

# Are massive pay gaps justified?

Madam, - Prof Tom Begley (Opinion, September 19th) argues for very high salaries for certain academics because that it is what it takes to attract world class recruits. It would be a mistake to allow this viewpoint to take root in Ireland's university sector.

This is the same logic that has infected the boardrooms of corporate America for the past decade as senior executives paid themselves higher and higher salaries because "they were worth it" and because such payments were necessary to hire and retain "the best". There was never any test of this assertion because money was plentiful, regulation was poor and oversight almost non-existent.

That many of them were not worth it has become painfully clear to all of us over the past year as a cadre of these people has brought the world economy almost to its knees.

This "super-salary" infection has spread to Europe and Ireland and we have noticed the increasing gap in the salaries of those at the top compared to those further down the ladder. It finally crossed into the public service here with the recent O'Brien salary review which saw massive increases being awarded at the top but nothing lower down.

Prof Begley fails to understand that Irish universities are funded from the public purse - funding which has never been adequate. Academics have always been used to the fact that their salaries are below what they could earn in the world outside and academic life has never been solely about monetary reward. For the system to work, it is necessary for people to act far beyond the narrow confines of their job descriptions. The fact that they do so is what keeps our education system operating.

Our education system cannot afford these hugely expensive individuals - they would reduce the size of the pot for everyone else and diminish the range of activities and services we can offer. But even if we could afford them, there is little reason why we should seek to hire them.

There is no evidence that these people are worth the extra money and, if they are so focused on their earning capacity, their lack of a public service ethos does nothing to reassure that they will serve the education system better. - Yours, etc,

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