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Linking spatial and social mobility: Is London's 'escalator' as strong as it was?

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Running title: Is London's escalator still as strong?

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Abstract

The 'escalator region' concept became a key element of migration literature after Fielding's work on South East England and fueled a welcome growth of interest in the links between spatial and social mobility. More recent research has shown that London has continued to perform an escalator function since the 1970s, but little attention has been given to how its strength has altered both over time and compared to other parts of the UK. Against the background of the declining rates of internal migration observed in the USA and several other countries, this paper seeks to identify whether London's escalator role was waxing or waning over the four intercensal decades between 1971 and 2011. The primary emphasis is on the chances of people shifting up from non-core to core white-collar work during each decade for London's non-migrant and in-migrant populations, both in absolute terms and relative to England's second-order cities. It is found that over the three decades since the 1970s London's escalator was still performing in the way originally conceived, but while its net gain of young adults from the rest of England and Wales steadily increased over this period, it was not operating as strongly in 2001-2011 as during the

1990s in terms of both the career-progression premium gained by its in-migrants and the extent of its advantage over England's second-order cities.

KEYWORDS

escalator region; migration; social mobility; career progression; London; second-order city regions

INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have seen a welcome growth in academic interest in the relationship between spatial and social mobility. Savage (1988) identified this area of study as 'the missing link' in UK research on internal migration, which prompted Fielding (1990) to undertake 'a search for the missing link'. This link he found in developing and testing the hypothesis of 'South East England as an escalator region' (Fielding, 1992). That idea comprises three main elements, all of which he successfully demonstrated, namely that: people are drawn to the escalator region at an early stage of their working lives, they then benefit from the faster career progression that the region affords, and at or close to retirement they quit the region taking with them the financial and social capital that they have gained – or, in Fielding's terminology, stepping on to the escalator, riding on it and finally stepping off it.

That study spawned a rich seam of intellectual inquiry into the prevalence and dynamics of this model, including its applicability to other UK cities besides London (for reviews, see Champion et al., 2014; Fielding, 2007, 2012; Findlay et al., 2008; Gordon, 2013; Stiles, 2017). From this body of work it would appear that the London escalator was not just a feature of the 1970s, but was still functioning in broadly the same way in the 1980s (Fielding, 1995), the 1990s (Champion et al., 2014; Findlay et

al., 2009; Gordon et al., 2015) and in the 2000s (Stiles, 2017). Not at all clear from the existing literature, however, is how much its strength has varied since the 1970s.

This omission is important because the past four decades have seen some substantial changes in migration behaviour and its drivers. Particular attention has been focused on the frequency with which people move home. In the USA (Cooke 2011, 2013, 2018) domestic migration intensities have been declining steadily, with the longer-distance moves on which the escalator model is predicated experiencing the largest percentage fall, down by more than half since the 1980s. According to the multi-national analyses of Bell et al. (2015, 2018) and the case studies featured by Champion et al. (2018), migration decline has been taking place not only in high-mobility settler societies in the New World but also in many other countries irrespective of their historic level of migration intensity (see also Frey, 2018). More generally, Smith et al. (2015) point to the profound changes that have occurred within the past quarter of a century in many of the key factors affecting residential mobility in the UK, including globalisation and related labour-market change, housing-market restructuring, more immigration and ethnic diversity, demographic ageing, proliferation of living arrangements, delays in key life-course events, reform of welfare systems, increased participation in higher education, the growth of ICT usage and social media, and much else besides.

Against the background of these widespread observations of migration decline and societal change, this paper addresses the question of whether London's role as an escalator region remains as strong in the 2000s as it was when initially identified by Fielding on the basis of data for the 1970s. Its primary contribution therefore is in

taking a longer-term perspective on London's role as an escalator region rather than focusing on single periods as virtually all previous work has done. It accomplishes this goal by replicating the methodology applied to 1991-2001 by Champion et al. (2014) for the previous two decades 1981-1991 and 1971-1981 and also by updating to the latest decade 2001-2011. Thus it tracks decadal rates of migration and social mobility across a total of four intercensal periods. In addition, following the example set by Champion et al. (2014), it also examines the extent to which London's escalator role is emulated by England's second-order cities, for which until now there have been no equivalent analyses for the two earlier decades.

Following a more detailed justification of our study and a brief description of its approach and data, we tackle four questions.

- Is London still as subject to the escalator pattern of migration as it was in the 1971-1981 decade of Fielding's initial test?
- Has the career progression of London's longer-term residents continued to outpace the national rate to a similar extent as then?
- Have those 'stepping onto the escalator' by moving to London in more recent decades managed to enjoy the same level of premium in career progression over its longer-term residents as then?
- Finally, has there been any narrowing of the gap in progression rates between London and England's second-order cities over the four decades?

The paper's concluding discussion focuses particularly on whether the observed reduction in London's comparative advantage since the turn of the millennium is merely a temporary phenomenon triggered by the Great Recession and other period effects or represents a more fundamental shift in the space economy.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

The principal justification for the present study is that to date there has been no systematic assessment of whether London's escalator function has been growing stronger or weaker since its first being observed for the 1970s. This is because the vast majority of escalator-related research – and this applies not just to London but also studies on cities in the rest of the UK and internationally – has been based on what is essentially a single observation period, with the main aim of establishing whether the fundamentals of Fielding's (1992) escalator 'hypothesis' apply in their chosen region. Irrespective of whether their data have been derived from secondary sources like population censuses or have been generated by purposive surveys, these studies have generally not sought to track the strength of the escalator function over time.

This is just as much the case for UK-based studies as elsewhere. Some of Fielding's own later (1995, 2007) work on South East England as an escalator region included a number of analyses relating to 1981-1991, but these were primarily designed to explore extra dimensions of the phenomenon – differences by gender, immigrant status and ethnicity – rather than to compare the situation then with his 1970s' findings. Indeed, his only explicit mention of change over time is in the form of an aside in parentheses (Fielding, 2007, p. 111):

> (Incidentally, analyses of the ONS Longitudinal Study data sets over the three intervals 1971-1981, 1981-1991 and 1991-2001 have shown that these relationships between migration and social mobility within

hierarchical urban systems are quite remarkably stable over time. Specifically, the arrival of the 'Thatcher' era in the 1980s did not, contrary to the author's expectations, alter the patterns to any significant degree.)

Clearly, the thrust in this passage is essentially qualitative in nature, confirming that the broad patterns associated with the escalator were not just a feature of the 1970s but not involving any statistical comparison across decades.

The same applies to most of the subsequent work on the UK. For example, Findlay et al.'s (2009) examination of the occupational mobility of migrants to and from South East England was focused on the 1991-2001 intercensal decade. So too were the studies by Champion et al. (2014) and Gordon et al. (2015) that compared London with other city regions of England and Wales. One notable exception, however, is provided by Stiles (2017) who, following an examination of regional differences across England and Wales in social mobility rates for 2001-2011, went on to compare those rates with the equivalents for 1991-2001. But this comparison was undertaken only for his 'London-Southeast' region, for which he found some strengthening of the escalator function between the two decades but was unable to tell whether this widened the gap with the rest of the country. This uplift could merely reflect the growth of opportunities at the top of the occupational ladder between the two decades nationally, prompting Stiles to recommend that future research should 'examine how other regions compared between decades' (ibid, p. 40). Nor could his findings on decadal change be compared directly with Fielding's results for the 1970s and 1980s because of methodological differences. In particular, Stiles' metric of social mobility was based on a somewhat different set of occupational groupings, while his definition

of 'London-Southeast' omitted the eastern and northern flanks of Fielding's broader South East region.

The justification for the present paper is very similar to that used by Stiles in terms of the massive changes that have been occurring in demographic, economic, social and technological dynamics. Fielding's expectation of patterns altering between the 1970s and 1980s (see above) applies even more when expanding the reference period to cover four intercensal decades. This is very evident from Smith et al.'s (2015) review of changes in UK internal migration patterns since the early 1990 (see also Champion, 2016; Falkingham & Champion, 2016; and Fielding, 2012). Key to the role of the London escalator is the capital's phenomenal growth as a global centre of financial and business services following the 'Big Bang' deregulation in 1986. Working against this, however, is the benefit that the country's second-order cities have reaped from the regeneration measures introduced after the inner city riots of the early 1980s and from large-scale investment under central government's 'urban renaissance' agenda from 1999 onwards (Townsend & Champion, 2014). Another major change is an eight-fold increase in university student numbers since the 1960s, with major implications for internal migration as the majority do not attend their local institution. In addition, the Second Demographic Transition has been steadily evolving, perhaps most noticeably in the increasing female share of the labour force and in the rise of the dual-earner (and dual-career) household, partly assisted by women's rising participation in higher education and the shift in occupational composition from blue-collar to white-collar work (Green & Shuttleworth, 2015).

Perhaps the most important development since the 1980s, however, is the widespread decline in internal migration rates mentioned in the introduction, especially the rise of what Cooke (2011) termed 'secular rootedness'. In relation to the UK, however, the evidence is rather mixed according to the most comprehensive review to date (Lomax & Stillwell, 2018). While overall residential mobility has fallen by about a quarter since the 1970s, the main contributor to this has been shorter-distance moving. Yet, while the longer-distance moves that primarily power the escalator function are fairly stable, this is mainly due to a steep rise in rates for young adults which nationally is mainly attributed to a big growth in moves to and from universities: rates for all other age groups have declined, as they also have for those with degrees and those in professional and managerial work (see Shuttleworth et al., 2018, for the latest evidence). Another indicator of growing internal migration sclerosis relevant to London is that North-to-South net migration has averaged virtually zero since 2000 (Lomax et al., 2014). In addition, net immigration to the UK from abroad has been running at a much higher level since the 1990s and, with London being the principal gateway, this may have reduced the opportunities for migrants from the rest of the country (Campbell et al., 2014; Champion, 2016). Additionally, Lomax & Stillwell (2018) highlight the big downward impact on internal migration rates of the 2008-2009 recession, though they suggest that this might be a temporary feature and anyway gross flows to the UK's main cities were less affected than counterurban moves.

Clearly, the environment within which the escalator process will have been operating in more recent years is very different from that of the 1970s, hence our interest is

discovering whether the London escalator is still as strong as it used to be in both absolute terms and relative to the country's other large cities.

APPROACH AND DATA

In its approach, the present study envisions the escalator function in the same three-stage way as Fielding (see above), but as in our previous analyses for 1991-2001 (Champion et al., 2014) our primary focus is on the 'stepping-on' and 'riding' stages. We look first at how migration between the London escalator region and the rest of the country has altered since the 1970s. Then we examine the change over time in the career-progression benefit gained from riding this escalator, initially for the capital's non-migrants before drawing comparisons with people arriving there each decade. Finally, we look to see whether the scale of London's comparative advantage in career-progression rate over the country's second-order cities has narrowed as the government programmes for the latter's regeneration have intensified.

We also follow Fielding in choosing to use the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study of England and Wales (ONSLS) as our data source for measuring career-progression rates. The reason is simple: the ONSLS is the only source of information on long-term social mobility across the whole population at the individual-person level, being based on the linkage of census records for a sample of just over 1% of the population, as well as life-events data including births to sample mothers, deaths and cancer registrations but not address changes (unlike the ONSLS's companion studies in Scotland and Northern Ireland). Starting with the 1971 Census, this linkage is an ongoing process, with the latest data added after the enumeration in

2011, providing the opportunity of comparing 10-year social transition rates across four intercensal periods. The main constraint is that the categories of some variables have altered between Censuses, but as a result of recodes by ONS and CeLSIUS staff (see Acknowledgements), the classifications used here are considered robust over time.

Turning to the detail of the occupationally-derived classifications, however, we depart from Fielding's approach in certain respects. While he examined a range of transitions between his 'social classes', we focus on his key metric relating to the chances of someone working in a 'white collar' job at the start of the intercensal decade moving up to the top category of 'service class' by the next census. Secondly, partly so as to achieve the greatest possible consistency across the four decades, the composition of these two classes in terms of Socio-economic Group (SEG) differs somewhat from Fielding's. In particular, whereas his 'service class' comprises SEGs 1, 2.2, 3, 4 and 5.1, our equivalent puts 5.1 ('intermediate non-manual: ancillary and artists') into the lower class. Also, while Fielding's 'white collar' comprises SEGs 5.2, 6 and 7, we excluded SEG 7 ('personal service workers') from our equivalent because by 2011 this group had become majority blue-collar. To emphasise our definitional changes, we relabel the two categories as White Collar Core (WCC) and White Collar Non-Core (WCN), respectively. A fuller justification for focusing on transitioning between these two white-collar categories can be found in Champion et al. (2014, pp. 425-426).

We also adopt a different geographical framework from Fielding's standard statistical regions so as to be able to compare London with the country's other large cities. As

again set out in more detail in Champion et al. (2014), our definition is based on the narrower city-region concept. While McCollum et al. (2018) advocate using workplace address for people's location, the ONSLS permits only the use of usual residence. But by adopting city-region definitions that are based largely on commuting self-containment, residence and workplace will have been in the same zone for the vast majority of our sample. Having taken this step, one further refinement involves restricting migration into the city regions to address changes of at least 40km so as to eliminate the shorter-distance moves that are likely to be prompted more by housing considerations than a decision to change job.

Finally, we also differ in the data source that we use to test the change over time in the strength of the 'stepping-on' stage of the London escalator. That part of Fielding's (1992) test was based on data from the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR) and related to the one year ending June 1986. To meet the aims of our research, however, we need data on migration covering the whole of our 40-year reference period, for which the NHSCR is inadequate, as the sub-regional series commenced only in 1975. Also, the NHSCR series is not available at the level of spatial detail needed to represent the London city region accurately. Instead, therefore, we choose to use the ONSLS also for this part of our study.

RESULTS

London's migration exchanges with the rest of the country

As mentioned above, the first step is to discover whether London is still as subject to the escalator pattern of net migration as observed by Fielding (1992). This pattern

involves the city region gaining people at the early stages of their working lives and losing them when they step off the escalator at or near retirement age. The results of our analysis across the four decades of our ONSLS data are shown in Table 1. Looking first at the 1981-1991 decade within which Fielding's NHSCR-based test was set (see previous section), there is confirmation that the escalator was operating then, with a net gain of 379 ONSLS sample members aged 15-24 at the start of the decade (equivalent to some 35,000 when grossed up to 100%). It is also clear that the age cohort with the largest net loss is that around retirement age, namely the 50-64 year olds that reach 60-74 by the end of the decade (with their sample number of 1,836 grossing up to around 168,000 for the decade). At the same time, London experienced a combined loss of 25-34s and 35-49s that is on a par with this, revealing that higher numbers of departures from the London city region than arrivals was not just a feature of late working lives but also of the prime working ages, as noted by other studies (e.g. Coombes and Charlton, 1992; Lomax and Stillwell, 2018). Also, as shown by Champion (2012) and confirmed by Stiles (2017), this exodus has not been restricted to native Londoners but also includes previous in-migrants stepping off the escalator well before retirement age.

<Table 1 about here>

The subsequent two columns of Table 1 conform to the same escalator pattern of net gains of the youngest working-age cohort and net losses of the three older ones, but with two significant quantitative differences. As regards the older cohorts, the net loss of 50-64 years olds is substantially smaller in 1991-2001 and also in 2001-2011 than in 1981-1991, while the net losses of 25-34s and 35-49s increase in both the

subsequent decades, suggesting a switch in emphasis in the timing of the London exodus towards more leaving in these prime working ages. The picture for the 15-24 cohort is one of strong acceleration in net gain over these two later decades, with the 1,204 for 2001-2011 being equivalent to some 110,000 when grossed up. Reinforcing this observed trend is this cohort's net migration balance for 1971-1981, which is one of the net loss of 838 sample members and suggests that the biggest change over these four decades had occurred by the time of Fielding's test using data for the mid 1980s. This change could well be linked to the parlous state of London's economy in the 1970s and the fact that its post-war programme of planned population dispersal was still in full swing, following the designation of three further New Towns around London in the previous decade. In fact, more detailed data (not shown here) show that the gross volume of the 15-24 cohort of sample members leaving the city region halved between 1971-1981 and 2001-2011, while the number moving to it rose by a half.

The ONSLS data also reveal that the gross inflows of working-age people to the London city region have become steadily more concentrated at the younger end. As shown in Figure 1, the 15-24s' share of the overall inflow of 15-64s rose from 49% in the 1970s to 63% in the 2000s. In other words, the proportion has risen from the already impressive level of around half to almost two-thirds most recently. Meanwhile, the shares of all three older age cohorts were smaller in 2001-2011 than for 1971-1981, reducing progressively over the four decades for the 25-34s and 35-49s though contracting only between the 1970s and 1980s for the 50-64s.

<Figure 1 about here>

This evidence allows us to draw two conclusions. In the first place, it confirms that the migration patterns that Fielding (1992) identified as key elements of the escalator model apply similarly to the narrower city-region definition of the escalator region used here, perhaps not surprisingly given that the London core has always been recognized as the primary motor behind the macro-region picture. Secondly and more importantly in the present context, we find that the escalator-related migration pattern has not only persisted across the three decades since the 1970s but has intensified in certain respects, most notably with the continuous increase in the volume of the young-adult net inflow and with this element making up a progressively larger share of the total working-age inflow.

London's non-migrant transition rate compared with the rest of the country

The second step in Fielding's (1992) test was to see whether the escalator region based on London outperformed the rest of England and Wales in terms of the career progression of its non-migrants through the intercensal decade. This Fielding was able to demonstrate by using the ONSLS to calculate the South East's rate of upward mobility between a selection of his 'social groups' for 1971-1981 and, with hardly any exceptions, finding this higher than for the other regions. In our previous work (Champion et al., 2014), we found that this was also the case in 1991-2001 on the basis of using the 'city region' definition of London and the metric of moving up from a WCN (White Collar Non-core) job to a WCC (White Collar Core) one. Out of 14,372 LS sample members who were living in the London city region in both 1991 and 2001, aged 15-64 years in 1991 and engaged in WCN work then and still in employment in 2001, a total of 2,270 – or 15.8% – had progressed to a WCC

occupation by 2001. This rate of upward social mobility was considerably higher than for those living elsewhere in England and Wales: LS members who did not move home across a regional boundary there during the decade averaged 12.3%. This means that over this period London's non-migrants had a 29% greater chance of making this career progression than the overall experience of those staying put in their own part of the country outside the London city region.

The new analyses carried out for this paper allow us to see how London's performance on this metric of career progression has altered over time by applying it to the ONSLS data for the previous two decades and updating to 2011. The results, presented in Figure 2, reveal that the proportion of London's non-migrants moving up from WCN to WCC work has increased between each of the four decades since 1971, but not in a steady fashion. There was only a very marginal increase between the 10.8% rate for 1971-1981 and the 10.9% rate of 1981-1991 and also only a small increase between the most recent two decades. By contrast, the proportion rose much more markedly between 1981-1991 and 1991-2001, up by almost 5 percentage points. On this evidence, it would appear that the labour market opportunities to be found in London moved on to an altogether higher plane in the 1990s.

<Figure 2 about here>

On the other hand, the picture for London looks rather different when compared with that of the rest of the country. For the latter, as also shown in Figure 2, the rate of upward social mobility for its non-migrants on this metric declined between the 1970s and the 1980s, but then increased by roughly equal amounts through the 1990s and

2000s. In all four decades the proportion of non-migrants moving from WCN to WCC work in the London city region was larger than that for those in the rest of England and Wales. However, the difference between the two – the 'London premium' – has not followed a consistent trajectory over the study period, falling back to 14% above that of the rest of the country in the final decade after having increased progressively larger from its 8% level in the 1970s to reach a peak of 29% in the 1990s.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from this part of the analysis is that the 'escalator region' effect identified by Fielding is still in place. Indeed, according to this metric, it appears to have been in relatively embryonic form during the decade that was the focus of his original work on the 1970s and has been operating more strongly since then. The only qualification is that since the turn of the millennium the degree of advantage gained by being a resident of the London city region compared to living in the rest of the country has halved, with the latter advancing more strongly than London. On the face of it, this more recent narrowing of the gap would seem to have less to do with a change in London's role and relate more to what has been happening outside London since the 1980s – a point to which we return later.

Transition rates for London's in-migrants

The third step in Fielding's test demonstrated that people moving to the escalator region were able to take advantage of the faster career progression that it offers compared with elsewhere in the country and indeed obtain greater benefit from it than its non-migrant population, i.e. those already living there at the start of the decade. Champion et al. (2014) found this 'migrant premium' still operating in 1991-2001,

when the WCN-to-WCC transition rate for those aged 15-64 in 1991 and moving into the London city region from the rest of the country during the subsequent 10-year period was 26.0%, compared to 15.8% for London's non-migrants then.

Figure 3 extends the evidence back to the 1970s and updates to 2011. This reveals two main features. Firstly, it confirms that in each of the four decades the transition rate for that decade's in-migrants is higher than that for those living in the London city region at both the start and end of the decade, i.e. that the 'migrant premium' has been in operation continuously over the study period. Secondly, the change over time in the in-migrants' rate broadly parallels that for the non-migrants, notably with a higher rate in the latest two decades than in the first two decades. It is also clear, however, that the 'migrant premium' varies considerably in size between the four decades. In absolute terms, the 10.2 percentage point level for the 1990s is much larger than for the other three periods: 7.5 points for 1971-1981, 6.3 for 1981-1991 and just 5.6 for 2001-2011. As can also be seen from Figure 3, the latest decade saw the premium at its smallest in relative terms too, at around just one-third of the non-migrant rate then as opposed to the 58-70 % range of the three previous decades.

<Figure 3 about here>

At the same time, it is important to check whether this migrant premium merely arises from compositional effects. As we have seen from Figure 1, the in-migrant flow is highly concentrated at the younger end of the working-age span. Combined with the observation of previous studies that show that career advancement is stronger in the lower half of this span (Champion et al., 2014), there is the possibility that the age

differential between the in-migrants and the non-migrants could merely result from the age difference between the two populations. This is tested in Table 2, which displays the transition rates for the working-age span split into four bands (though only three for the in-migrants because the number of those aged 50-64 moving to London in the ONSLS sample is below the statistical disclosure threshold in all four decades). The data for non-migrants confirms that the probability of career progression, as measured in this way, is lower at older ages, though it is higher for those aged 25-34 at the start of the decade than for 15-24 year olds. But it is also apparent from the rest of the data in Table 2 that the migrant premium is positive at all the ages shown and in all four decades, and indeed is substantial in all cases except for the 35-59s in 1981-1991 and the 25-34s in 2001-2011.

<Table 2 about here>

In sum, as was demonstrated by Fielding (1992) for the 1970s, there is a migrant premium operating as part of the escalator region process that has continued since then. Furthermore, it is not one that results from the in-migrant flow containing a much higher proportion of people at the early stage of their working lives than the non-migrant population. The fact that more of the new arrivals manage to move up from their start-of-decade WCN occupational status to WCC 10 years later than is the case for those staying in the London city region over the decade must therefore have a different explanation. The most obvious is that there is another type of selectivity in the in-migrant flow besides age, which could be to do with health and family background but is most likely to be associated with educational qualifications, especially a degree, and also with 'ambition', as hypothesized by Fielding (1992) and

demonstrated by Findlay et al. (2008) and Gordon (2013). Alternatively, it might have something to do with the process by which in-migrants enter and then experience London's labour market, notably whether securing a job before moving as opposed to speculative migration and how much of any career progression occurs during their time in London rather than at the time of their move (Findlay et al., 2009).

England's second-order cities compared with London

The final element of empirical analysis in this paper picks up on the main question addressed by Champion et al. (2014), namely how far England's second-order cities emulate London as a human-capital escalator. This aim was what prompted the change in the escalator region definition from the wider South East statistical region to the more tightly drawn 'city region'. That study, focusing on the intercensal decade 1991-2001, found that the second-order city regions were but pale shadows of the London city region. But we now know from the findings presented earlier (notably as presented in Figure 2) that the 1990s was the period when the London premium over the aggregate of the rest of England and Wales was at its greatest: it had been building up over the previous two decades and then fell back in the 2000s. These other three decades thus offer the prospect of the second-order cities performing more strongly relative to London than they did in the 1990s.

We now check for this by comparing London's rate with a three-way split of the rest of England and Wales in which the nine second-order city regions are treated as a single subdivision alongside the Rest of the Greater South East (RGSE) and the remainder of England and Wales. Figure 4 displays the results of introducing the three-way split to the rest of England and Wales outside the London city region for

the WCN-to-WCC transition rates of non-migrants (A) and of in-migrants (B). For the former, it reveals a very persistent pattern across the four decades, with regional and urban dimensions both apparent but with the former being the stronger. None of the other three area types posts a transition rate higher than that for the London city region in any of the four decades, with the next highest being the RGSE. As regards the two subdivisions beyond the GSE, the rate for the aggregate of the second-order city regions is always higher than that for the non-city-region remainder there.

<Figure 4 about here>

For those who moved at least 40km into these four subdivisions in England and Wales, Figure 4B reveals that the regional and urban dimensions are again in play, but in contrast to the non-migrant pattern, for the in-migrants it is the second of these dimensions that is the more important and also the pattern is not quite so stable. Over the first three decades, the highest transition rates are for the two city-region area types, with the two non-city-region rates being below these in their respective parts of the country. This, however, is not the case in the final decade, for which the ranking is the same as for the non-migrant population, i.e. with the RGSE now ahead of the second-order cities.

Specifically in terms of the difference between London and the second-order city regions, the latest decade now appears to constitute a change in trend in favour of the latter. For non-migrants (Figure 4A), the excess in London's transition rate over the second-order city regions grew from just 0.4 % points for the 1970s to 1.9 for the 1980s and 3.6 for the 1990s, but for 2001-2011 the gap narrowed to 2.2 points.

Similarly, for in-migrants (Figure 4B), London's advantage reduced from 3.8 to 2.6 points between these last two decades after rising sharply after the first two. At the same time, it was not just the second-order city regions that closed the gap on London in the 2000s, as all the other three subdivisions saw their non-migrant rates shift upwards towards London's, while the main feature for in-migrants is that London's rate fell back further than for the other three. In all, this reveals the good sense of Stiles' (2017) recommendation that further research should compare London's change in social mobility over time with those of other parts of England and Wales.

TOWARDS EXPLANATION

Synthesising the step-by-step results presented above, the most obvious point is that the London escalator is still functioning in very much the same way as originally conceived and successfully tested by Fielding for the 1970s. Despite his feeling that it might not have survived the Thatcher era, the key elements remain in place, as shown by Fielding's own work on the 1980s and by more recent studies including Stiles (2017) and the present study's updating to 2011. London continues to receive a large influx of younger working-age people who then exhibit stronger upward social mobility than longer-term residents who in their turn have higher career progression rates than those living in the rest of the country. The continuity of this pattern over at least four decades does indeed mark it out as one of the most stable dimensions of the national migration system, thoroughly deserving of Fielding's (1993, 2007) classification of it as a 'deep structural' process.

This is, however, not to say that the London escalator is totally invariant over time, either in absolute terms or relative to the rest of the country. As its prime purpose, the present paper has sought to quantify its strength and thereby assess whether it has been waxing or waning since the 1971-1981 intercensal decade for which its existence was first proved. In this respect the findings have been more mixed. On the one hand, our metric of social mobility applied to the London city region displays a strengthening over the reference period, with the rate being substantially higher since 1991 than in the first two decades. Relative to the rest of England and Wales, however, while there is still a clear strengthening in the 'London premium' over the first three decades, this halves between the 1990s and the 2000s, ending up not far above its 1970s' level. All three parts into which we divided the rest of the country played a part in this narrowing of the gap with London, including the 9 second-order cities. The other significant setback for London between the latest two decades is the near halving of its 'migrant premium', with the benefit gained by stepping onto the escalator over that achieved by London's longer-term residents being lower in 2001-2011 than for any of the three preceding decades.

These observations about the relative weakening of London's escalator performance after 2001 prompt the question as to whether this is likely to prove merely a temporary aberration due to special circumstances (so-called 'period effects') or heralds a long-term waning. As regards the shrinkage in London's migration premium, the list of changes provided earlier in this paper offers some insights. Perhaps foremost among these potential explanations is the rise in net immigration to the UK and, in particular, the very large numbers arriving from Eastern Europe from 2004 onwards. With London being the major magnet for international labour

migrants, one potential impact of this influx is the reduction in the career opportunities for people moving there from the rest of the UK (Campbell et al., 2014). Another candidate is the much larger number of young people with degree-level qualifications entering the labour market in this decade compared with previous ones and taking advantage of the strong growth in higher-status job opportunities (Green & Shuttleworth, 2015). A further, partly related, factor is the Global Financial Crisis (GFC): while London escaped relatively lightly from the UK's deepest recession since the 1930s thanks to a massive government bail-out (LSE London, 2011), this introduced a period of economic uncertainty, probably forcing many of those stepping onto the escalator during the next few years to lower their job expectations.

Similar factors may also be responsible for London's longer-term residents seeing their transition rate rise only marginally in the new millennium compared with its impressive surge between the 1980s and 1990s. The competition provided by immigrant labour, the increasing number of young people with degrees and the shock of the GFC and subsequent Great Recession could all have played a part. An additional factor concerns the timing of London's resurgence as a global city, for while it was largely the financial deregulation of 1986 that kicked off this process, progress was held up by the 1990-1991 recession which impacted much more severely on the London region than did the 'de-industrialisation' recession of 10 years before. Also related to this timing of events is that, while the 1991-2001 intercensal decade started off in the depths of recession, 2001-2011 began towards the end of a long period of economic recovery, meaning that there would have been less headroom for career advancement in 2001 than there had been in 1991. Maybe if censuses had

been held in the middle of each decade rather than near the start, a somewhat different picture might have resulted.

This timing factor would not, however, seem to have held back the rest of the country, which takes us to the final change observed above that merits attention, namely the substantial narrowing of the gap between there and London in 2001-2011 seen in Figure 2. Part of this catching-up process can be ascribed to the acceleration in rate for the rest of the Greater South East, which from Figure 4 appears to be cementing its role as an extension of the London city region, including its closing the gap on the latter for the career advancement of its in-migrants. Nevertheless, the second-order cities as a group, as well as the rest of England and Wales, enjoyed a similar level of uplift in their non-migrant transition rates, suggesting that developments there since the 1990s hold at least part of the explanation. The most likely candidates from the list presented earlier are the 'urban renaissance' agenda and the expansion of higher education. The former involved a major expansion of central government investment in second-order cities in the hope of trickle-down effects benefiting their wider regions and led to a substantial growth of employment, albeit mainly in the public sector (Centre for Cities, 2012). Meanwhile, the increase in university places was particularly strong in larger cities outside the Greater South East, aiding their economic regeneration both directly through the extra jobs (including high-skill ones in the universities themselves) and also through creating a larger local pool of new graduates (Goddard & Vallance, 2013). In the latter context, though graduate retention remains a challenge there, there is mounting evidence of new graduates choosing to stay on, capitalising on the links with the local labour market forged during their studies and retaining their personal and social relationships – evidence

that includes the '(re-)gentrification' of previously 'studentified' residential areas in these cities (Kinton et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

Against the background of widespread decline in internal migration intensities around the world (Champion et al., 2018), this paper has addressed the question whether London's 'escalator' is now as strong as it was when first observed for the 1970s by Fielding (1992). It thus follows Stiles' (2017) lead in examining the trajectory of London's escalator over more than a single decade on the basis of a consistent metric of social mobility, but in this case spanning four intercensal decades rather than just the latest two of that study. It has confirmed that London is still performing this role in the way originally conceived, but not as strongly in 2001-2011 as during the 1990s in terms of the scale of its premium over England's second-order cities nor with respect to the extent of extra career progression gained by its in-migrants from the rest of the country. This raises questions as to whether the London escalator has perhaps passed its peak, at least in terms of incentivising a major element of the UK's internal migration system.

The previous section offered suggestions about the causes of this observed trajectory drawing on a list of the major societal changes that have occurred over the past half-century, but did not try to assess the relative importance of each factor. Unfortunately, however, any attempt at anticipating the future strength of the London escalator has to face the fact that many of the drivers themselves are not readily predictable. For instance, how far will the UK's changing relationship with the European Union affect

the flow of immigrants from there who compete for jobs and promotion with young adults moving to London from other parts of the country? How far will the latest pressures on higher education alter the number of students graduating each year and the extent to which they opt for their local university? Thirdly, the post-2010 'austerity' regime will have affected people's social and spatial mobility in ways which will no doubt become evident once the 2021 Census provides the data for adding an extra decade to the analysis in this paper. In the meantime, there remains plenty of scope for further study of the trends already observed, including triangulation with other indicators of change since the 1970s.

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Table 1. Net migration between London city region and the rest of England and Wales, 1971-2011, by age cohort

Age at start of decade	1971-1981	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001-2011
15-24	-838	379	582	1204
25-34	-992	-941	-997	-1301
35-49	-1033	-959	-1004	-1267
50-64	-1754	-1836	-951	-1147
All 15-64	-4617	-3357	-2370	-2511

Source: calculated from ONS Longitudinal Study. Crown copyright data.

Note: net migration refers to the balance for London city region based on sample members moving at least 40km.

Table 2. Transition rates for non-migrants and in-migrants for London city region, 1971-2001, by decade and broad age group

Decade	Migrant status	Age at start of decade			
		15-24	25-34	35-49	50-64
1971-1981	Non-migrant	10.9	13.4	10.5	6.2
	In-migrant	17.9	19.4	17.6	
	Migrant premium	7.0	6.0	7.2	
1981-1991	Non-migrant	12.0	12.3	10.1	6.7
	In-migrant	17.2	21.9	12.6	
	Migrant premium	5.2	9.6	2.5	
1991-2001	Non-migrant	17.0	18.5	14.3	10.4
	In-migrant	27.5	25.6	24.2	
	Migrant premium	10.5	7.1	9.9	
2001-2011	Non-migrant	16.6	18.4	15.3	14.7
	In-migrant	22.9	21.1	21.6	
	Migrant premium	6.3	2.7	6.3	

Source: calculated from ONS Longitudinal Study. Crown copyright data.

Note: Transition rate refers to the proportion of sample members in White Collar Non-core work at the start of the decade progressing to White Collar Core work by its end. No data can be shown for in-migrants aged 50-64 (and thus for the migrant premium) because the number of LS members is below the disclosure threshold in all four decades.

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Figure 1. Age distribution of London city region's in-migrants across their 15-64 age span, 1971-2011, % (Source: calculated from ONS Longitudinal Study. Crown copyright data. Note: restricted to those moving at least 40km, see text.)

Figure 2. White Collar Non-core to Core transition rates for non-migrants of London city region and the Rest of England & Wales, 1971-2011 by decade (Source: calculated from ONS Longitudinal Study. Crown copyright data.)

Figure 3. White Collar Non-core to Core transition rates for London city region's non-migrants and in-migrants, 1971-2011 by decade (Source: calculated from ONS Longitudinal Study. Crown copyright data.)

Figure 4. White Collar Non-core to Core transition rates, 1971-2011, by decade and four-way subdivision of England and Wales, for: A. Non-migrants; B. In-migrants (Source: calculated from ONS Longitudinal Study. Crown copyright data.)

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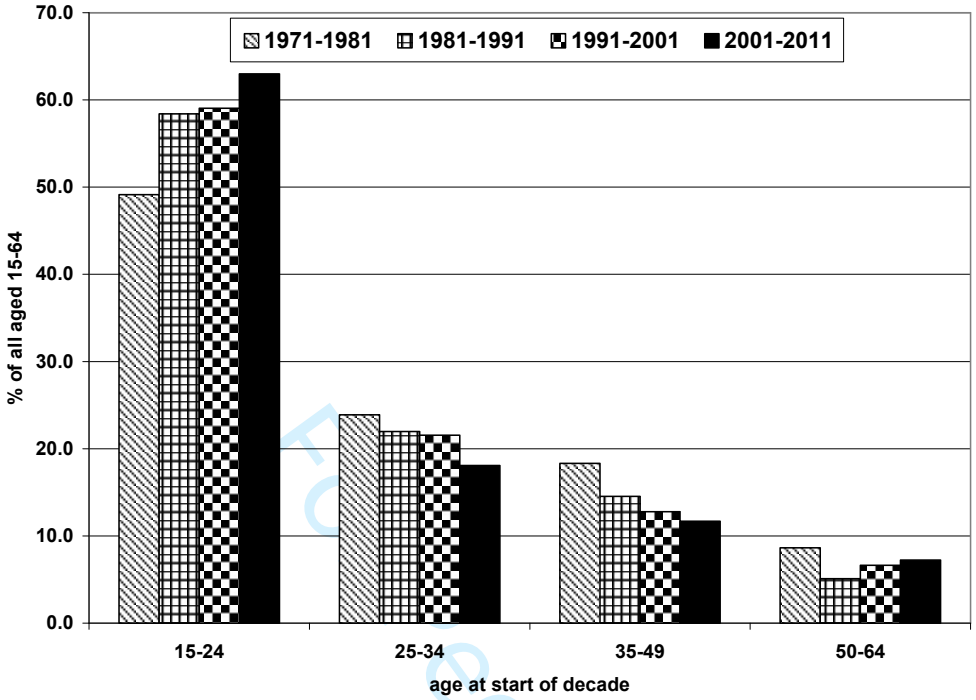

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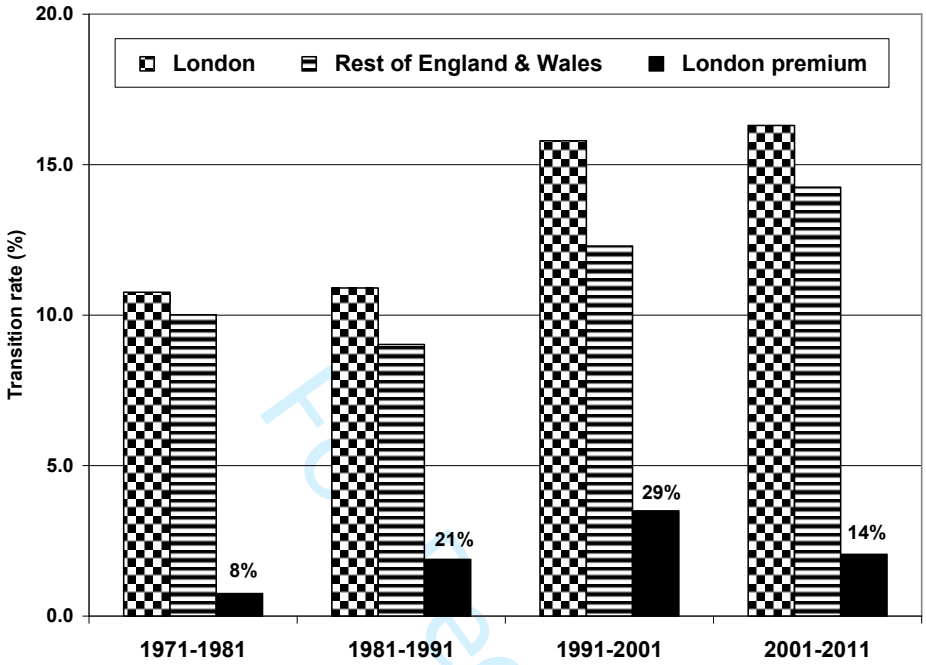

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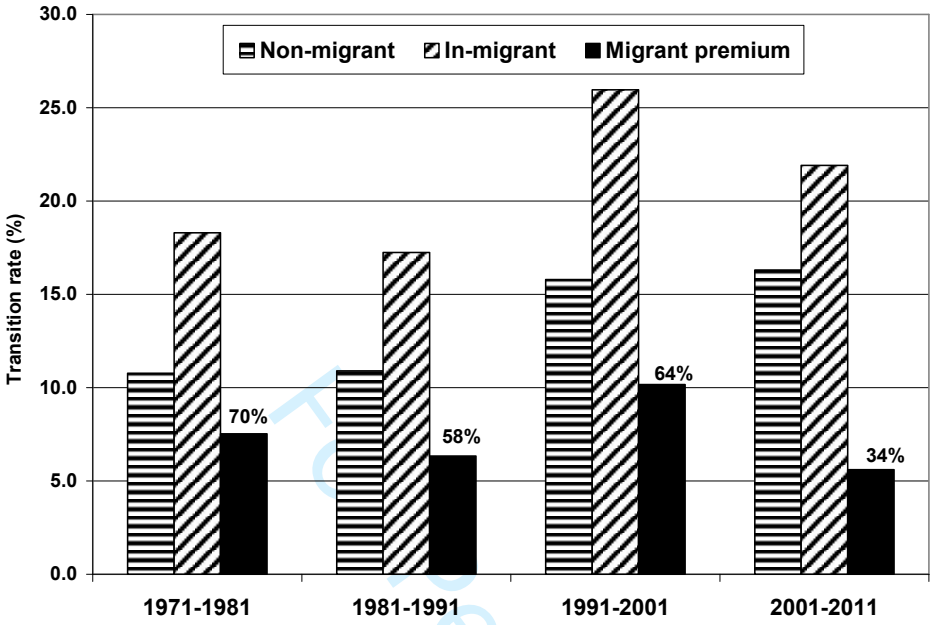

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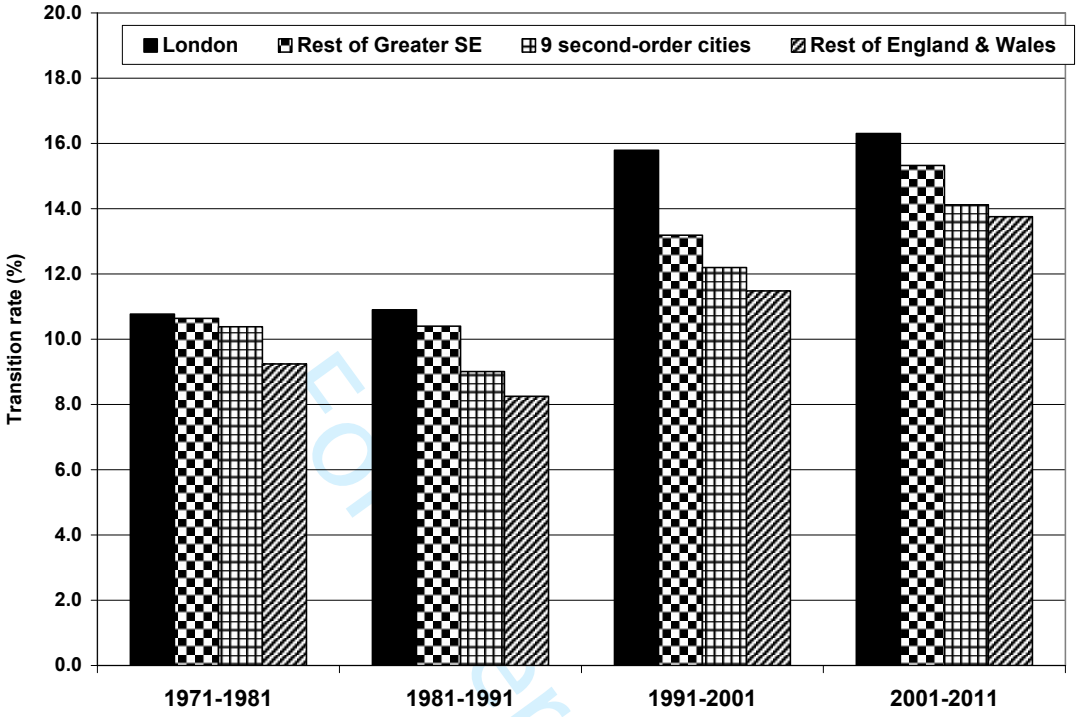
A. Non-migrants



B. In-migrants