

University Challenge appearances are a better predictor of graduate earnings than official government data, research say

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Prospective students wanting to know which university will set them up for a well-paid career should watch University Challenge rather than read the government's own data, research says.

Dr. Katarzyna Zdunczyk and Professor Marco Mongiello, of the University of Surrey, analyzed the number of times teams had qualified

to appear in series of the BBC2 program and found this correlated well with the earnings of their graduates at age 29.

The official Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which rates universities either gold, silver or bronze according to a range of measures of their teaching, correlated less well with graduate earnings, the researchers told the British Academy of Management's annual conference in Birmingham today [Thursday 5 September].

The number of appearances is a rough indicator of the quality of the students taking part, since they have to pass an initial knowledge test to be among the 28 teams chosen each year out of over 100 universities wanting to appear on the program, hosted by Jeremy Paxman.

"We found that the TV program University Challenge was a better predictor than TEF," Professor Mongiello told the conference.

"There is a correlation between appearing on University Challenge and higher real earnings. Moreover, there is no correlation between TEF gold and silver and higher earnings."

The researchers say that though the TEF is supposed to measure how well a [university](#) teaches, and not specifically how much its graduates earn, parents and sixth-formers could easily assume it measures income.

"Parents and sixth-formers who are less used to sift through data and to apply critical analysis of information might be misled by the simplistic gold, silver and bronze marks awarded to universities," said Professor Mongiello.

Dr. Zdunczyk told the conference that "Parents and sixth-formers would be better off if they simply went for the universities that appear more often on University Challenge.

"By relying on superficial measures of [student](#) experience and outcomes, TEF misinforms potential students about what matters when choosing a higher education institution.

"Far from empowering students in making one of the most important decisions of their lives, it blurs the rules of the game even further by purporting to be a credible, state-assured framework."

Provided by British Academy of Management

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