

Family Background and Changing Educational Choices in Denmark (James McIntosh and Martin D. Munk)

We examine the participation in upper secondary and tertiary education of two cohorts of Danish males and females who were aged 23 in 1985 and 2005. We find that the large expansion of secondary education in this twenty year period was characterized by a phenomenal increase in the proportion of this age group which obtained a gymnasium qualification, especially for females. Using a methodology which controls for unobservable attributes we find that for both males and females, factors not related to the observable characteristics of the household in which the respondent was raised have become more important relative their family backgrounds for their upper secondary school success than they were a generation ago. As a result Denmark has become a more mobile society. Also, we found that the proportion of boys and girls completing gymnasium for the lowest income quartile has increased over the twenty year period, however the proportion of boys from low income households who have not completed any upper secondary education has actually increased and remains above 50%. A similarly dramatic increase in attendance at university was found for both males and females who were 23 in 2005.