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## **Equity and Professional Mobility in Higher Education and some Questions Concerning the EHEA from the Catalan Experience**

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# Equity and Professional Mobility in Higher Education and some Questions concerning the EHEA from the Catalan Experience

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## Abstract

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This article deals with the equal opportunities and professional mobility of Catalan university students in the first decade of the XXI century. The data presented demonstrate that there is a high level of equity and intergenerational professional mobility between graduates and their parents. Using these results, and the factors that have rendered them possible, the text raises questions about whether the progressive incorporation of Spanish universities into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) can result in a greater differentiation between universities, leading to a decrease in the equity of the university system and a more selective occupational mobility.

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**Keywords:** higher education, equity, intergenerational professional mobility

# Equidad y Movilidad Profesional en Educación Superior y Algunas Cuestiones Relativas al EEES desde la Experiencia Catalana

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## Resumen

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Este artículo analiza la igualdad de oportunidades y la movilidad profesional de los universitarios catalanes en la primera década del siglo XXI. Los datos presentados demuestran que existe un alto nivel de equidad y de movilidad profesional intergeneracional entre los graduados y sus padres. Utilizando estos resultados, así como los factores que lo han hecho posible, el texto plantea preguntas acerca de si la progresiva incorporación de las universidades españolas en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior (EEES) puede resultar en una mayor diferenciación entre las universidades, dando lugar a una disminución de la equidad en el sistema universitario y en una movilidad ocupacional más selectiva.

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**Palabras clave:** Educación superior, equidad, movilidad profesional intergeneracional

The transition from the educational system to employment or the professional transition of young people is one of the phenomena that most determines the construction of people's adult life, and, consequently, the future of our societies. As a result, social scientists take great interest in studying it in order to describe and interpret the process by which youths stop being youths. This interest is reflected in the abundant literature on the subject, from the pioneer study by Coleman (1979) to the works carried out by Raffè (2003, 2011). This transition is a privileged point of observation for analysing the functions of three fundamental institutions in our societies: the family, the educational sphere and the labour market.

The specific way in which an individual embarks on the adult period of his or her life is certainly the result of his or her own decisions, as well as of the social and cultural contexts behind these (social class, gender, place of birth, etc.). However, it also depends on institutional situations that limit and channel these decisions: educational opportunities, the strategies of employers who have to hire them or not, the structure and preferences of the economically active population competing with him/her, the public policies supporting youth employment, etc.

In short, the transition from school –and from university in particular- to the professional world is a subject of study that involves different dimensions, offers often contrasting perspectives and refers to the complexity and variability of our labour markets and our societies as a whole.

To focus on such a complex subject of study as the professional transition of youths, it is essential to situate it in a historical perspective (Sala et al. 2007).

Historically speaking, the generation of which we are analysing the professional insertion, in terms of studies, is a generation that was educated at the height of mass schooling, contrary to their parents, who were born at the end of the 40s and went to school during the 50s and 60s, characterised by the educational destitution of the Franco-regime.

The growth of education is one of the most significant social phenomena of the second half of the XX century in European societies. It is the result of a historic agreement between states, productive organisations, individuals and families, all interested in contributing to an increase in the levels of education. It involved, therefore, a massive widening of training, both in

terms of the population (through the universalisation of the educational system) and time (the average length of studies has continued to increase since the decade of the 60s). In the case of Spain, the increase in education came later than in neighbouring countries, but it was more sudden. As a result, the differences in the educational opportunities of the generations studied and those of their parents are much greater than those observed in neighbouring countries for the same generations (Beduwe, Planas 2003: 173-175).

The evolution of Spanish youths' participation in university in recent decades demonstrates one of the greatest increases (OECD 2007:29) and a higher degree of equity (OECD 2007: 116-117) out of all of the European countries and the OECD. If we consider the objectives proposed for the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter EHEA) (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2009 with the Horizon 2020 plan), both in relation to the increase in the participation of youths in university studies and equity in accessing university, the case of Catalonia, and by extension, Spain, are an "exemplary" precedent, the interest of which goes beyond the specific territorial sphere.

Since the 60s, and, especially during the post-Franco regime democratic period, a great increase has taken place in the student population at all levels and particularly in universities, as the result of a quantitative transformation based on the growth of the public offering of Catalan university places, both in each university and in the number of universities. But the social function of universities has also changed, leaving behind its elitist nature. During the democratic period the number of university students has tripled both in Spain in general, and in Catalonia in particular (IDESCAT and Rotger, 2009; INE 1976 and 2009). As a result, if we analyse the insertion of university graduates from current university, we must bear in mind the effects of the changes in their social origin on this insertion. To understand the professional insertion of graduates from the former elitist university, we must bear in mind, apart from the quality of their studies, the economic capacity of their families (financial capital), their social relations (social capital) and the educational level of their parents (cultural capital). Comparatively, the families of graduates from the new university of the masses have a financial, social and cultural capital that is comparatively lower than that of graduates from the elitist university of their parents'

generation. This factor should be considered when comparing the insertion of university graduates from the parents' generation with that of the new graduates, even when this is, as demonstrated in the results presented below, quite good.

This phenomenon, as previously indicated, is shared at least, by all the OECD countries (2010), making the particular case presented in this text even more significant.

In these pages we will analyse the professional insertion in 2008 of the generation of 2004 university graduates, and will compare it with that of their parents. It can be considered an emblematic question because, in this case, the distance between the birth date of the parents and the graduation date of the children spans the half century that was dominated by educational growth. The parents were born around 1950 and the children graduated in 2004.

Among the priorities indicated in the development of the EHEA (2009) for 2020, the Leuven Communiqué refers directly to two of these: “Social dimension: equitable access and completion” and “Employability”. Bearing in mind that the generation of graduates being analysed began their university education in 2000, as part of a university model prior to the “Bologna Process”, the population studied comprises a type of “control group” to evaluate the results of its implementation in relation to the aforementioned priorities.

For the generations analysed, the percentage of people accessing university stands at around 40% (EPA - National Statistics Institute, 2005). The extended education mainly increases for women and children from the lower class, and becomes little less than a “social duty” for middle and upper classes (in pursuit of avoiding downward mobility). This growth has been based on the certainty regarding both the social and personal value of education. In our societies, especially in moments of crisis, the uncertainty surrounding social and economic changes that we have to overcome is accompanied by the belief that raising the educational level of the population, but especially of young people, is an essential factor to face these.

Even so, unlike the phase of the first school of the masses, this new context gives rise to increased expectations through the educational system which do not always correspond to the social opportunities available. It

coincides in time with the great crisis of the labour market generated from the 70s onwards, which has continued to happen periodically. Europe, then, began a break with the growth models, under the weight of technological and organisational changes as well as the globalisation of the markets, which provoked the economic crisis of key sectors and the instability of the occupation of skilled work.

The period analysed between qualification and the survey about graduates' insertion was characterised by an increase both in the supply and demand of skilled work. The professional insertion period we are analysing, between 2004 and 2008, was probably one of the most favourable in terms of the professional insertion of young university graduates, for two reasons. On the one hand, the drop in the birth rate had started to reduce the number of graduates and, on the other hand, because it was a period of economic growth; although in a labour market, especially for young people, marked by employment instability. At the same time, it was a period of growth both of the economic activity rate and the employment rate, especially for women (Esteban, Martín, Miguélez, Molina and Recio, 2009).

The data we present below enable us to have a clearer idea about whether our university system, the ensemble of our universities, plays the role of "social elevator" that it is given by some, or whether as others believe, on the contrary, it reproduces the differences stemming from the social origin of the youths, filtering access and/or conditioning their academic performance.

This article contributes elements of analysis, using the case of Catalan universities, concerning the degree of "equity" and "employability" of graduates trained prior to the implementation of the Bologna Process, which we can use to raise a series of questions about the possible effects of its application up to now and of its development in the near future with the horizon of "The Bologna Process 2020" (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009).

### **Education, Equity and Intergenerational Mobility**

The role of schools in our societies has been one of the central themes of social science and of sociology in particular. In this text we tackle two of the dilemmas set out by the social sciences regarding the educational system and university in particular: on the one hand, the dilemma of equity in accessing

higher education and, on the other, that of occupational mobility stemming from university education.

With regards to equity, the main question raised since the 70s regarding the educational system in general, and university in particular, has been: Is school a social institution that provides the same opportunities for all children and young people regardless of their family of origin? Or, on the contrary, does it reinforce and legitimise the inequalities stemming from the social origin of students?

In view of this question, different theoretical and ideological trends have emphasised each of the options.

Since 1959 Parsons (1959), within the functionalist and meritocratic trend, emphasised the role of the school as distributor, among its students, of the functions required for the technical division of work in a meritocratic context, meaning, that it would provide students with the same opportunities of access and success regardless of their family of origin.

Later, from the 70s onwards, mainly within the Marxist movement – although also from the perspective of critical functionalism (Coleman 1979, 1982) – theories of reproduction were formulated (Bowles, Gintis 1976; Baudelot Establet 1979) that criticised the functionalist theories and highlighted the discriminatory nature of schools as agents that reproduced the origin inequalities of children and youths, by providing them with different access opportunities and results on the basis of their social origin. In this way, this research and many more that later abounded in this line of thought, portray the educational system to us as a social system that reproduces and legitimises in children the social differences of their parents.

Additionally, sociological literature has been traditionally involved in analysing the relation between educational level and occupational status and has found a very high relation between both elements (Boudon, 1983:40).

Pioneer research carried out in this field, such as that of Blau and Duncan (1967) using the causal analysis method, observe the incidence of 4 variables on the occupational status of children (father's education and occupation, and child's education and first job), explaining 43% of the total variance. Although this technique improved with what is known as the Wisconsin model of educational attainment in 1975 by adding psychological variables, it manages to explain 40% of occupational attainment and 57% of educational attainment. The authors observe that the effects of the socio-



economic status of the parents on their child's educational and occupational attainment operate by means of other variables (main referents of the child - his/her parents-) that influence the educational and occupational aspirations of the children (Kerbo, 2003: 174-177). Moreover, a review of the Wisconsin model analyses a generation prior to that of the parents and finds that the socio-economic status of grandparents did not influence the occupational and educational attainment of the grandchildren (Warren and Hauser, 1997: 561-572).

It is interesting to note that sociological literature traditionally took the occupation of the head of the family as a focal point to stratify society or, in general, that of working men. Some of the most prolific lines of work in this field were the contributions made by John Goldthorpe and his colleagues at Nuffield College in Oxford. This author considers the occupation of a position in the labour field to be a sufficiently appropriate indicator for evaluating the social position of an individual.

Goldthorpe developed a class schema, which was later improved, but which initially consisted of three categories taking the male head of the home as a unit of analysis: the service class (with Class I and II in the classification), intermediate class (Classes III to V) and working class (Class VI and VII) (Goldthorpe, 1980: 39-42). But the great changes that took place in society modified the perspective of the matter and it became clear that this division of work by gender responded to the separation of men and women's spheres of activity, which was considered as natural (Crompton, 1999: 105) in such a way that in more recent decades, the woman began to be incorporated into these analyses.

Numerous studies have been carried out about the relation between the occupations of parents and children using traditional social mobility studies. In fact, mobility studies began to be carried out after the Second World War. They sought explanations about the development of industrial societies. Some examples of this line of work are the studies by David Glass and his team from the London School of Economics in 1949, the work by Lipset and Zetterberg in 1956 and that by Lipset and Bendix in 1959. Glass, for example, combined educational categories and socio-professional categories in order to carry out this kind of study (Hernández de Frutos, 1997: 152-154). Carabaña (1999) and Echevarria (1999) are the pioneers' researchers in Spain about mobility, using the methodology of Erikson and Goldthorpe.

But as Moreno Mínguez (2011) states there are still few empirical studies that reflect the distribution of educational attainment in terms of family background.

The wide use of occupation indicators has been applied to men only as shown. This has given rise to a “...reductionist identification between social mobility and male mobility, which has had as its most immediate consequence, the practical invisibility of the female half as subject of study.” (Salido Cortés, 2001: 43). In general, the relations between gender, values and social structure have been studied very little (Xiao, 2000) and until now, a minority of studies have analysed the relative contribution of both parents (Kalmijn, 1994) leaving the influence of the socio-economic status of mothers on the social and psychological results of their children an unknown matter (Hitlin, 2006: 29).

There is a whole line of analysis about young people’s transition from dependence to independence, which puts particular emphasis on the formation of their values. Hitlin states that values and aspirations, although formed and channelled socially, represent the emotional and cognitive orientations of the individual agent (the youth) making the occupational decisions. Youths choose careers (or pathways), given their skills and abilities, when they have structural opportunities to do so and when they are perceived as real (Hitlin, 2006: 26). The author, carrying out an exegesis of the relation between the socio-economic status and the development of values and aspirations, compiles important contributions and states that many works follow the approach developed by Melvin Kohn who studied the relation between the socio-economic status of the family and two particular values: consent and autonomy. A position in the class structure influences the adoption of these values providing (or preventing) the opportunities to experience them in an occupation (Kohn, 1969, 1976, 1977, 1981; Kohn and Schooler, 1982, 1983; Kohn et al. 1990; Pearlin and Kohn, 1966; Slomczynski, Miller and Kohn, 1981). Parents’ consent and autonomy values are made up of a fundamental complexity of the occupational and class context and are transmitted within the family (Kohn and Schoenbach 1993; also see Johnson 2002).

## Methodology

In this work we want to examine the tradition of the occupational and educational analysis of young people, avoiding sexist biases. However, the analysis of the socio-economic status of a certain population provides different results, depending on whether one or another indicator (or both) is applied. The education indicator relates the family origin of students to their early age, in terms of cultural capital, and it is relative to the educational opportunities available for each generation. On the contrary, the occupational indicator reflects a situation that is easier to change than the educational level. The parents can change their job throughout their professional life but they reach a certain educational level during their youth and it is difficult to change this later.

The survey conducted with university graduates, has variables of the parents' educational and occupational level, and as a result, our work addresses the family origin of the graduates by analysing these two aspects. In the particular case of our analysis, occupation is an indicator of the socio-economic level of the parents at the time of the survey (2008) while the indicator of the educational level refers to the youth of the parents. However, there is a relation between both indicators (R de Pearson 0.51).

In methodological terms, it is important to highlight that the graduates' answers about both topics (the education and occupation of their parents) exceed 98%. Consequently, a good base has been established from which we can carry out the analysis presented below.

## Variables

In our analysis, the variable that allows us to identify the education of the graduates' parents does not differentiate between father and mother, and is sorted into five categories: both parents have primary education or have no education, one of the two has secondary education, both parents have secondary education, one of the two has higher education and both have higher education. In order to obtain a greater capacity to describe and reveal the origin of the graduates according to the educational level of their parents, these categories are grouped into three: parents who have primary education, parents who have secondary education (one or both) and parents who have

higher education (one or both).

With regards to the variable occupation, our work focuses on considering the highest occupational level whether it is the mother or father (Fachelli, 2009). In this way, we differentiate between groups of employed individuals, and more specifically, we select the highest occupational status of the father or the mother in order to analyse the main characteristics of the graduates' families. In this regard, the classification that we put forward has 5 categories as detailed below:

- (1) Employed: Management
- (2) Employed: Senior technician (including self-employed, requiring university studies)
- (3) Employed: Skilled
- (4) Self-employed: University studies not required
- (5) Employed: Unskilled

It must be noted that, in order to carry out this analysis, we did not reduce the categories to three groups of employed individuals, since it is of analytical interest to maintain the five categories. In general, the resulting analyses of this way of organising information (transition matrices) are more interesting the more categories the base information has. Since our information about the parents has been sorted into five categories, we decided to follow the same procedure with the children, meaning, reorganising the information in the same way that the survey compiles information about the parents' occupation. Likewise, in order to avoid the difficulty of comparing graduates who work part-time and those who work full-time, we chose those graduates who were employed full-time at the time of the survey, comprising 80% of the total sample.

### **Procedure and Participants**

Professional insertion studies about Catalan universities are carried out by the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) on the basis of surveys conducted since 2001. The survey was conducted between 16th January and 13th March 2008 (AQU, 2008: 5). The population of graduates surveyed in the 2003-2004 academic year was 12,258, although in the case of medicine degrees, the reference population is the student group that graduated in 2001, since medicine presents a longer professional transition

than other studies. Appendix 1 contains the data sheet of the study.

### **What Universities Are We Discussing?**

The distribution of university graduates between the public and private sectors in Catalonia is 90% in the public sector and 10% in the private sector. The survey on which this article is based does not cover graduates from all the universities in Catalonia; firstly, because it was considered that those from the Open University of Catalonia (who make up 18% of students), due to their irregular characteristics of distance learning, could not be analysed together with those from on-campus universities; secondly, because the survey was not able to interview graduates from 3 private universities who make up 7% of the university student body.

As a result, the reference population of this analysis are those graduates from all the on-campus public universities and one of the private universities that makes up 25% of the private sector students. These universities cater for 75% of the total number of Catalan university students.

If we want to make a comprehensible typology of the differences between the universities, beyond that marked between public and private, we can establish 3 core areas: a) historical, b) geographical location and area of influence and, c) orientation and/or vocation.

The survey includes the two “historical” universities (founded prior to 1968) in Catalonia: the University of Barcelona (UB) and the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC); a public university founded in 1968, the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), those that emerged from the decentralisation of the university system in the eighties, and those that were founded more recently such as the public Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) and the private University of Vic (UV).

With regards to location, four of the universities considered are in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona and educate 71% of the “on-campus” university student body of Catalonia. Meanwhile, “on-campus” universities located outside the Barcelona area (let us call them “decentralised”), although they only represent 20% of the student body, have played a key role in the growth and democratisation of the university population of Catalonia, by reducing, among other aspects, the indirect costs of university education arising from the costs of changing residence in order to access

university for young people living outside the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona.

Finally, as regards the “vocation/orientation” aspect, the majority of the universities have a general orientation (with a wide range of specialty areas), while the UPC has, due to its tradition, a markedly technological orientation, as indicated by its name. It is also important to note that the UPF –the most recently founded- has a “selective and elitist intention/orientation”, despite its moderate results in this regard and the fact that it is public.

### Results

#### **An Approximation Towards Equity: The Educational Level of Parents, of the Generation of the Parents and Its Presence Among the Graduates.**

A first global fact is that the majority of graduates come from households where the parents have, at most, primary education (40.1%). The others are distributed equally between those from households with parents who have secondary education and parents who have higher education.

Table 1  
*Highest educational level of graduates’ parents*

Highest educational level of the parents	Cases	%	Grouping in 3 categories	%
Both have primary education or no education	4,908	40.1	Up to primary education	40.1
One has secondary education	1,828	14.9	Secondary education	30.6
Both have secondary education	1,918	15.7		
One has higher education	2,054	16.8	Higher education	29.3
Both have higher education	1,524	12.5		
Total	12,232	100.0	Total	100.0

Source: own creation using the AQU base

However, this distribution is moderately heterogeneous if we consider it according to universities, training pathways and simultaneity between study and work.

The survey does not provide the age of the graduates' parents, so we have made an estimate. The aim is to have an equity indicator when obtaining the university qualification. We are interested in analysing the relation of the graduates' parents with regards to the average population of their generation. To achieve this we carried out an exercise as a guideline on the relation between graduates' parents and their generation, with regards to their educational level. Lastly, the result is that the "average" generation of the parents of graduates in 2004 in Catalonia, is that of fathers born in 1949 and mothers born in 1953.

On the basis of these data we can consider a relation that would illustrate the representative level of graduates' parents in relation to their generation. This relation is shown in the following graph:

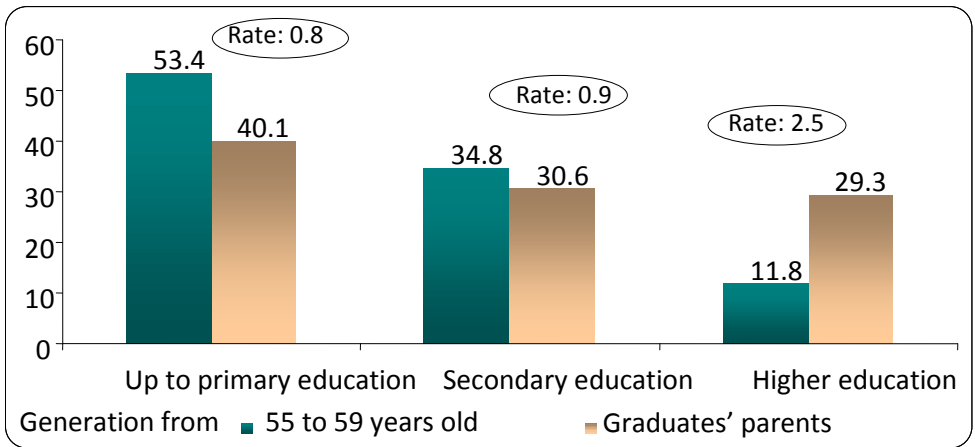


Figure 1. Comparison of the educational level of graduates' parents in 2004 with the educational level of their generation (individuals between 55 and 59 years of age).

Rate of presence

Source: Microdata from the AQU and EPA surveys (2nd semester 2005)

It is important to note that the rate of presence reflects the comparison of the educational level of the generation aged between 55 and 59 years, with the group of parents of university graduates. Thus, the value 1 means equality in presence of the different educational levels of graduates' parents

in relation to that of their generation; a value of less than or more than 1 in the groups being analysed, means under-representation or over-representation respectively.

We can observe that parents with no education or with primary education who have children in university are slightly under-represented in university in relation to their generation (0.08). Parents with secondary studies are represented in the university almost proportionally to their generation (0.9). Lastly, those parents with higher education are over-represented in university (2.5), meaning, the proportion of parents with higher education with children who graduated in 2004 is clearly higher than the presence in their generation, since only 11.8% of people aged between 55 and 59 years have higher education, and within the university this percentage reaches nearly 30%.

We present the same data as indicated by the probability of being a university graduate according to the parents’ educational level, if the average probability of being a university graduate from the generation born in 1980 is 28% (EPA 2nd term 2009), the probabilities of graduating from university on the basis of the parents’ education, obtained by multiplying this average figure by the rate of presence of each group of parents (Graph No. 1), are the following:

Table 2  
 Percentage of children who are university graduates and non-university graduates based on the parents’ educational level for the entire generation of graduates

Parents		Primary	Secondary	University	Total
Children's qualification	University	22.4%	25.2%	70.0%	28.0%
	Non-university	77.6%	74.8%	30.0%	72.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Own creation using microdata from the AQU survey and EPA (2nd term 2005 and 2nd term 2009).

But this phenomenon has not always been the case; rather, as Marina Subirats demonstrates on the basis of the Barcelona Metropolitan Survey (2009: 19-20), it is the result of a gradual process of increasing the participation of “low professional categories” in university.



It is worth highlighting four facts from the previously presented data; 1) the large majority of university graduates in 2004 are children of parents who do not have university studies (70%); 2) of these, graduates from families with primary education or less, comprise the relative majority (40% of the total), 3) there are very few differences in the opportunities of accessing university qualifications between children from families who have primary education or less and those who are from families with secondary education; 4) children of university graduates, although a minority in today's university, have much greater opportunities to access university, than those from homes with parents who do not have university studies.

Lastly, it is important to point out that this exercise is approximate, since the comparison is made between an estimate of the educational level of the generation of parents and the information provided to us by children in the AQU survey about the higher educational level of their mother or father.

### **What is the Occupation of Graduates Compared to That of Their Parents?**

Firstly, we would like to highlight the high economic activity rate of the graduates, since the unemployment rate in 2008 of Catalan university graduates from 2004, was only 3.1%. These figures support Manel Castells (2006: 15) when he states that "...one of the biggest mistakes repeated in the media in our country is that "university is a factory producing unemployed people". This is not the case in Spain (the unemployment rate of university graduates is much lower than that of those who do not study beyond secondary education) nor worldwide, as demonstrated by Martin Carnoy, upon finding a high statistical correlation between the number of years of study and the salary level throughout a person's career.

Addressing the comparison between the occupation of graduates and that of their parents, we regroup five occupational categories into three groups, as we did with the parents' educational level, in order to obtain a greater capacity to describe and reveal the family origin of the university graduates on the basis of the occupational hierarchy of their parents. Firstly, we present the highest occupational level of the parents in Table No. 3.

Table 3  
Highest occupational level of parents

Highest occupational level of parents	Cases	%	Occupational status	%
Employed: Management	1,894	15.7	High status	35.3
Employed: Senior Technician	1,523	12.6		
Self-employed: University studies required	840	7.0		
Employed: Skilled	3,849	31.9	Medium status	31.9
Self-employed: No university studies required	2,493	20.7	Low status	32.7
Employed: Unskilled	1,453	12.1		
Total	12,052	100.0	Total	100.0

Source: own creation using the AQU base

The distribution of the occupational status of the parents of graduates is grouped into three almost equal parts. This distribution shows a relative variation when considered according to universities, training pathways, simultaneity between work and study (see [Planas & Fachelli, 2010](#)).

In global terms, the following table reveals the relation between children’s and parents’ occupations. Thus, we can observe the proportion of graduates who carry out jobs of the same level, and also those who carry out jobs of a different level than their parents, whether of a higher or lower hierarchical level. The result presented below reflects all the graduates in full-time employment.

Table 4

*Occupation of graduates according to parents' occupation*

Highest occupational status of parents	University graduates in full-time employment				
	Management	Senior Technician	Skilled	Self-employed	Unskilled
1 Management	6.0	1.8	6.8	0.7	0.3
2 Senior Technician	6.2	2.4	8.6	1.1	0.6
3 Skilled	9.5	4.4	15.5	1.0	1.3
4 Self-employed without university education	6.4	2.9	10.0	1.3	0.8
5 Unskilled	3.7	1.3	6.3	0.4	0.7

Source: own creation using the AQU base

A large proportion of university graduates, despite being in their first professional insertion, obtain higher positions than their parents, who due to their age, are in the final phase of their professional career. 51.1% of the total number of graduates (obtained by adding all the percentages of the left margin and bottom of the grid) already carry out jobs of a higher hierarchical level than that of their parents.

Furthermore, 25.9% carry out similar jobs to those of their parents (sum of the diagonal figures) and 23.3% still carry out jobs of a lower hierarchical level (right margin and top of the grid).

It is interesting to note that the insertion of the graduates we are analysing is early. Therefore, they have a long road ahead to advance in their professional career. In many cases this will mean an occupational rise for graduates who will tend, even more so than now, to exceed the occupational positions of their parents.

If we observe the results in terms of gender (see Table No. 1 of Appendix 2) it is clear that men carry out jobs of a higher hierarchical level than women, although the differences are very slight (52.4% and 49.8% respectively).

Consequently, women are over-represented in lower hierarchy jobs. For example, men who work in management whose parents are senior technicians or skilled workers add up to 18.6%. On the contrary, in the case

of women, this figure is 13.7%.

Additionally, if we observe the occupations above the diagonal line (jobs of a lower level than those of their parents) women represent 24.2%, while men represent 22%.

The proportion of men and women who carry out jobs of the same level as their parents is similar (26% and 25.6% respectively). In both cases the higher rate is found in skilled jobs (17.4% for women and 12.7% for men). Lastly, men appear in higher positions more than women (10.6% compared to 6.8% in positions of management and senior technician).

### Children’s Occupation Compared to That of Their Parents

If we carry out a reading considering the occupation of the father as an indicator of the university graduate’s family origin we obtain the following results:

Table 5  
Occupation of graduates according to occupation of parents

Highest occupational status of parents	University graduates in full-time employment					Total
	Management	Senior Technician	Skilled	Self-employed	Unskilled	
1 Management	38.0	11.7	43.4	4.8	2.2	100
2 Senior Technician	32.6	12.7	45.4	6.0	3.3	100
3 Skilled	30.0	13.7	49.0	3.2	4.2	100
4 Self-employed without university studies	30.0	13.4	46.7	6.0	3.9	100
5 Unskilled	29.8	10.3	51.0	3.0	5.9	100

Source: own creation using the AQU base

(1) Management: bearing in mind that this is the highest occupational category, and consequently, they cannot have ascending mobility, it can be observed that 38% of children carry out jobs of the same level, 43.3% carry out skilled jobs and 11.7% carry out jobs as a senior technician. Very few children are self-employed (4.8%) and only 2.2% carry out an unskilled job.

(2) Senior Technician: Almost 13% of children carry out jobs of the same level, while approximately one third exceed them in hierarchical terms and carry out management jobs. On the contrary, 45% carry out skilled jobs and the rest are divided between 6% who are self-employed and 3.3% who are in unskilled jobs.

(3) Skilled: almost 50% of the children carry out jobs of the same level as their parents. 43.7% exceed their parents in hierarchy, while little more than 7% carry out jobs of a lower hierarchy.

(4) Self-employed (without university studies): children who carry out a job of the same level as their parents, in this case, decrease to 6%. Excluding almost 4% who carry out unskilled jobs, the remaining 90% carry out jobs of a higher hierarchy.

(5) Unskilled: 6% of children carry out jobs of the same level as their parents, and considering that this is the lowest occupational category, the rest carry out jobs of a higher hierarchy.

If we perform the same analysis differentiating between the gender of the graduates (see Table No. 2 of Appendix 2), relevant differences appear. Of the total number of male children of parents working in a position of management, 44% have a similar position. This percentage reduces to 33% in the case of women. This situation balances out with a greater proportion of women in skilled positions (50%) compared to 36% of men.

Male children of senior technicians carry out management jobs to a greater extent (37.5%) than women from the same family origin (29.2%). More than 15% of men have the same place of origin as their parents, while in the case of women this figure is 10%.

Children of skilled workers who carry out the same jobs as their parents, are more numerous in the case of women (53.8%), than in that of men (41.5%).

If we observe the category of parents who are self-employed and have no university education, we see that the percentage of children who exceed them in other occupations of a higher hierarchy is similar between men (89%) and women (91%).

The number of children who carry out the same unskilled job as their parents is approximately 6% in both genders and as the lowest category, the remaining 94% work in higher categories.

Lastly, it seems reasonable to conclude that university provides tools to place children in jobs that hierarchically exceed the job carried out by their parents, and that the influence of the origin of the parents in occupational terms on the child's occupation is not very important.

### **Conclusions**

In the first pages of this text we raised a question regarding the equity of our educational systems: Is school, in this case university, a social institution that provides the same opportunities to all young people regardless of their family of origin, or, on the contrary, does it reinforce and legitimise the inequalities stemming from the social origin of students?

Having observed the results, the answer cannot categorically favour either of the two options without matrixes. However, from the information we have retrieved, two particularly relevant corollaries emerge regarding the social function of Catalan universities. Firstly, advances can be observed in the equal opportunities that exist when obtaining qualifications from Catalan universities, considered globally on the basis of the origin of the university students. This allows us to assume that the mentioned equity is also found in access to universities. Consequently, we must highlight the reduced discrimination in the universities' job of raising the educational level of the population. This fact is consistent with data presented by the OCDE in reference to all Spanish universities compared to those from other countries belonging to the same international organisation.

Even when we use approximate estimates, the rate of presence of the different educational levels of the parents, if we compare the educational level of the graduates' parents with the average for their generation, is not homogeneous. However, it is very close to 1, both for those who have primary education (0.8), and those who have secondary education (0.9). The difference is greater for children of parents with higher education who have a rate of presence of 2.5. As a result, if the generation born in 1980 has on average 28% of opportunities of obtaining a university qualification, the opportunities of those who were born into families with primary education or less are 22.4% and those from families with secondary education are 25.2%, while those children whose parents have university qualifications represent 70%.

Synthetically, in relation to the educational level of graduates' parents we can state that: a) the large majority of graduates in 2004 are children of individuals who do not have university education (70%); b) of these the graduates who come from families with primary education or less, make up the relative majority (40% of the total) of the graduates surveyed; c) there are very few differences between the opportunities of accessing university qualifications for children from families with primary education or less and those for children from families with secondary education; d) children of university graduates, although currently a minority in university, still have many more access opportunities than those from families without higher education.

The second result that we would like to highlight is the high rising professional mobility of graduates compared to their parents. This is a comparison between one generation, that of the parents, who are at the end of their professional career, and another, that of their children, who have recently started their career. We observe that the university system facilitates graduates having hierarchically higher jobs than their parents within only 4 years of graduating. This does not necessarily mean that the occupation in which they are working meets all the expectations of the new graduates but it nearly does, since the percentage of graduates who consider their insertion adequate with regard to their training is 80% and all of the surveyed graduates rate the training received globally with "6/10 points".

This phenomenon is also reflected in the fact that the graduates who are in higher occupational positions are children of families of very different origins, and are distributed in similar proportions for each of the social strata of the parents.

Strictly speaking, with the data available, we can only discuss intergenerational occupational mobility and not social mobility. In any event, the fact that graduates from 2004 have, already in 2008, a mainly higher occupation than that of their parents tells us that their insertion matches, at least, the changes in the work demand and, consequently, the evolution of the social structure.

However, these two major results must be qualified; discrimination on the grounds of social origin is apparent in university, on the one hand, in the higher relative presence of students whose parents have higher education, even when currently these, in absolute terms, comprise a minority. On the

other hand, it is apparent in the higher presence of students whose parents have a low educational level and low occupational status in shorter cycle courses. Lastly, discrimination is also apparent in the fact that graduates whose parents have a higher occupational level have a greater probability of having higher work positions.

As well as these results about the social function of Catalan universities, the data analysed provide us with other interesting results both regarding society in general and parents and university students. Students from all the universities are not equal; neither are their parents, nor their opportunities. But the main fact is still the great similarity within their diversity. Although it is not the aim of this article, we cannot avoid the fact that the greatest difference appears on the grounds of gender and is evident in the choosing of different fields of study and degrees within the university. It is also especially evident in the negative discrimination of women when accessing high occupational positions, despite their higher educational level, and mainly in their salaries when they find themselves in equivalent occupations despite a progressive comparison in the duties.

As we pointed out in the introductory section, if we consider the objectives proposed for the EHEA with the Horizon 2020, both in relation to the increase in youths' participation in university education and the equality in accessing university and employability, the case of Catalonia and, by extension Spain, comprise an "exemplary" precedent, the analysis of which acquires a value that goes beyond its specific regional sphere. Furthermore, bearing in mind that the generation of graduates being studied started their university education in 2000, as part of a university model prior to the "Bologna Process", the studied population constitutes a type of "control group" to evaluate the results of its implementation, in relation to the aforementioned priorities.

Using the results presented, we set out a question that we consider to have a general value for the implementation process of the EHEA: To what extent should "innovation" take place in institutions that present a high degree of efficiency and equity? In the process of becoming incorporated into the EHEA, transformations have occurred both in the contents and in the organisation and management of the university system, without paying much attention to preserving those organisational, managerial and content elements that facilitated the high level of efficiency and equity. In general,



no previous analysis has even been conducted, such as that presented in this text, of the degree of efficiency and equity of university before the implementation of the "Bologna Process". Regardless of the intentions and statements of principles that preceded the changes taking place in our universities in terms of equity and efficiency in professional insertion, this is no guarantee that changes which are fixated on "excellence" do not result in, although they do not seek it, an increase in the inequity of our higher educational systems. For example, what would be the effects of introducing obligatory full-time education if it is not accompanied by a more generous grant system? since it would make it more difficult for children from a lower social origin to access the Catalan university system. The results of previous study show that full-time dedication to education has a clear relation with the social origin of the students (Planas & Fachelli, 2010; Fachelli & Planas, 2011). In this regard, the results presented should make us reflect on the role of public universities outside Barcelona, which, by having catered for a higher percentage of students from low status families, have played a key role in the democratisation of university studies.

What is being done so that university systems, such as the Spanish system, during their incorporation into the EHEA, do not lose the "exemplary" nature that they have had, at least prior to the implementation that is being carried out?

What evaluation and intervention measures are being considered so that the recommendations made for the 2010-2020 stage of the "Bologna Process" regarding equity, employability and increase of presence do not remain simply as good intentions?

How will these aspects be affected by the budgetary restrictions stemming from the current economic crisis? Especially if we bear in mind that the EU countries that have been most affected by the crisis are those which already had less of a budget per capita of university students.

Will the 2020 objective of guaranteeing equity in the construction process of the EHEA involve another type of "convergence" in the budget per capita of European university students from different countries?

If this is not the case, there is a clear risk that the differences (divergences?) between the university systems in the different countries will increase the internal inequity in the EU; regardless of the fact that the intentions being drawn up as EHEA objectives for 2020 state the contrary.

From this research, the answer to these questions can only be to create a mechanism that facilitates a detailed and objective follow-up (university by university, country by country) of the impact of the EHEA development process, which should provide us with information about the effects of the changes in course by establishing a system of indicators which enables the evolution of equity in access and employability for university graduates to be monitored, relating them to the changes in course.

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Table 1  
Population and sample per university

University	Population	Sample	Response out of total population (%)	Sample error
University of Barcelona	7,363	3,279	44.53%	1.27%
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	4,759	2,605	54.74%	1.29%
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya	3,594	1,694	47.13%	1.73%
Pompeu Fabra University	1,682	892	53.03%	2.25%
University of Girona	1,599	1,100	68.79%	1.65%
University of Lleida	1,411	975	69.10%	1.74%
Universidad Rovira y Virgili (URV)	1,935	1,226	63.36%	1.69%
University of Vic	680	487	71.62%	2.37%
Total	23,023	12,258	53.24%	0.61%

Source: AQU (2008: 5)

## Appendix 2

Table 1  
*Occupation of graduates by gender according to parents' occupation*

Highest occupational status of parents	Female employed graduates					Male employed graduates				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1 Management	4.8	1.8	7.2	0.5	0.4	7.6	1.9	6.2	1.1	0.3
2 Senior Technician	5.5	2.0	9.6	0.9	0.8	7.3	3.0	7.3	1.5	0.4
3 Skilled	8.3	4.4	17.4	0.7	1.6	11.3	4.3	12.7	1.4	1.0
4 Self-employed without university studies	5.9	2.9	11.2	1.1	0.8	7.1	2.8	8.1	1.5	0.8
5 Unskilled	3.5	1.2	6.7	0.3	0.7	4.0	1.4	5.6	0.5	0.7

Source: own creation using the AQU base

Table 2

Occupation of graduates by gender, according to occupation of origin of parents

Highest occupational status of parents	Female employed graduates					Total	Male employed graduates					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
1 Management	32.9	12.1	49.2	3.3	2.5	100	44.4	11.1	36.1	6.5	1.8	100
2 Senior Technician	29.2	10.7	51.2	4.7	4.2	100	37.5	15.5	37.2	7.7	2.1	100
3 Skilled	25.6	13.5	53.8	2.3	4.8	100	36.7	14.0	41.5	4.6	3.2	100
4 Self-employed without university studies	27.0	13.1	50.9	5.2	3.8	100	34.8	13.8	40.0	7.2	4.2	100
5 Unskilled	28.1	9.7	54.3	2.2	5.8	100	32.4	11.3	46.0	4.2	6.1	100

Source: own creation using the AQU base