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Gender pay gap persists

NEW female bachelor degree graduates were paid around 3 per cent less on average than their male counterparts, according to recent findings from the Australian Graduate Survey.

The research, conducted by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) into the salaries of Australian bachelor degree graduates in their first full-time employment, concluded that female graduates earn less on average than male graduates of a similar background and in similar employment.

GCA Senior Research Associate, David Carroll, explained that this finding did not suggest widespread discrimination against female graduates within particular firms, but that it pointed to an issue within the Australian labour market as a whole.

“This does not necessarily suggest that a graduate is paid less because she is female,” Mr Carroll said. “It does suggest, however, that female graduates do not always have the same access to highly-paid positions as male graduates within a given field of employment.”

The good news for graduates was that, in spite of the economic downturn, the median annual starting salary for bachelor degree graduates increased by \$3,000 between 2008 and 2009, growing from \$45,000 to \$48,000.

The three fields of education with the highest median starting salaries in 2009 were dentistry (\$70,000), optometry (\$64,500) and engineering (\$57,500), while the three fields with the lowest median starting salaries in 2009 were humanities and social sciences (each with \$42,000), art and design (\$37,300) and pharmacy (\$35,000).

Mr Carroll noted that graduates starting salaries were not always reflective of their lifelong earning potential.

“Graduates from some fields may be required to complete a period of supervised practical experience immediately after graduation, which may be relatively low paid,” Mr Carroll said.

Other findings in the survey found bachelor degree graduates with a disability did not earn a significantly different starting salary to those graduates in similar employment who did not identify themselves as having a disability.

Furthermore, graduates who had completed an honours degree earned around five per cent more than similar graduates who did not complete an honours degree, while graduates who completed a double degree qualification earned around 3 per cent more than otherwise similar graduates who had not undertaken a double degree.

Bachelor degree graduates employed in small and medium enterprises earned around eight per cent less on average than similar graduates employed in similar jobs in large firms.

Interestingly, for those weighing up the merits of tertiary education, the 2009 median annual starting salary for graduates aged under 25 of \$48,000, was \$9000 more than for individuals aged 20-24 in the wider Australian population. Moreover, while the median annual salary for these graduates grew by 6.7 per cent between 2008 and 2009, the median earnings of 20-24-year-olds in the wider population exhibited no growth.

The Australian Graduate Survey is an annual survey of graduates who complete a course at an Australian higher education institution. More than 122,000 graduates completed the 2009 survey.

