

Bernhard Christoph, Heiko Quast & Dr. Heike Spangenberg

IAB & DZHW

Bernhard.Christoph@iab.de, quast@dzhw.eu, spangenberg@dzhw.eu

The long arm of the family. On the role of social background and parental preferences for students' reconsideration of educational decisions

Among the most important transitions in the educational pathways of (future) academics is the decision to enter a university (or comparable institution) after finishing secondary education. Moreover, while inequalities have been decreasing at the transition to higher secondary education, access to universities is still highly selective (Lörz & Schindler 2011; Blossfeld et al. 2015), making this transition particularly important for inequality structures.

In our paper, we focus on the determinants of the decision to enter tertiary education among a very specific subgroup: those that during their final year of school have reported to have no intention to enter tertiary education but planned to pursue a vocational education instead.

In our analyses, we are interested in two questions: first, whether reconsidering will increase or decrease inequalities in university access (i.e. is it rather students from privileged families or those from non-privileged backgrounds that reconsider their original decision). Second, we are interested in the role of parental preferences for tertiary education in the course of this process

Using data from the third wave of the DZHW's 2010 School Leavers Survey (Studienberechtigtenpanel), we can show that reconsidering one's original decision is – like other educational decisions – dependent on social background: Young people from privileged families are not only more likely to take up academic studies in the first place but, moreover, have a higher probability to later on correct an original decision against academic education.

Beyond that, we can demonstrate parental preferences for academic education to play a substantive role in this process of reconsideration. Since parental preferences are usually assumed to exert an influence mainly on earlier educational decisions (e.g. Hillmert & Jacob 2003; Becker 2017), to identify such an influence of parents' wishes even so late in their children's educational biographies could not necessarily be expected.

References

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