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Do too many people get a university education?

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How many times have you heard that too many young people are going to university today? Have you heard it as an aside, said in passing, or said to see if you might agree? Or have you overheard others saying it? Or maybe you have never heard it at all?

I hear it a lot. Often, when it is said directly to me, it is a test. I am supposed to agree.

I overhear this conversation said in hushed tones when the people sitting next to me on the train talk. I get to hear it said slightly more loudly when people think they are among people like them. I hear it most clearly and loudly said by children who have passed an entrance exam to go to their school, but have not yet gone to university.

Whenever someone suggests that too many young people now go to university I tend to change the subject. I usually comment on how interesting it is that so many more girls now gain places than boys.

When someone is a little more vehement in their claim that far too many young people go I often can't help thinking, "that's not true – although maybe the world would be a better place if you had not gone." I know I shouldn't. But I do.

How would you know if too many people were going to university? There have always been those who have claimed that too many people were going, even when the numbers were a fraction of what they are now. Even then it was 'too many' for some. Especially when women were allowed in.

Earlier some thought that not all children should receive a secondary education, or even a primary one. There are always people who just think there are too many people being born, let alone receiving an education. Funnily enough, they rarely include themselves in that category.

Not everyone needs to go to university. At some point the compulsory school leaving age has to stop rising, and maybe 18 is a good point to hold it at. But everyone should have the right to go at some point, if they want to. Perhaps we could reduce university fees the later you go to university – so that fewer go aged 18?

Choosing the wrong course in the wrong city is an extremely expensive mistake to make for a child in England today. One simple mistake will cost them £27,000 with so much more interest and other debts added to that sum that their childhood error could cost them dearly in adulthood. I am amazed no university student has yet successfully sued a university of mis-selling a Faustian pact.

I don't think too many people go to University, but I do think too many go too early. I would reduce the fees by £500 a year. Go at age 36 for the first time and your university education would be free. In the short term this would save money, as more people would delay. In the long term this would save money, as fewer people would make the wrong choices.

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