

Value judgment

The graduate incomes debate flares up again, with passionate words from the UUK chief and headline-grabbing stats from the Institute for Fiscal Studies

The issue of graduate incomes and value for money has been drawn back into the spotlight with the release of the latest analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), commissioned by the Department for Education.

The IFS research compares the lifetime earnings of graduates and non-graduates. It finds that while “going to university is a very good investment for most students”, and about 80% of students are likely to gain financially from attending university, an estimated one in five students – or about 70,000 every year – “would actually have been better off financially had they not gone to university”.

Furthermore, according to the report, men will gain on average £30,000 in net lifetime earnings more than women over their careers, and “few of those studying



Julia Buckingham

creative arts will gain financially from their degrees at all”.

Universities minister Michelle Donelan said: “This research underlines that our university sector is world-leading by setting out the impact higher education can have on someone’s life.

“When you add the unquantifiable experiences and friendships that come with that, it is no surprise our universities attract students from all over the world.

“However, that prestige is built on quality and my role is to work with the regulator to safeguard that, while ensuring students and the taxpayer are getting the value they would expect for their investment.”

In his response to the IFS study, Alistair Jarvis, chief executive of Universities UK (UUK), pointed out that “graduates, including those who go on to work in sectors where salaries are relatively low, make vital contributions to the wider economy and to society.

“We particularly welcome government reflecting that the benefits of a degree stretch far beyond salary outcomes. UUK recently published recommendations for a new way of defining and measuring the ‘value’ of a degree to help universities to show openly and consistently how they make a difference. We are looking forward to working with

government to further explore this new proposed approach.”

His words echo those of UUK president Prof Julia Buckingham who, earlier in February, delivered a passionate defence of higher education in a speech which attacked government measurements of the sector based on graduate incomes.

She called upon other vice-chancellors to “make the case to government that we need to look beyond an individual’s P60 and think about the total package which is enriching their life and those of the people and community around them”.

Drawing upon results of a 2019 Savanta ComRes poll commissioned by Universities UK (UUK), its president said: “Policymakers and politicians have got it wrong when it comes to understanding what motivates today’s students and graduates.”

According to the survey, only a third of students and recent graduates surveyed said they decided to go to university to get a higher salary than they otherwise would have had, with 84% agreeing that future salary was not the only factor they considered when applying.

WHAT I'M READING

Leaders in HE tell us what's on their bedside table
This month: Dr Kavita Powley of City, University of London

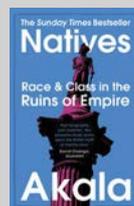


Dr Kavita Powley is equality, diversity & inclusion programme manager at City, University of London and runs the *Diversify Your Mind Book Club*, “a safe space where staff are invited to talk about books which encourage them to think about race, equality and inclusivity”.



The Good Immigrant by Nikesh Shukla

A series of short stories by diverse authors who candidly share snippets of their race-related real-life experiences. It made me cry both happy and sad tears as so many of the stories are told wittily, while the honest, bleak reality of racism resonated too much.



Natives by Akala

This reads a bit like a biographical and historical text, busting myths on the notion of Britain being meritocratic. Akala is an inspirational and poetic storyteller, but *Natives* is a hard-hitting book that is not for the faint-hearted.



Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race by Reni Eddo-Lodge

The author perfectly depicts the way some people completely shut down when people of colour talk about race. I was angered from the realisation of how little I was taught throughout my schooling about race. I think this book is exceptionally educational and provocative. We could all learn something from it.