



HISTORY & POLICY

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Why go to University? History shows higher education makes graduates richer, though not always wealthier

Ten years after the Dearing Report, which paved the way for tuition fees, a new History & Policy paper explores how funding structures have affected past generations of students, and challenges the current ‘market place’ approach to higher education policy.

In *Going to University: funding, costs and benefits*, published on the History & Policy website today, Professor Carol Dyhouse of the University of Sussex demonstrates that the long-term benefits of higher education to the individual and the economy take time to materialise, making them hard to factor into the kind of cost-benefit analyses promoted in current policy debates.

As the ‘value’ debate continues, Professor Dyhouse shows that students have always gained different advantages from their degrees depending on their gender and background. Since they were first admitted to universities in the late 19th century, women have benefited less in straight economic terms from their degrees than men. Recent research shows this is still the case today; in the past ten years, the proportion of female graduates in low-level jobs has more than doubled, while men from lower socio-economic backgrounds continue to gain most financial benefit from their degrees.

Professor Dyhouse traces the history of university funding from grants to top-up fees. She shows how the university experience has changed over the past century; one hundred years ago the ‘typical’ student was a full-time male undergraduate, now female part-time students are more representative.

Professor Dyhouse said;

“Before the First World War, 2 per cent of 18 years olds went to university, now the government wants 50 per cent to experience higher education. The continuing debate about funding and widening participation would benefit from being informed by the experiences of past students. History shows there can be no single measure of the ‘value’ of university education, despite the recent tendency to focus exclusively on graduates’ earnings. The experiences of students over the last 70 years demonstrate clear variations in the financial benefits according to students’ gender and class, but all shared an appreciation of the less quantifiable benefits of higher education. The recent tendency in policy debates to quantify the ‘value added’ by a degree obscures these wider effects.”

Notes to editors:

1. You can read Carol Dyhouse’ History & Policy paper, *Going to University: funding, costs, benefits* in full on the History & Policy website. Carol Dyhouse is a Research Professor in History at the University of Sussex.
www.sussex.ac.uk
2. [History & Policy](#) is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history. It was founded by historians at the Universities of Cambridge and London and is based in the [Centre for Contemporary British History](#), at the [Institute of Historical Research](#), University of London. History & Policy is funded through a charitable grant from the Philanthropic Collaborative.
3. For further information or to request an interview with a historian, please contact: Mel Porter, External Relations Officer, History & Policy, tel: 020 7862 8768, email: mel.porter@sas.ac.uk.