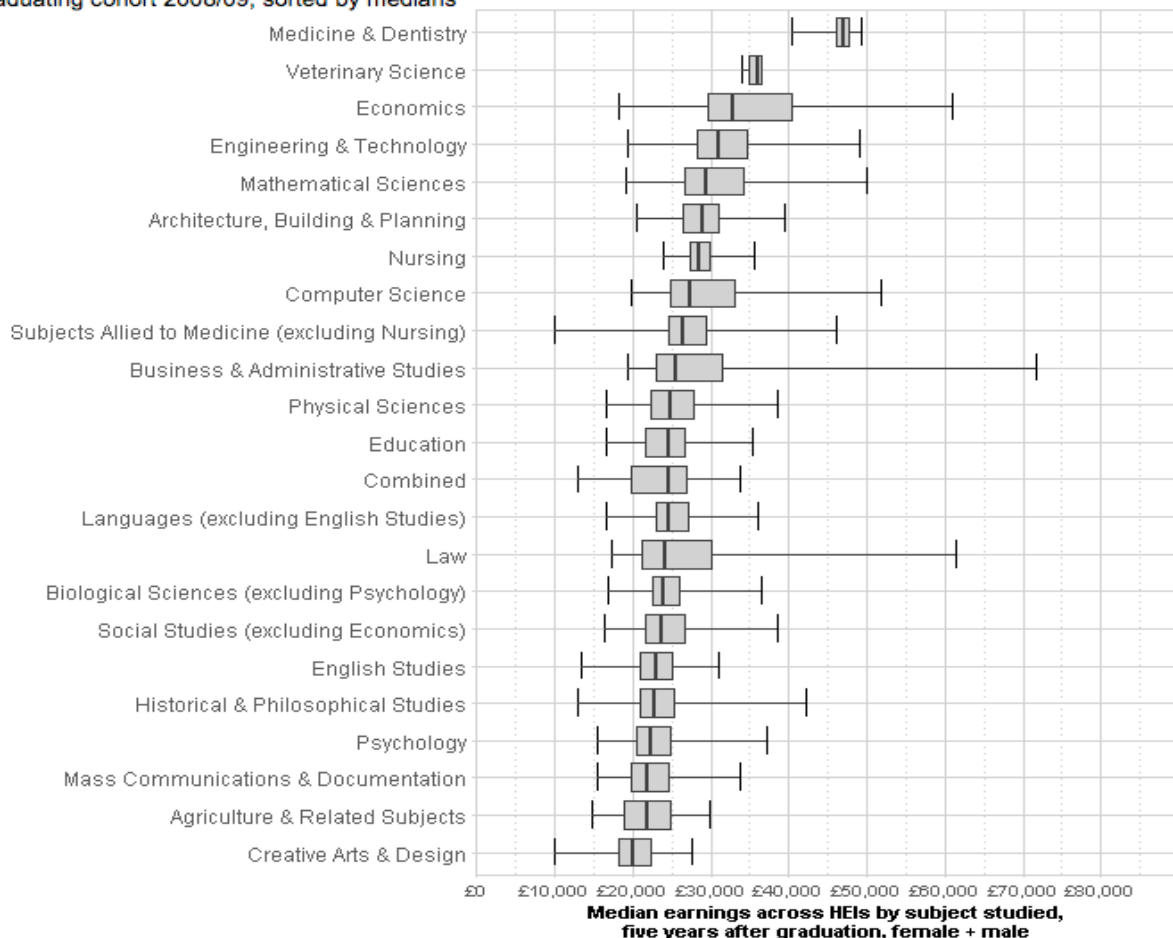


Briefing on Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data

On 13 June 2017, **the UK Government released statistics** matching subjects that students have studied with the employment outcomes related to these subjects five years after graduation. This 'experimental' dataset is intended to complement the DLHE data that currently forms an essential part of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). For academic and professional staff working in HE institutions, in not just England but all other parts of the UK, it is crucial to understand how the LEO data encourages institutions to prioritise subjects that add economic value over those that do not. Some institutions may even consider closing those subjects that do not contribute to employability metrics in the near future, in anticipation of future TEF exercises.

**Distribution of median annualised earnings across HEIs for each subject area five years after graduation (minimum, lower quartile, median, upper quartile, maximum).
Graduating cohort 2008/09, sorted by medians**



Source: Department for Education, Employment and earnings outcomes of higher education graduates by subject and institution: experimental statistics using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data

As can be seen from the graph of median graduate earnings based on subject studied, Creative Arts and Design are at the bottom of the table, barely reaching the **national average for full-time employees of £28,028**. Humanities subjects vary in terms of graduate earnings, with education and languages sitting in the middle of the scale alongside the physical and biological sciences. Based on the highest earnings of graduates studying particular subjects, economics and business studies can help students achieve the highest incomes alongside law, while at the top of the scale, medicine and dentistry far outstrips all other subjects in terms of earnings after graduation, with the lowest incomes in those categories being higher than the median graduate incomes of all other subjects.

The LEO data also reveals that prior attainment, which is to say GCSE and A Level results before going to university, is a significant factor in graduate earnings attainment. Gender and ethnicity, particularly when combined, also have a significant effect on graduate earnings. **According to WonkHE**, 'the absolute gender pay gap and pay gaps for several ethnic minorities, do not build up over time, but appear instantly when graduates enter the labour market, again regardless of subject studied. These gender and racial pay gaps also get worse the further into their careers that graduates embark. The pay gaps between white men and non-white women are particularly striking.' LEO data shows the reality of structural inequality, in particular in terms of class, gender and ethnicity, rather than the effect of 'choice' and equality of opportunity.

As it focuses on economic value over social or subjective value, the LEO data is subject to misuse by both a government keen to push marketisation further through the sector and by vice-chancellors desperate to gain advantage before new providers fully appear to disrupt the status quo. **Andrew McGettigan has argued** that this kind of data allows higher education to be conceptualised as 'variable human capital investment', which is to say as a private investment by individuals in future economic prosperity and an arms length government system for the production of skilled labour to meet the needs of the wider economy. Individuals and institutions are rewarded or punished according to how wisely they invest; education is reduced to cost-benefit analysis. For UCU, the immediate danger is that VCs will anticipate this data being used in future TEFs, and close courses that do not lead to high graduate earning scores.

Branches and local associations are encouraged to keep an eye on any attempts to use LEO data to propose changes to subject or course provision. Please can you send in any information to Rob Copeland, UCU policy officer at **rcopeland@ucu.org.uk**

UCU nationally and locally will continue to put forward progressive arguments for the social value of all higher education subjects, and higher education as a whole, which is not just an individual investment for private gain. Throughout the history of modern universities, from Humboldt's University of Berlin to the Open University in the UK, higher education has been supported by the government as a public good that brings economic and social benefits for the whole of society, not just for individuals. It is also important that our young people be able to follow their dreams without just thinking of the bottom line.