

## **Career effects of education: a life course perspective (PhD project 1 in CAREER)**

### **Aim**

To understand (a) how careers of workers with general and specific educational qualifications differ and (b) why and how these diverging career trajectories differ across different countries.

### **Theoretical background**

Technological changes and the automation of occupational tasks present societies with a challenge: Is it still sensible to provide students with occupation-specific (vocational) education? Or are students with general educational qualifications better equipped for the future, given that what is demanded in the labor market is under rapid change?

While a large literature has shown that graduates with vocational training have a comparatively smooth transition from school to work (Shavit and Müller 1998), it has focused on the early career. We do not know how and why labor market outcomes vary over the life course. In CAREER we take a career perspective to study how and why labor market returns to vocational and general education vary over the life cycle (Forster and Bol 2018; Hanushek et al. 2017). More specifically, in this project we will look at the role of labor market mobility.

The core proposition of the PhD-project is that vocational graduates have a late-career disadvantage because of their occupation-specific skills. Vocational graduates have more narrow employment possibilities and cannot be as mobile in the labor market as general graduates. This inflexibility becomes a problem for vocational graduates in their late-career, as they have more difficulties in getting reemployed.

Labor market mobility is also the dominant mechanism used to predict cross-national variation in career effects. Hanushek et al. (2017) argue that late-career penalties to vocational education are larger in countries where vocational education is highly occupation-specific (e.g., Germany, Switzerland) than in countries with school-based systems that offer broader vocational skills (e.g., Sweden, UK). The key argument, again, is that late-career mobility is more difficult when skills (or qualifications) are more specific, resulting in larger wage penalties and higher probability to end up unemployed.

While theoretically important, the hypothesized importance of labor market mobility in explaining career effects has not been tested empirically. In this project you will investigate these questions using rich panel data from different countries and quantitative methods. Your goal will uncover how careers of different workers evolve, and what role occupational mobility plays.

### **Research design**

CAREER is a comparative project, and studies six countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In this PhD-project you will use panel data from surveys and from the population registers in these six countries. You will analyze these data to investigate (a) how and why careers of workers with general and specific qualifications differ and (b) how these career patterns might be different across the countries under study.

### **Project**

This PhD position is part of an ERC project for which one other PhD-position is also recruited (see project 4). The other PhD-project will study employers, and gather data to investigate how they evaluate older workers. Besides the project initiator, a fourth member of the project will be a postdoctoral scholar who will investigate how labor markets are changing.

### **Project initiator**

Thijs Bol (UvA), to be hired co-promotor

**Location:** University of Amsterdam

**References**

Forster, Andrea G., and Thijs Bol. 2018. "Vocational Education and Employment over the Life Course Using a New Measure of Occupational Specificity." *Social Science Research* 70:176–97.

Hanushek, Eric A., Guido Schwerdt, Ludger Woessmann, and Lei Zhang. 2017. "General Education, Vocational Education, and Labor-Market Outcomes over the Lifecycle." *Journal of Human Resources* 52(1):48–87.

Shavit, Yossi, and Walter Müller, eds. 1998. *From School to Work: A Comparative Study of Educational Qualifications and Occupational Destinations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.