



What your SOC's say about how good your job is

David Kernohan – Associate Editor, Wonkhe – June 2021

The problem

Regulators appear increasingly keen to judge the quality (and thus the fundability) of higher education provision through graduate outcomes.

Even if the data was reliable (spoiler: it isn't), there are a huge number of confounding variables.

LEO

Administrative data

Focus on salary

Need to control for demographic groups, gender, region, subject provider

Part time breaks

Graduate Outcomes

Survey data (c50%)

Salary, industry, reflections.

The data frame

SOC2020

Standard Occupational Codes

Nine major groups, 25 sub-major groups, 90 minor groups, 369 units.

Classifies the “concept of a job” considering skill level and skill specialisation.

“an increasing number of occupations require the application of knowledge and expertise that is associated with a tertiary level of education”

SIC2007

Standard Industry Codes

Used in classifying business establishments and other statistical units by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged

Don't really appear in this presentation.

Apologies for any disappointment caused

Definitions

Graduate Job

Either – a job that explicitly requires a degree to practice (eg lawyer, architect)

Or – a job where current employees commonly have a degree (eg mechanical engineers, careers advisors)

Or – a job where one among many common routes to employment is via a degree (senior executives, graphic designers)

Highly skilled job

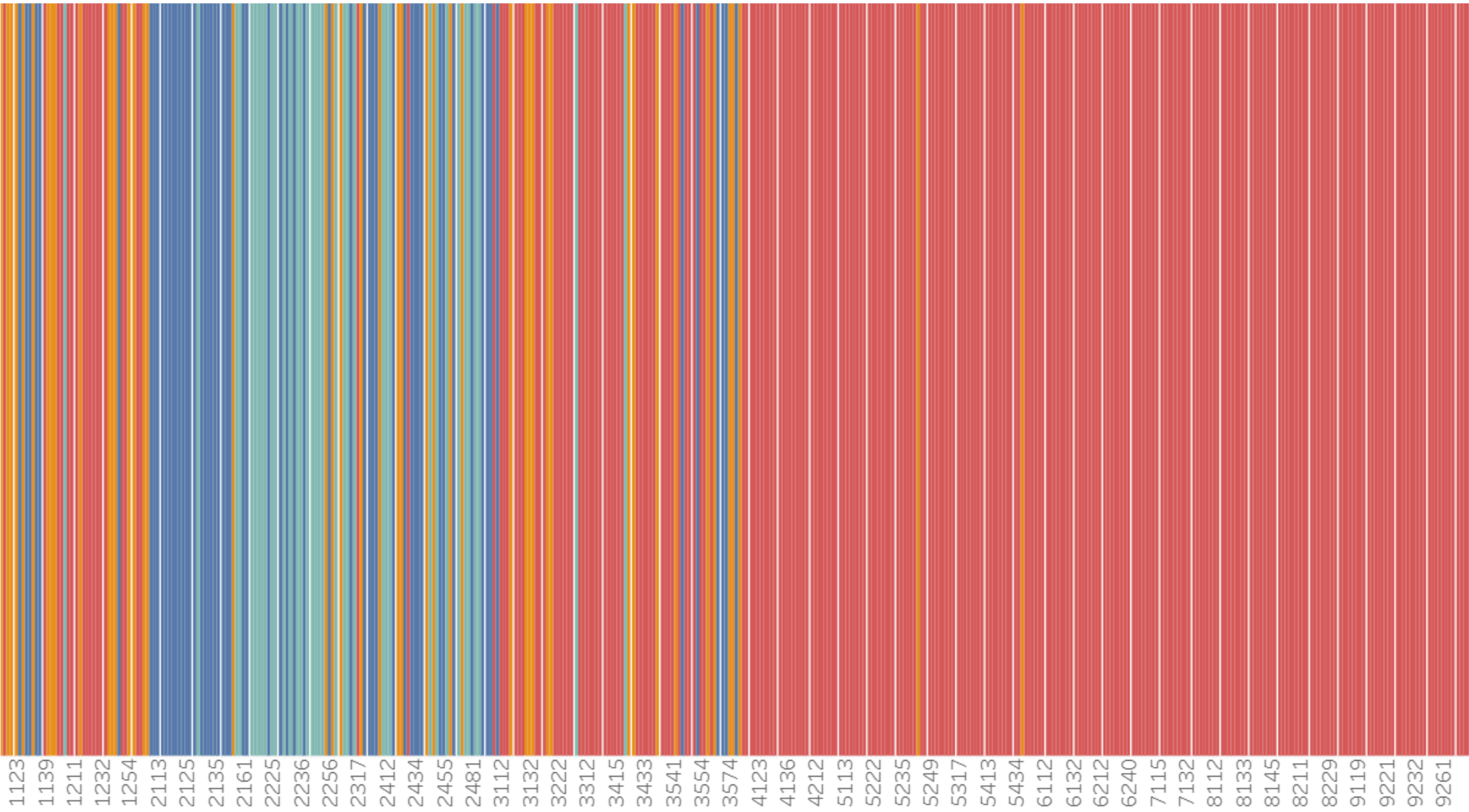
Either - A job in one of the top three Standard Occupational Code (SOC) groups

- **Managers, directors, and senior officials**
- **Professional occupations**
- **Associate professional occupations**

Or – a job in the top of four “skill” levels within SOC

SOC2020 Unit Codes by degree requirement

Data: ONS (note, coding is by Wonkhe so may not match ONS standards)



Degree required

- Required
- Commonly
- May also
- No

Highlight SOC 2020 Group...

Highlight SOC 2020 Gr...

Skill Level	SOC2020					
Level 4	11 Corporate managers and directors					
<i>Equivalent to Degree and above</i>	21 Science, research, engineering and technology professionals					
	22 Health professionals					
	23 Teaching and other educational professionals					
	24 Business, media and public service professionals					
Level 3	12 Other managers and proprietors					
<i>Equivalent to some higher education</i>	31 Science, engineering and technology associate professionals					
	32 Health and social care associate professionals					
	33 Protective service occupations					
	34 Culture, media and sports occupations					
	35 Business and public service associate professionals					
	51 Skilled agricultural and related trades					
	52 Skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades					
	53 Skilled construction and building trades					
54 Textiles, printing and other skilled trades						
Level 2	41 Administrative occupations					
<i>Equivalent to general education plus work experience</i>	42 Secretarial and related occupations					
	61 Caring personal service occupations					
	62 Leisure, travel and related personal service occupations					
	63 Community and civil enforcement occupations ¹					
	71 Sales occupations					
	72 Customer service occupations					
	81 Process, plant and machine operatives					
	82 Transport and mobile machine drivers and operatives					
Level 1	91 Elementary trades and related occupations					
<i>General education</i>	92 Elementary administration and service occupations					

Coding

<https://cascotweb.warwick.ac.uk#/classification/soc2020>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2020/soc2020volume2codingrulesandconventions>

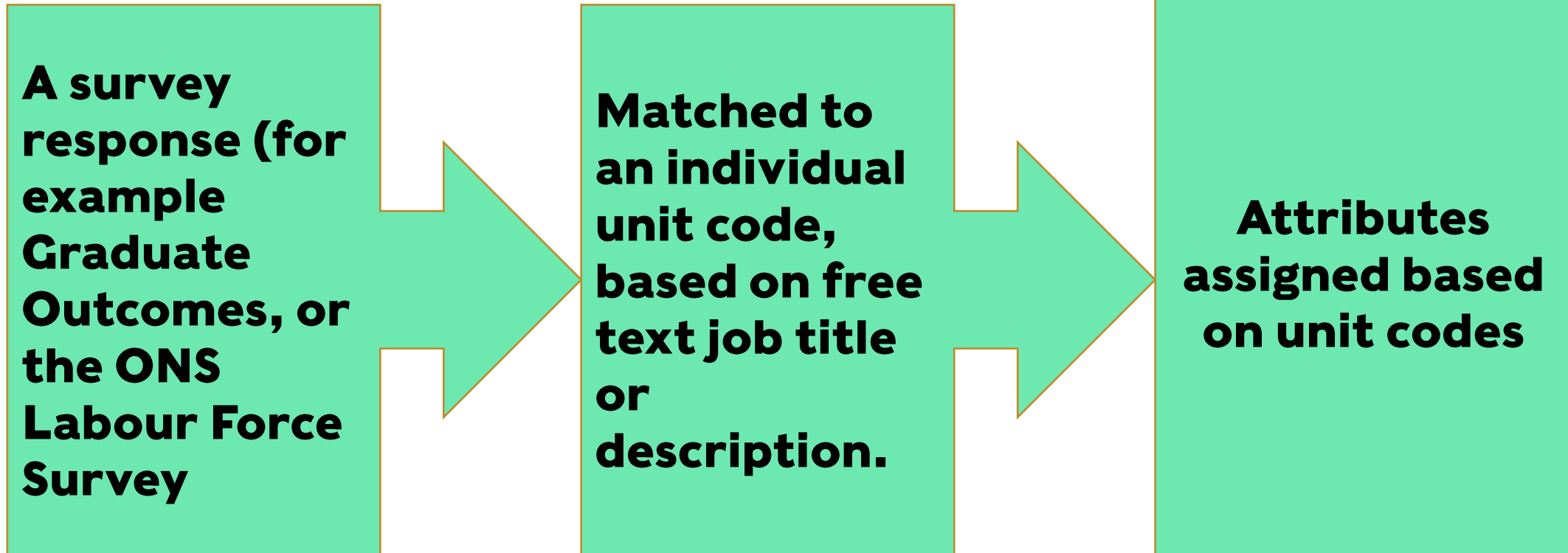


**“I’m a blogger,
I write blogs”**

**3412 Authors,
Writers,
Translators**

**Highly skilled?
Yes.
Graduate? No.**

Coding (alternative)



“I organise and direct the communications of an organisation or on behalf of clients”

1133 Public relations and communication s directors

**Highly skilled? Yes.
Graduate? Yes.**

This is not a sound basis
for the direction of public
funds.

Extensions and additions

SOC-SUGs

Essentially, extra categories underneath the existing SOC unit codes.

Separates out individual job roles at a greater level of definition.

Eg blogger is 3412/O2, technical writer is 3412/O7, poet is 3412/O5. (“Social media influencer” is 3413/O9)

Would allow for finer grained allocation of skill level and qualification level. Eg STEM+MH is proposed as a marker.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/standardoccupationalclassificationsocextensionproject>

Skills Functional Taxonomy

DfE sponsored project (via Skills and Productivity Board) to develop “ways to name, define, and classify skills”

To identify skills shortages, explore links to qualifications and occupations taxonomies.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/skills-and-productivity-board>
<https://bidstats.uk/tenders/2021/W18/750321877>

Decent Job

(via UN SDG 8)

- **Terms of employment (job security, minimum guaranteed hours, underemployment)**
- **Pay and benefits (Actual pay, satisfaction with pay)**
- **Health, safety and psychosocial well-being (Physical injury, mental health)**
- **Job design and nature of work (Use of skills, control, opportunities for progression, sense of purpose)**
- **Social support and cohesion (Peer support, line manager relationship)**
- **Voice and representation (Trade union membership, employee information, employee involvement)**
- **Work-life balance**

(Overemployment, paid/unpaid

<https://www.oversight.org.uk/trust.org.uk/publications/measuring-good-work-the-final-report-of-the-measuring-job-quality-working-group>

Worthwhile Job?

Jobs that contribute to the wellbeing of society and the wider environment?

Jobs in industries that have a future?

Jobs in industries that create rather than rent value?

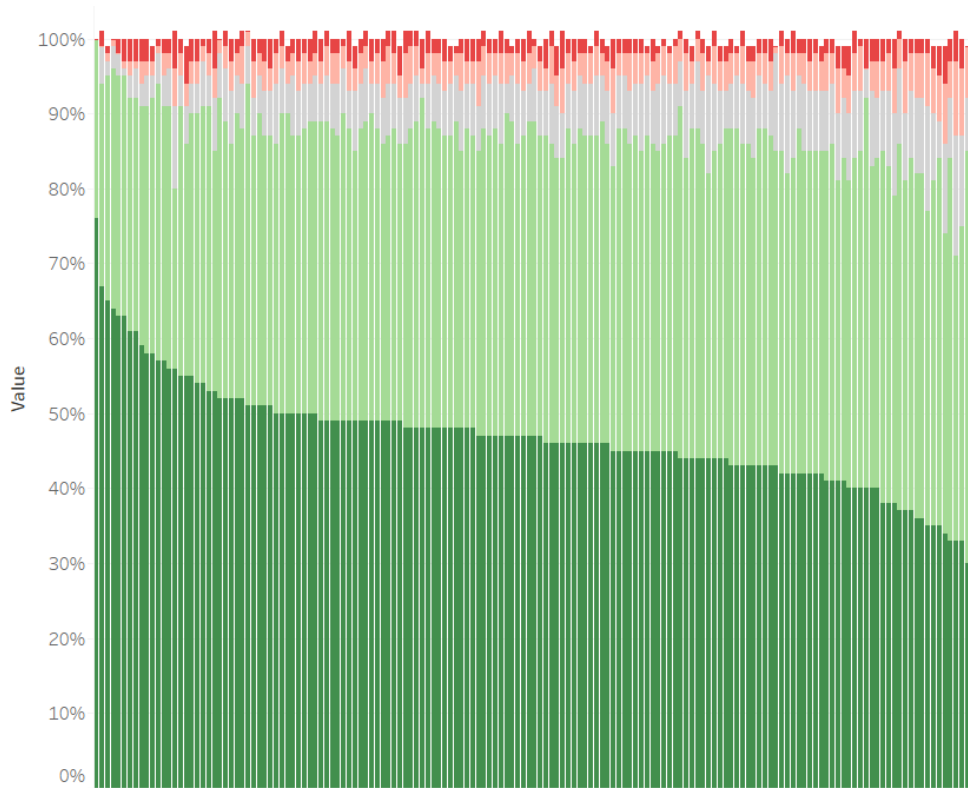
Jobs that allow for caring and leisure?

Jobs that feel “meaningful”?

BS Jobs?

“Say what you like about nurses, garbage collectors, or mechanics, it's obvious that were they to vanish in a puff of smoke, the results would be immediate and catastrophic. A world without teachers or dock-workers would soon be in trouble, and even one without science fiction writers or ska musicians would clearly be a lesser place. It's not entirely clear how humanity would suffer were all private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, ~~On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs to~~ ~~(Crabtree, 2015)~~ ~~Similarly, <http://www.stop-bullshit-jobs/>~~”

BS Jobs?



% of graduates in full time employment agreeing or strongly agreeing that their activity is “meaningful”, by provider. (from HESA Graduate Outcomes data)

“The empirical data do not support any of Graeber’s hypotheses. [...] In particular, the proportion of workers who believe their paid work is not useful is declining rather than growing rapidly, and workers in professions connected to finance and with university degrees are less likely to feel their work is useless than many manual workers.”

Alienation Is Not ‘Bullshit’: An Empirical Critique of Graeber’s Theory of BS Jobs (Soffia et al, 2021)
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09500170211015067>

“dead-end courses that leave young people
with nothing but debt”

- Gavin Williamson, 2021

“For too long we’ve been training people for
jobs that don’t exist”

- Gavin Williamson, 2020

A higher proportion of creative graduates are in “graduate level” jobs six months after graduating than social sciences, history, geography, law, biology, and psychology graduates

82 per cent of graduates working in design, 78 per cent in music, performing and visual arts and 75 per cent in architecture

have a creative degree

“For love or money?”, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Cent

<https://www.pec.ac.uk/research-reports/for-love-or-money>

To conclude:

- Interrogate any claims about “good” graduate destinations
- Argue for definitions that benefit society and nature
- Query the use of coding frames and terminology