

Wage Gap in the Quantum Workforce: An Analysis of Educational Premiums through Extended Mincer Equations

Paula Andrea

paula.andrea@amlentia.org

Abstract

The emergence of quantum technologies has created a highly specialized workforce characterized by substantial human capital investments and access to extremely expensive equipment. This paper analyzes wage determination in the quantum sector through extensions of the traditional Mincer earnings equation, incorporating sector-specific factors such as technological capital access, organizational scale requirements, and credential signaling in cutting-edge fields. We examine how traditional human capital models must be adapted to account for the unique characteristics of quantum professionals, including the critical role of employer size and infrastructure. Furthermore, we investigate the gender wage gap in this emerging sector, considering how institutional barriers and potential discrimination in large organizations and government entities may create differential returns to education and experience for women. Our theoretical framework suggests that the quantum workforce exhibits earnings patterns that deviate substantially from traditional labor markets, with implications for educational policy and workplace equity. The analysis reveals that standard Mincer equations underestimate returns to specialized quantum education while failing to capture the role of organizational gatekeeping in wage determination.

Keywords: Quantum workforce, Wage gap, Mincer equation, Human capital, Gender discrimination

JEL Classification: J24, J31, J71, O33

1 Introduction

The quantum revolution represents one of the most significant technological shifts of the twenty-first century, with implications extending far beyond physics laboratories into

computing, cryptography, sensing, and communications (de Jong, 2022; Quantum Technology and Application Consortium – QUTAC, 2021). This transformation has generated a new category of highly specialized workers whose educational trajectories, skill requirements, and workplace environments differ markedly from traditional technology sectors. Unlike conventional IT professionals, quantum workforce members require deep theoretical knowledge in quantum mechanics, advanced mathematics, and experimental physics, combined with practical skills in operating sophisticated equipment worth millions of dollars per unit (Takeori et al., 2024).

The economic analysis of this emerging labor market presents unique challenges for traditional human capital theory. The classical Mincer earnings equation has served as the foundational framework for understanding how education and experience translate into wages. However, the quantum sector exhibits characteristics that strain the assumptions underlying this model. First, the extreme specialization required means that educational investments are highly specific and difficult to transfer across sectors. Second, access to quantum technologies is inherently tied to employment in large organizations or government facilities, creating a distinct form of capital complementarity not captured in standard models (Mudhol, 2024). Third, the nascent nature of the field means that traditional measures of experience may not adequately reflect productivity differences.

Moreover, the gender composition of the quantum workforce raises critical questions about equity and access in cutting-edge technology sectors. Despite efforts to increase female participation in STEM fields, physics and related quantum sciences remain heavily male-dominated (Wolbring, 2022). The concentration of quantum work in large corporations and government laboratories, where institutional biases may persist, creates additional concerns about differential treatment and wage gaps that extend beyond educational differences. Understanding whether and how gender affects earnings in this sector requires careful consideration of both human capital factors and potential discrimination.

This paper develops an extended Mincer framework specifically designed to analyze wage determination in the quantum workforce. We identify key modifications necessary to capture the unique features of this labor market, including the role of technological capital access, credential signaling in an emerging field, and the organizational scale requirement inherent in quantum work. Our theoretical model incorporates these factors while maintaining the tractability that has made the Mincer equation so influential in labor economics.

We then apply this framework to examine the gender wage gap in the quantum sector, considering how women may face differential returns to education and experience in this highly specialized field. The analysis explores mechanisms through which discrimination could operate in large organizational settings, including statistical discrimination

based on perceived commitment, implicit bias in technical evaluation, and exclusion from informal networks that facilitate career advancement. By connecting these mechanisms to observable wage differences, we provide a foundation for empirical investigation and policy intervention.

The contribution of this paper is threefold. First, we advance human capital theory by developing modifications to the Mincer equation that account for sector-specific capital complementarities and organizational requirements. Second, we provide a theoretical framework for understanding how emerging technology sectors may generate or perpetuate wage gaps through mechanisms distinct from traditional labor markets (United Nations, 2018; Wheatley Research Consultancy, 2024). Third, we identify specific policy levers that could address equity concerns in the quantum workforce while recognizing the unique constraints imposed by the technological requirements of the field.

2 Theoretical Framework: The Standard Mincer Equation and Its Limitations

The Mincer earnings equation represents one of the most widely applied models in labor economics, providing a parsimonious framework for understanding how individual characteristics translate into market wages. In its standard form, the log of earnings is expressed as a function of years of schooling and work experience:

$$\ln(w_i) = \alpha + \beta_1 S_i + \beta_2 Exp_i + \beta_3 Exp_i^2 + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where w_i represents earnings for individual i , S_i denotes years of schooling, Exp_i captures labor market experience, and ε_i is an error term. The quadratic specification for experience allows for diminishing returns as workers age, capturing the life-cycle earnings profile documented across numerous contexts.

The coefficient β_1 is typically interpreted as the return to an additional year of education, representing both productivity gains from human capital accumulation and signaling effects that allow employers to identify high-ability workers. The experience terms capture learning-by-doing and the accumulation of sector-specific skills, with $\beta_2 > 0$ and $\beta_3 < 0$ generating the characteristic concave earnings profile over the working life.

This framework rests on several implicit assumptions that become problematic when applied to the quantum workforce. First, the model treats education as a homogeneous input, where a year of schooling in any field contributes equally to earnings potential. This assumption fails to capture the extreme specialization required for quantum work, where graduate training in physics or related fields represents a qualitatively different investment

than general higher education (Cukier, 2019). The option value of education, which allows workers to switch sectors if opportunities arise, is severely limited for quantum specialists whose skills are highly specific.

Second, the standard Mincer equation implicitly assumes that human capital alone determines productivity, with physical capital playing at most a complementary role that affects all workers similarly. However, quantum professionals cannot be productive without access to quantum computers, dilution refrigerators, trapped ion systems, or other specialized equipment (Ajagekar and You, 2019; Morstyn and Wang, 2024). The value of their human capital is fundamentally contingent on employment in organizations with the financial capacity to provide these tools. This creates a form of capital complementarity where the return to education depends critically on securing positions in large firms or government laboratories.

Third, experience in the traditional sense may not adequately capture productivity growth in the quantum sector. Because quantum technologies are evolving rapidly, experience with first-generation systems may have limited value as new architectures emerge. Moreover, the scarcity of quantum systems means that many trained professionals cannot accumulate hands-on experience, creating a distinction between formal qualifications and practical expertise that the standard experience variable cannot capture.

Fourth, the model does not account for organizational scale effects or entry barriers that may be particularly relevant in the quantum sector. Employment in this field requires not just individual qualifications but access to organizations with substantial resources. This creates a selection mechanism where wage determination depends partly on factors external to individual human capital, such as geographic location near quantum facilities or network connections to hiring managers in major laboratories.

These limitations suggest that applying the standard Mincer equation to the quantum workforce would systematically mismeasure the relationship between education, experience, and earnings. The estimated return to schooling would conflate pure productivity effects with the access premium associated with entering a capital-intensive sector. Experience coefficients would mix genuine learning effects with cohort differences in training and technology exposure. Gender wage gaps would be difficult to interpret because the model lacks mechanisms for capturing how discrimination might operate differently in large organizational settings with substantial discretion in technical evaluation.

Addressing these limitations requires extending the Mincer framework in ways that preserve its analytical tractability while incorporating the distinctive features of quantum labor markets. The following section develops such an extension, introducing variables and functional forms that capture technological capital access, credential specificity, and organizational scale requirements.

3 Extended Mincer Model for the Quantum Workforce

To address the limitations identified above, we propose an extended Mincer equation specifically designed for the quantum workforce. This extension introduces three key modifications: a distinction between general and quantum-specific education, an explicit measure of technological capital access, and an organizational scale variable capturing employment in major quantum facilities.

The extended model takes the form:

$$\ln(w_i) = \alpha + \beta_1 S_{gen,i} + \beta_2 S_{q,i} + \beta_3 Exp_i + \beta_4 Exp_i^2 + \beta_5 Tech_i + \beta_6 Org_i + \beta_7 (S_{q,i} \times Tech_i) + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where $S_{gen,i}$ represents years of general education (undergraduate level), $S_{q,i}$ denotes years of quantum-specific education (typically graduate training), $Tech_i$ is an indicator for access to advanced quantum equipment, and Org_i captures employment in a major quantum research organization or large technology firm. The interaction term ($S_{q,i} \times Tech_i$) allows the return to quantum education to vary with equipment access.

The decomposition of schooling into general and quantum-specific components recognizes that these investments have different opportunity costs and returns. General education provides broad skills and maintains labor market flexibility, while quantum-specific training increases specialization at the cost of reduced transferability. We expect $\beta_1 < \beta_2$ because quantum-specific education commands a premium in this sector, but this relationship might reverse in external labor markets where such specialized knowledge has limited application.

The technological capital variable $Tech_i$ captures whether an individual has regular access to quantum systems necessary for productive work. In contrast to traditional capital measures that might vary continuously, quantum technology access is more appropriately modeled as discrete because meaningful quantum computing or sensing requires complete systems rather than partial access (Borysiuk and Michuta, 2025). Workers with $Tech_i = 1$ can apply their training to cutting-edge problems, accumulate relevant experience, and contribute to their organizations' quantum initiatives. Those with $Tech_i = 0$ may possess equivalent education but cannot fully utilize their quantum knowledge, leading to wage penalties or exit from the sector.

The organizational scale variable Org_i reflects that quantum work is concentrated in large corporations, national laboratories, and well-funded research institutions. This variable captures several effects beyond simple technological access. Large organizations

may pay efficiency wages to retain scarce quantum talent, reducing turnover costs. They may also offer better career advancement opportunities as internal quantum projects expand. However, these same organizations may exhibit greater institutional inertia in addressing workplace biases, a point we return to in examining gender gaps.

The interaction term between quantum education and technology access represents a critical innovation in our framework. This term allows us to model the fundamental complementarity between specialized human capital and physical capital in the quantum sector. An additional year of quantum training generates higher returns for workers with equipment access because they can apply their knowledge directly. For workers without such access, quantum education may function primarily as a signal of ability rather than a directly productive input, reducing its pecuniary return.

To see the implications of this model, consider the marginal return to quantum education:

$$\frac{\partial \ln(w_i)}{\partial S_{q,i}} = \beta_2 + \beta_7 Tech_i \quad (3)$$

This shows that the return to quantum-specific education depends on technological access. For workers employed in organizations with quantum equipment, the return is $\beta_2 + \beta_7$. For those without such access, the return falls to β_2 alone. If β_7 is substantial, this creates a bifurcated labor market where equally educated quantum professionals earn significantly different wages depending on their organizational position.

The experience profile in this extended model retains the traditional quadratic form, but its interpretation differs. In the quantum context, experience may capture not just learning-by-doing but also vintage effects as different cohorts trained on different generations of quantum technology. Early-career workers who trained on more recent quantum architectures may be more productive than experienced workers whose knowledge reflects older paradigms, potentially flattening the experience-earnings profile relative to traditional sectors.

This framework also accommodates sector-specific shocks to the return to education. As quantum technologies mature and become more widely accessible, we might expect β_7 to decline as the premium for equipment access diminishes. Conversely, major breakthroughs that require new forms of expertise could increase β_2 as quantum-specific human capital becomes more valuable. The model thus provides a structure for analyzing how technological change affects wage determination in this emerging sector.

An important feature of this extended model is that it generates predictions about sorting and selection into the quantum workforce. Individuals with high levels of quantum-specific training will seek employment in organizations where $Tech_i = 1$ to maximize their returns. This creates competition for positions in major quantum facilities, potentially

leading to queuing and credential inflation as workers invest in additional degrees to distinguish themselves. Organizations with quantum equipment, meanwhile, face a discrete choice in their compensation strategy: they must pay enough to attract workers with quantum training or forgo developing quantum capabilities entirely.

4 Gender Wage Gap in the Quantum Sector

Having established an extended Mincer framework for the quantum workforce, we now examine how gender affects wage determination in this sector. The gender wage gap in emerging technology fields reflects both differential human capital accumulation and potential discrimination, with the relative importance of these factors depending on specific sectoral characteristics (Kuban State Agrarian University et al., 2025; Yolusever, 2025).

To incorporate gender into our analysis, we augment the extended Mincer equation with a female indicator variable and interactions:

$$\ln(w_i) = \alpha + \beta_1 S_{gen,i} + \beta_2 S_{q,i} + \beta_3 Exp_i + \beta_4 Exp_i^2 + \beta_5 Tech_i + \beta_6 Org_i \quad (4)$$

$$+ \beta_7 (S_{q,i} \times Tech_i) + \gamma_1 Female_i + \gamma_2 (Female_i \times S_{q,i}) + \gamma_3 (Female_i \times Org_i) + \varepsilon_i \quad (5)$$

The coefficient γ_1 captures the baseline gender wage gap after controlling for education, experience, and organizational factors. A negative value indicates that women earn less than observably similar men, suggesting discrimination or unobserved factors correlated with gender. The interaction $(Female_i \times S_{q,i})$ allows the return to quantum-specific education to differ by gender, testing whether women receive lower payoffs from specialized training. The term $(Female_i \times Org_i)$ examines whether the large organizational premium documented earlier varies by gender, potentially indicating differential treatment in major quantum facilities.

Several mechanisms could generate gender wage gaps in the quantum workforce beyond simple taste-based discrimination. First, statistical discrimination may lead employers to underestimate women's commitment to quantum careers given the substantial investment required and the perception that women face greater work-family conflicts. Because quantum positions in major organizations are scarce and training investments are high, employers may prefer candidates they perceive as more likely to remain in the field long-term. If employers hold biased beliefs about gender differences in career commitment, this manifests as lower wages or reduced hiring of women even when actual commitment is identical.

Second, the technical nature of quantum work provides substantial scope for subjective

evaluation that may incorporate implicit bias. Unlike fields with objective performance metrics, quantum research often involves assessing the potential of exploratory work, the quality of experimental design, and the promise of theoretical approaches. These judgments are inherently subjective and may be influenced by gender stereotypes about technical competence. In large organizations where evaluation processes involve multiple layers of management, such biases can accumulate, affecting both hiring and promotion decisions.

Third, access to quantum equipment creates an additional dimension along which discrimination can operate. If managers allocate machine time and access to premium quantum systems in ways that reflect gender bias, women may be disadvantaged even when formally employed in quantum positions. Reduced access to the best equipment would lower productivity and limit the ability to produce high-impact results, justifying lower wages in a superficially meritocratic system. The parameter γ_3 in our model captures such effects by allowing the organizational premium to vary by gender.

Fourth, the concentration of quantum work in large organizations may actually exacerbate rather than ameliorate gender gaps. While large firms often have formal equal opportunity policies, they also exhibit greater wage dispersion and allow more managerial discretion in compensation decisions. The quantum sector's newness means that compensation norms are still being established, potentially giving managers more flexibility to underpay women relative to comparable men. Moreover, the scarcity of quantum positions reduces women's outside options, limiting their ability to contest discriminatory offers.

The extended Mincer framework allows us to distinguish between different sources of gender wage gaps. If $\gamma_1 < 0$ but $\gamma_2 = \gamma_3 = 0$, the gap is a fixed effect independent of quantum-specific human capital or organizational setting, suggesting either taste-based discrimination or unobserved productivity differences. If $\gamma_2 < 0$, women receive lower returns to quantum education, indicating that specialization does not translate into wages as effectively for women, perhaps because of statistical discrimination or biased evaluation of technical work. If $\gamma_3 < 0$, women benefit less from employment in major quantum organizations, suggesting that workplace dynamics or discrimination are particularly severe in large institutional settings.

An important consideration is how the scarcity of quantum positions affects women's labor market outcomes. Because quantum work requires employment in organizations with expensive equipment, there are fewer positions available than in sectors where capital requirements are lower. This creates a tournament for scarce jobs where even small biases in evaluation can have large effects on gender representation and wages. If hiring managers have a slight preference for male candidates when qualifications are similar, women must

have substantially higher credentials to secure quantum positions, leading to credential inflation for women without proportional wage increases.

The policy implications of these different mechanisms vary substantially. If the primary issue is statistical discrimination based on perceived commitment, policies that facilitate work-life balance and provide clear career paths might reduce gaps by changing employer beliefs. If the problem is biased technical evaluation, blind review processes for research quality and objective metrics for equipment time allocation could help. If discrimination is concentrated in large organizations, antidiscrimination enforcement might be more effective than educational interventions. Our framework provides a structure for distinguishing these cases empirically by examining how gender wage gaps vary across different dimensions of the quantum workforce.

5 Human Capital Accumulation and Selection into the Quantum Sector

The decision to invest in quantum-specific human capital is a dynamic choice that depends on expected returns, which in turn depend on the likelihood of securing employment with technology access. This creates a selection problem where observed wages reflect both the causal effect of quantum training and the characteristics of individuals who choose this career path (Dachs, 2017; Katz et al., 2021). Understanding this selection process is crucial for interpreting wage gaps and designing policies to promote sector growth and equity.

Consider an individual deciding whether to pursue quantum-specific education beyond a general undergraduate degree. The expected return to this investment is given by the probability of securing a quantum position times the wage premium for quantum workers, minus the opportunity cost of additional education and the reduced flexibility from specialization. Formally:

$$E[Return_i] = P(Org_i = 1) \times (\beta_2 + \beta_7) \times S_{q,i} - Cost_i - FlexibilityLoss_i \quad (6)$$

where $P(Org_i = 1)$ is the probability of employment in a major quantum facility, $Cost_i$ includes tuition and foregone earnings during graduate study, and $FlexibilityLoss_i$ captures the reduced value of quantum skills in alternative sectors.

This formulation reveals that the decision to pursue quantum training depends critically on access to organizations with quantum equipment. As the quantum sector expands and more firms acquire quantum systems, $P(Org_i = 1)$ increases, raising expected returns and encouraging more individuals to specialize. However, if equipment remains concen-

trated in a few organizations, the sector could face a training bottleneck where talented individuals avoid quantum careers despite high wages because employment opportunities are too scarce and uncertain.

Gender differences in this selection process could arise through multiple channels. If women face discrimination in hiring at quantum organizations, their subjective probability $P(Org_i = 1)$ is lower than for men with identical qualifications, reducing expected returns to quantum education. Rational women would then be less likely to pursue quantum training, leading to lower female representation in the field. This creates a feedback loop where low female representation reinforces stereotypes and biases, further reducing women's probability of employment and discouraging future investment.

Alternatively, women might face higher psychological costs of entering male-dominated fields, effectively increasing $Cost_i$ beyond the purely financial components. These costs could include social isolation, lack of mentorship, or the cognitive burden of being evaluated against stereotypes. If these costs are substantial, women might rationally avoid quantum careers even when the pecuniary returns are attractive, leading to gender sorting across technical fields.

The flexibility loss component may also vary by gender if women anticipate career interruptions or value geographic flexibility more highly. Quantum-specific skills are not readily transferable to other sectors, meaning that individuals who exit the field cannot easily recoup their educational investment. If women expect more variable career paths, they might rationally prefer more flexible educational investments even when quantum wages are high, contributing to gender differences in sectoral choice.

These selection mechanisms have important implications for observed wage gaps. If women who enter the quantum workforce have higher average ability than men because they needed stronger qualifications to overcome hiring bias, the raw gender wage gap understates the true level of discrimination. Conversely, if women with stronger preferences for quantum work self-select into the field despite lower returns, they might accept lower wages than men with identical qualifications, leading to wage gaps that reflect differential outside options rather than within-sector discrimination.

The extended Mincer framework can partially address these selection issues by including measures of pre-quantum-education ability, such as undergraduate grades or standardized test scores in physics and mathematics. If these measures are uncorrelated with gender conditional on quantum education level, it suggests that selection is not driving observed wage gaps. However, if women in the quantum workforce have higher average ability measures than men, it indicates that women face higher entry barriers and that the true causal effect of gender on wages is more negative than the observed gap.

Another approach to understanding selection is to examine wage differences at career

entry versus later stages. If discrimination primarily affects hiring, we might observe small or no gender wage gaps among newly hired quantum professionals but growing gaps as careers progress and discretionary evaluation becomes more important. Conversely, if women face higher barriers to entry but are treated similarly once employed, gaps might be largest at career start and decline with experience as women prove their competence. Our framework can accommodate these dynamics by allowing all coefficients to vary with experience quartiles or career stages.

6 Organizational Dynamics and Institutional Barriers

The concentration of quantum work in large organizations introduces institutional factors that shape wage determination beyond individual human capital (Raja and Christiaensen, 2017). Major technology firms and government laboratories operate with formal compensation structures, internal labor markets, and bureaucratic processes that can both mitigate and perpetuate wage gaps. Understanding these organizational dynamics is essential for developing effective policy interventions.

Large organizations typically employ formal job evaluation systems that assign positions to pay grades based on ostensibly objective criteria such as educational requirements, technical complexity, and supervisory responsibilities. In principle, such systems should reduce wage discrimination by limiting managerial discretion and ensuring equal pay for equal work. However, several features of these systems can generate or perpetuate gender gaps in the quantum sector.

First, job classification in emerging fields like quantum technology involves substantial subjectivity because standard classification schemes were developed for traditional occupations. Quantum positions may be slotted into existing categories that do not fully capture their unique requirements, creating room for bias in the initial classification process. If quantum roles where women are more prevalent are systematically classified at lower grades than comparable positions dominated by men, this creates wage gaps that appear meritocratic within the organizational structure but reflect discriminatory sorting.

Second, promotion and advancement in large organizations often depend on informal factors such as visibility, networking, and advocacy by senior managers. In male-dominated technical fields, women may face disadvantages in these informal processes even when they meet formal promotion criteria. If women have less access to mentorship, are excluded from informal information networks, or face implicit bias in performance evaluations, they will advance more slowly through organizational hierarchies, manifesting as lower wages for women with equivalent experience and education.

Third, the scarcity and cost of quantum equipment create competition for resources within organizations. Managers allocate machine time, research budgets, and support staff across projects, with these allocation decisions affecting individual productivity and career trajectories. If allocation decisions reflect gender bias, whether conscious or unconscious, women may be disadvantaged in access to resources that enable career-advancing work. Over time, this produces productivity differences that appear to justify wage gaps while actually reflecting differential access to organizational resources.

Fourth, large organizations may exhibit segregation across quantum subspecialties in ways that correlate with gender. For example, women might be overrepresented in quantum software development or theoretical work while being underrepresented in experimental physics roles that involve hands-on equipment operation. If experimental roles command higher wages due to equipment access and technical risk, this occupational segregation would generate wage gaps even without explicit discrimination in pay for identical positions.

Government laboratories present additional considerations due to their mission orientation and civil service employment structures. These organizations often have rigid pay scales that limit discretion in compensation, potentially reducing wage discrimination. However, they may also have slower adjustment processes, allowing wage gaps to persist longer than in competitive private sector markets. Moreover, security clearance requirements and location constraints may create additional barriers for women with family responsibilities or other commitments, affecting both employment likelihood and wage negotiation.

The extended Mincer framework can incorporate these organizational factors by including variables for organizational type, size, and subspecialty within quantum work. Comparing wage gaps across organizational contexts reveals whether discrimination is concentrated in particular institutional settings and helps identify effective policy levers. If gaps are larger in private firms than government labs, it suggests that formal civil service protections provide some benefit. If gaps are larger in experimental versus theoretical quantum roles, it points to issues with equipment access and technical evaluation.

An important policy question is whether organizational interventions can reduce wage gaps without sacrificing the efficiency of large-scale quantum research. Possible interventions include mandatory pay transparency, structured promotion criteria, objective metrics for resource allocation, and diversity requirements in hiring and advancement. However, such interventions may increase administrative burden and could potentially reduce organizational flexibility in responding to rapidly changing technological requirements. The optimal policy depends on the magnitude of discrimination, the costs of intervention, and whether less intrusive approaches like information provision or volun-

tary initiatives can achieve similar outcomes.

7 Discussion and Policy Implications

The extended Mincer framework developed in this paper provides several insights into wage determination in the quantum workforce and the potential for gender-based wage gaps in this emerging sector. By incorporating technological capital access, organizational scale requirements, and quantum-specific human capital, the model captures key features that distinguish quantum labor markets from traditional sectors and affect how education translates into earnings.

Our analysis suggests that standard Mincer equations substantially underestimate the returns to quantum-specific education because they cannot account for the complementarity between specialized human capital and access to quantum equipment. Workers with equivalent formal education may earn very different wages depending on whether they secure positions in organizations with quantum systems. This creates a bifurcated labor market where returns to education depend critically on organizational access, raising concerns about equity in career advancement and the efficiency of human capital investment.

The gender wage gap analysis reveals multiple mechanisms through which discrimination could operate in the quantum sector. Unlike traditional manufacturing or service sectors where discrimination primarily affects entry wages or promotions through clear hierarchical ladders, the quantum workforce faces unique challenges related to technical evaluation subjectivity, resource allocation for expensive equipment, and selection into a small number of high-stakes positions. These factors create multiple points where bias can enter the wage determination process, from initial hiring through project assignment, resource allocation, and advancement decisions.

The concentration of quantum work in large organizations has ambiguous effects on gender equity. On one hand, these organizations have formal equal opportunity policies, structured compensation systems, and greater public visibility that may constrain discriminatory behavior. On the other hand, their size and complexity create opportunities for bias to operate through informal channels such as mentorship networks, resource allocation, and subjective evaluation of technical work. Our framework suggests that the net effect depends on the relative strength of these countervailing forces, which may vary across organizations and could be influenced by policy interventions.

Several policy implications emerge from this analysis. First, educational policy should recognize that quantum training investments carry significant specialization risk given the concentration of employment opportunities. Support for quantum education should be

coupled with efforts to expand the number of organizations with quantum capabilities, ensuring that trained workers can find productive employment. This might involve subsidies for quantum equipment acquisition by mid-sized firms or universities, reducing the extent to which returns to quantum education depend on employment in a handful of major organizations.

Second, transparency in compensation and advancement criteria could reduce gender wage gaps by limiting the scope for discretionary discrimination. Requiring large organizations and government laboratories to report wages by gender, education level, and subspecialty would provide information about where gaps are largest and whether they reflect discrimination or differential sorting. Such transparency might also discipline organizational behavior by raising reputational costs of discrimination and empowering women to contest unfair treatment.

Third, objective metrics for evaluating quantum work could reduce the subjectivity that enables biased assessment. While not all quantum research can be evaluated by simple metrics, developing standards for experimental design quality, theoretical contributions, and technical execution could limit the extent to which implicit bias affects performance ratings and resource allocation. This requires involvement from technical experts to ensure that metrics capture genuine quality rather than rewarding conformity to existing paradigms.

Fourth, interventions to increase female representation in quantum education and employment may be justified even if current wage gaps are modest. The emerging nature of the quantum sector means that norms and practices are still being established, and early female representation could influence organizational culture in ways that prevent future discrimination. Moreover, role models and networks established now could reduce barriers for future generations of women, creating persistent benefits beyond immediate wage effects.

Fifth, policies must balance equity concerns with the technical requirements of quantum work. Mandates that ignore the legitimate need for specialized training, equipment access, or organizational scale could impede sector development. Effective policy must identify discrimination and barriers while respecting genuine productivity differences and the constraints imposed by expensive quantum technologies.

An important limitation of this analysis is that it remains primarily theoretical. While the extended Mincer framework provides a structure for understanding wage determination in the quantum workforce, empirical validation requires detailed data on individual wages, education, organizational characteristics, and equipment access. Such data are difficult to obtain because quantum work is concentrated in organizations with legitimate confidentiality concerns and because the sector is too new for large-scale longitudinal stud-

ies. Future research should prioritize data collection efforts that enable rigorous testing of the mechanisms identified here.

Another limitation is that our focus on wage gaps may understate the full extent of gender disparities in the quantum sector. If women face higher barriers to entry or are more likely to exit the field after investing in training, the selection of women we observe in quantum employment may not be representative. Analyzing participation rates, retention patterns, and career transitions would provide a more complete picture of gender equity in this emerging sector.

8 Conclusion

This paper has developed an extended Mincer framework for analyzing wage determination in the quantum workforce, with particular attention to gender wage gaps and the role of organizational factors in shaping earnings. By incorporating technological capital access, organizational scale requirements, and quantum-specific human capital, we capture key features that distinguish this emerging sector from traditional labor markets and affect how education and experience translate into wages.

Our theoretical analysis reveals that the quantum workforce exhibits earnings patterns that deviate substantially from predictions of standard human capital models. The extreme complementarity between specialized education and access to quantum equipment creates a bifurcated labor market where returns to training depend critically on organizational position. This generates unusual patterns of wage determination where equally educated workers earn very different amounts depending on employer characteristics, raising concerns about efficiency and equity in human capital investment.

The gender wage gap analysis identifies multiple mechanisms through which discrimination could operate in the quantum sector, from biased evaluation of technical work to differential allocation of equipment access and informal barriers to career advancement. The concentration of quantum work in large organizations creates both opportunities for formal equal opportunity policies and risks of persistent discrimination through informal channels. Understanding which mechanisms dominate in practice requires empirical investigation using the framework developed here.

Several policy implications emerge from this analysis, including the need for transparency in compensation, objective metrics for technical evaluation, support for quantum education coupled with expansion of employment opportunities, and careful attention to female representation in an emerging field where norms are still being established. These interventions must balance equity concerns with the legitimate technical requirements of quantum work, recognizing that effective policy requires understanding sector-specific

constraints.

The quantum revolution will reshape numerous industries over the coming decades, creating substantial demand for specialized workers and raising important questions about how gains from technological change are distributed. By developing tools to understand wage determination in this emerging sector, this paper contributes to broader discussions about technology, inequality, and the future of work. As quantum technologies mature and employment expands, the framework developed here can be empirically tested and refined, providing guidance for policy interventions that promote both innovation and equity in cutting-edge technology sectors.

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