



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: 27 June 2017

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 0001 BST WEDNESDAY 28 JUNE 2017

Subject choices have little impact on poorest pupils' job prospects

School leavers from poorer families are significantly more likely to be unemployed regardless of which subjects they have studied, research shows.

A study found that seven out of 10 S4 school leavers whose parents were in long-term unemployment or inactive were unemployed or inactive after three or four years.

Half of S4 school leavers with parents in routine manual jobs were also unemployed or inactive after three or four years.

By contrast, 30 per cent of their peers whose parents were in managerial or professional occupations were out of work.

Significant differences based on social background were also found among S5 and S6 leavers one to three years after leaving school.

University of Edinburgh researchers from the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN) drew upon data from the Scottish Longitudinal Study to analyse job outcomes for 1,600 school leavers.

The study by AQMeN tracked the job market success for young people who left school in S4 and S5/6, and found that subject choice had little effect on job prospects.

Researchers found that the only subject choices that improved job prospects were studying History and Business at S4 and Maths at S5/S6.

Professor Cristina Iannelli, AQMeN co-director, said: "Despite policy efforts to tackle issues of poverty and exclusion among young people in Scotland, disadvantage is still being passed from one generation to the next and remains a pressing issue.

"The limited impact that subject choices have may be because of the general nature of curricula and the lack of standardised certifications in Scotland. This leaves employers unclear about a school leaver's knowledge and skills, and school leavers more reliant upon family resources to help them gain a job."

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In contrast to official government statistics that show more than 90 per cent of school leavers are in education or employment, the study found about 30 per cent of S4 leavers and nine per cent of S5/S6 leavers were unemployed or inactive a few years after leaving school.

The paper, *Inequalities in school leavers' labour market outcomes: do school subject choices matter?*, was funded by the ESRC and is published in the Centre for Longitudinal Studies Working Paper Series.

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