



Students' old school tie still the key to the best paid jobs

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THE old school tie may still work as hard as ever in deciding who gets the best paid jobs, according to new research.

The 'who you are, rather than what you are' rule could still apply, and is particularly prominent if you are male.

Graduates with wealthy, well-educated parents have higher expectations of walking into well-paid careers than students from less advantaged backgrounds.

Every extra year of a parent's education is worth an additional €2,241 a year, on average, in earnings to their graduate children, according to a new study.

As things stand, a degree gives an average of an 8pc boost to an individual's earnings over a lifetime - and that rises to about 10pc if the graduate comes from a well-off, well-educated family.

While the time in university itself is a social leveller, and manages to even out the differences in earlier educational experiences, the class divide suddenly opens up again, once the students leave college and try to enter the workforce.

The research, which was completed earlier this year, is part of the Irish Universities Study (IUS) which has been tracking students in the Republic's seven universities for a number of years.

It was carried out at University College Dublin's (UCD) Geary Institute, which found a "large, significant and persistent differential" in terms of the earnings expectations of students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

"Our findings pose a sizeable challenge for policy-makers in this area, as they suggest that equalising educational outcomes may not translate into equal labour market outcomes," Geary researchers Colm Harmon, Liam Delaney and Cathy Redmond said.

Earnings

Their findings are published in a discussion paper entitled 'Parental Education, Grade Attainment and Earnings Expectations among University Students'.

The findings are based on final-year students' expectation of their future earnings power and, while rooted in belief rather than reality, evidence shows that such expectations are self-fulfilling. While students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be disadvantaged at the start of college - students from better-off backgrounds perform better in the Leaving Cert - the gap narrows substantially during their years in university.

As a starting point, the study notes the difference students' socio-economic backgrounds can make to their academic performance at the point of entry to university.

However, there is a sense that, in terms of student performance, universities are doing a good job in eliminating earlier disadvantage.

But the latest Geary research says the gap re-emerges again when they leave college with students from more disadvantaged backgrounds having lower earnings expectations. It affects boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds more than girls, partly because of the subject choices made by girls at

college.

They found with boys in particular, they could not explain the gap in expected earnings.

The Government-funded study does not speculate on the reason why boys from more educated and wealthier families do so much better in the long-term pay stakes.

However, there is a slew of anecdotal evidence that boys from higher professional families, such as lawyers or accountants, find it easier to get college work placements connected to their course of study.

This could be because of a parental peer, or 'old boys' network, often referred to as the 'old school tie'.