

Poorer people still excluded from top professions

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Doctors and lawyers are more likely to come from wealthy backgrounds according to new research from the Department of Economics that indicates that the ‘social gap’ that prevents poorer people from entering the top professions is becoming more pronounced over time.

Using data on family income and IQ in childhood drawn from the National Child Development Survey (NCDS), which tracks a representative sample of the population born in 1958, and the British Cohort Study (BCS), which follows people born in 1970, the research shows that professions such as law and medicine attract better-off people, compared with other professions such as teaching and nursing,

although differences in IQ test scores for the former decreased over time.

On the other hand, those who became engineers and nurses - two professions with the lowest average family incomes across the groups and the lowest IQ scores for those born in 1958 - appear to buck this trend with the average IQ scores for both professions increasing over time.

Taking the occupation of all individuals in the NCDS and BCS who were in a profession in their early 30s and calculating the average monthly income of their families when they were 16 years old, the report shows that individuals from both groups who went on to become doctors and lawyers came from families with much higher incomes than the average. Scientists, dentists or vets, however came from families with a much lower income than those of future doctors.

[Doctors](#) who were born in 1958 came from families with incomes 42 per cent greater than the average compared with only 7 per cent more for scientists and other medical professions. For those born in 1970, this had increased to 63 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.

Those born in 1958 who went on to become accountants came from families with average incomes no different from the average but those born in 1970 who went on to become accountants came from families earning 40 per cent more a month than the average family.

Similarly, those born in 1958 who went on to become journalists came from families with below average incomes but, for those born in 1970, this difference had increased to over £600 a month above the average salary.

Out of all of the professions, lecturing, teaching and art are the only

professions that exhibit a small decrease in the family income between the 1958 group and the 1970 group. In the case of teachers, this may be due to the rewards offered in the past decade to attempt to increase the number of teachers in the labour market, including help with training costs and bursaries for living expenses while in training.

Out of journalists, bankers and accountants, who had the largest increases in family incomes compared with the average across the two cohorts, journalists fared marginally better in IQ scores over time but not to the extent the income difference suggests, while bankers and accountants saw their IQ scores decrease compared with the average. This effect was particularly pronounced for accountants.

This seems to suggest that while differences in incomes were rising for the top professions, differences in ability were declining, so that those entering some professions were increasingly from better-off families despite the fact that their ability was closer to but still above the average. These patterns are repeated when using maths and reading test scores instead of [IQ](#).

More significantly, this trend appears to have worsened in many of the professions for those born in 1970 compared with those born in 1958, with the gaps in family income between the top professions and the average increasing over time.

Speaking about the findings, the report's author Lindsey MacMillan said:

‘The findings suggest that there is a widening social gap in entry in entry to the top professions. Some of these are increasingly being filled by individuals who look less different to the average in terms of ability but more different to the average in terms of family income.’

[More information:](#) The report, Social Mobility and the Professions by

Lindsey Macmillan, a PhD student in the Department of Economics, can be downloaded from the [Centre for Market and Public Organisation website](#).

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