



[A Day In The Life of An Exam Factory](#)

Opinion piece by [Jane Turner](#) February 2014

In ***Saturday Night and Sunday Morning***, Alan Sillitoe wrote of “the deadening treadmill” and “monotonous graft” of life on the factory floor, but today, we could apply this description to life in the classroom in many schools, colleges and even in the old bastions of Higher Education, universities. Just how did school, college and “uni” become so boring and so uninspiring that today’s university students would rather read a newspaper and don’t even want a First class degree according to ' [A first-class degree? I'd rather get a job...](#) '.

Education is no longer the joyful pursuance of ideas, the **belief in knowledge**, and the freedom to languish in the pleasure of reading, absorbing, thinking, theorising and discussing. Education has become like most things in capitalist society, a product in the form of a qualification. It is designed, marketed, processed, packaged, sold, and purchased. And, like many other consumer products, is now available online, in

easy bite sized packages

, sometimes for free and where those who fear intimacy and real live human interaction can pick up a qualification from the worldwide catalogue - as easily as clicking and collecting a packet of fish fingers or a few hundred more Facebook friends.

Teachers and lecturers, once the ***fount of knowledge***, are now supervisors in the production process, overseeing and encouraging the learners on the shop floor who churn out qualifications like widgets on an assembly line. Processing and accrediting them like inputs and outputs in a factory like process, ticking the quality control boxes along the way when objectives have been met, and packaging the end products in reassuring terminology, designed to make the consumers feel good about becoming an

accredited learner

or a consumer of a particular NVQ, A level or degree product.

There is even quite a ***large profit to be made***, for organisations who sell their courses and qualifications in the competitive education marketplace – three for a tenner missus? Or buy one get one free? Institutions and organisations sell their courses to schools, colleges and universities, and increasingly put them online, in some cases at no charge, or for relatively small monetary amounts, after all they have a worldwide market, with many professionals and people in some parts of the world spending vast amounts of money on their products.

And how ironic that in a period when more people go to college and university than ever before, and when you can join one of the many online educational communities without even leaving your living room, that standards in education have declined. University professors complain that students can't write a sentence, spell correctly or form an argument, never mind read a whole book or write an interesting essay that hasn't had large sections ***cut and pasted from the internet***

There are now thousands of unemployed ***indebted graduates***, graduates working in jobs once done by schooleavers with three GCSE's, and uneducated but highly expectant graduates who don't want the menial jobs, because they have degrees and expect to get a better job with such a qualification. Many of today's students are much more interested in their employment prospects and earning capacity than in reading a book, as getting a degree equates to earning tens of thousands of pounds more each year, rather than broadening the mind.

Whatever happened to knowledge hungry intellectuals
, and those we used to call geeks?

Most teachers are judged on outcomes, the number of passes, which they have to report on, and as funding depends on results, they make sure that students pass the courses they are enrolled on. This often means skipping through the more interesting and absorbing areas of a dumbed down curriculum, reading parts of a book rather than the whole thing, watching rather than participating in experiments in order to reinforce the objectives these learners need to pass exams and pick up their qualification. The once much slogged-for degree, envied by those with an inferior state education is now degraded to the equivalent of a reference, a piece of paper that says "employable", not necessarily educated, just job-market-ready.

Tick. Job done. Clock off.