



Women's softer side plays role in 8.3pc pay gap with men

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WOMEN'S softer side plays a small role in why female university graduates are paid less than their male counterparts, according to new research.

Personality differences are just one of the reasons for the gender pay gap that opens as soon as graduates leave college. Another factor in the average 8.3pc salary advantage enjoyed by male graduates is the subject studied at college.

While male graduates expect to earn €33,784 in their first job, females set their sights lower at €31,193, or €2,591 a year less. Over their working life, males expect to reach a maximum annual salary of €118,024, compared with €96,115 for females - a difference of €21,909.

Researchers at University College Dublin's Geary Institute tried to explain the difference by looking at family background and education, subject choice, character traits and life ambition.

But that provided only a small part of the answer and they say further examination is needed on what role discrimination is continuing to play.

Their survey of 2,500 Irish 17- to 30-year-old students in 2009 looked at earnings' expectations, which have been shown to be an accurate estimate of actual earnings.

Previous Geary research found that graduates with wealthy, well-educated parents have higher

expectations of walking into well-paid careers.

According to the latest study, women's preference for studying humanities/arts counts against them because, typically, it leads to careers that pay less than engineering and computing, where men are to the fore.

Women have higher levels of agreeableness - defined as being friendly and compassionate as opposed to competitive and antagonistic - and it is the main personality trait working against them in the pay stakes. They also pay a penalty for being less likely than men to take risks.

Ambitious

Their earnings also suffer because of the importance they attach to contributing to the well-being of others, wanting to maintain a good relationship with family and being less ambitious about wealth.

But according to researchers Professor Colm Harmon, Dr Liam Delaney and Cathy Redmond, such differences do not explain most of the pay differential.

Overall, their findings fill only 26pc of the gap in short-term earnings and 34pc of the difference in long-term pay expectations.

The researchers' paper - 'Decomposing Gender Differences in College Students' Earnings Expectations' - says it is an important finding in itself that "differences in characteristics between men and women in themselves are limited in explaining pay differentials".