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School Dropout and Completion

International Comparative Studies
in Theory and Policy

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Chapter 1

School Dropout and Completion: An International Perspective

Stephen Lamb and Eifred Markussen

Introduction

In most OECD countries, graduation from secondary school is now viewed as the minimum level of educational attainment needed for successful participation of young people in further study and work. This is because in most nations, secondary education serves as the foundation for entry to university and other education and training opportunities as well as preparation for entry into the labour market. Over time, it has become more and more important in deciding how economic and other life benefits, such as good health and well-being, are distributed. Despite this, in some countries, the numbers of young people leaving school without completing a relevant upper secondary qualification can be quite large. Even in nations where the numbers appear small, this does not guarantee that education systems have met all of the challenges in adequately equipping every graduate with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to take advantage of the full range of education and labour market opportunities. When it comes to rates of school completion and promoting universal attainment of upper secondary qualifications, all school systems display patterns of success and failure, which are more or less marked. Every system has ‘failure’ – varying numbers of young people who fail to gain an upper secondary qualification – though the level of failure may be concealed or debated, depending on the measures that are used. The social patterns of dropout suggest that in all countries, the opportunities and benefits associated with successful completion are difficult to penetrate for ‘non-traditional’ users. Yet, some systems have been more successful than others in promoting high rates of completion and providing programs that accommodate the majority of young people. This book offers a systematic analysis of how different school systems work and the impact of differences in institutional and program arrangements on patterns of student dropout and completion.

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There has been ongoing interest across all nations in the issue of secondary school dropout and completion and part of the reason for this has to do with the consequences. While rates of school dropout and completion vary across western nations, one thing that does not vary much is the finding that, for individuals, not completing school and failing to gain equivalent education and training qualifications is associated with poorer labour market outcomes. Consistently, research in different countries shows that dropouts are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for longer, have lower earnings and over their life course accumulate less wealth (e.g., see Rumberger & Lamb, 2003; OECD, 2001; Barro, 1997; Shavit & Mueller, 1998). Dropouts also more often experience poorer physical and mental health, have higher rates of crime and less often engage in active citizenship (Owens, 2004; Rumberger, 1987). In addition to the costs for individuals, there are also social costs associated with increased welfare needs and reduced taxation revenue (Owens, 2004).

In response to these issues, governments have been seeking policies to increase rates of secondary school completion and reduce dropout. Addressing the problem of dropout, however, presents a major test for education and training systems. For any system, the challenge in encouraging more young people to remain at school is finding ways to deal with pupil diversity. In all countries, young people who leave school before obtaining an upper secondary qualification tend to come from disadvantaged social and racial backgrounds, they tend more often to have become disengaged from school, are less motivated scholastically and more often experience personal difficulties and behavioural issues that place them at risk. They also tend to have histories of school failure and low academic achievement during the compulsory years. In the past, many systems have not needed or attempted to provide for all young people in an inclusive way within the school system at upper secondary level. Encouraging more low achievers and other young people at risk of dropout to remain at school and complete an upper secondary qualification exerts great pressure on the flexibility of institutional arrangements and qualification structures.

Responses to these issues vary across nations, depending on the organisation and structure of upper secondary education. One type of response is to diversify the range of opportunities available at upper secondary level within the school sector in order to encourage young people to remain in school and graduate. This sort of approach, with a focus on accommodating young people within the school sector, involves what might be termed 'internal differentiation strategies', that is, strategies internal to school systems, which seek to reduce the problem of dropout by changing or expanding the sorts of opportunities available in post-compulsory programs and the requirements for entry and successful completion. Two broad types are evident:

1. Some countries have attempted to expand opportunities by offering alternative qualifications in the senior school years. This can be done in separate single-purpose schools as in China or Germany. However, even where students attend a single school type, different courses may be offered according to the students' ability or interest, such as in Australia or New Zealand. These courses may lead to different levels of qualification and therefore, grant access to different educational

and employment opportunities. Some European and other OECD countries have made serious efforts to encourage more students to remain in secondary school and to improve qualification rates by diversifying the sorts of programs and qualifications provided in the post-compulsory years. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, Finland, Sweden and Norway implemented a number of educational reforms focusing largely on expanding vocational education options as a means of encouraging students to participate in and complete upper secondary. All three nations saw growth in upper secondary graduation rates (OECD, 2001).

2. Other countries provide alternative options within the same qualification to address pupil diversity. Within a school type, the students may be directed towards different tracks leading to a similar qualification. Some countries offer upper secondary diplomas based on satisfactory achievement in a core of common subjects, a block of subjects specific to the chosen area of study and a range of elective subjects. The requirements for qualification can vary substantially across systems. Sweden and the United States offer credit-based models, in which each course provides a set number of points that may be accumulated over the course of the program towards high school graduation and the attainment of a high school diploma. Other systems, such as those in England and many jurisdictions in Australia, require students to successfully complete a set minimum number of subjects to qualify for a school certificate, even if the specific subjects can vary substantially across types and fields of study.

In terms of the different approaches to the provision of senior school programs and qualifications, there can be substantial variation within as well as across countries. Federated systems, such as those in the United States and Australia, can have different approaches, qualifications and completion requirements across jurisdictions. For example, the recent introduction of exit exams in California as a hurdle requirement to graduation sets this state apart from others in the United States. Similarly, in Australia, the state of Victoria provides an alternative senior school certificate to the mainstream diploma, while other states and territories do not.

School-based diversification strategies are not the only focus of efforts to respond to non-completion. Some countries provide alternative pathways to work and adult life for young people who are no longer at school and who left without gaining a qualification. This reflects more of a focus on 'external diversification strategies' to provide alternative opportunities for young people, particularly dropouts. These strategies can include extended opportunities for school graduation through recovery programs or study in alternative settings, provision of a breadth and depth of alternative qualifications and study opportunities through further education colleges, provision of work-based indentured training contracts such as apprenticeships, and alternative routes involving combinations of work, training and study.

It is possible for countries to employ both types of approaches – to encourage young people to remain in school and gain a qualification through the provision of more diversified senior school offerings and to strengthen the range of post-school pathways available to those who leave without at first gaining a qualification from

school. Such approaches are evident in several systems and reflect the continuing tension between effort to prevent school dropout and strategies to assist those who have already dropped out. One facet of this tension is the potential for successful alternative pathways outside of the school system to act to encourage larger numbers of young people to leave school before completing a qualification. This sort of counter-effect needs to be considered in assessing the value, impact and importance of alternative pathways.

Countries differ in the upper secondary school programs that they offer and how these are provided. The aim of this book is to compare and evaluate various approaches by evaluating their impact on rates of dropout and completion. It involves an examination of different approaches to provision and how well they work in delivering mass completion rates while maintaining high and even standards. Case studies of national systems will be used to highlight the different approaches including institutional arrangements and the various alternative secondary school programs and their outcomes. The evaluation will be based around several key questions: What are the main approaches? How do they work? For whom do they work? And, how successful are they in promoting high rates of completion and equivalent outcomes for all?

Defining and Measuring Completion and Dropout

Central to this book is a comparative analysis of school dropout and completion across nations. In some respects, this is a difficult and challenging task. The very terms present major issues when comparing national systems. For example, the term ‘dropout’ is used mainly in the United States and Canada to refer to young people who leave school without gaining a high school diploma. It is a term used rarely by the statistical agencies, education authorities and research centres of other countries. Other nations have similar concepts, such as ‘early school leaving’ and ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET), but these are measured differently. This also applies when looking at the notion of ‘school completion.’ This is referred to as ‘graduation’ in some contexts, while other systems tend to employ measures such as ‘retention to the final year’ and ‘obtaining an upper secondary certificate or equivalent.’ In some systems, such as in England and Scotland, there is no concept of school completion or graduation. After a young person reaches the end of compulsory schooling, usually at the age of 16, the level, duration, mode and content of learning vary widely and until recently, there has not been a standard or benchmark by which to judge whether an individual completes secondary education or not (Raffe, 2010).

Despite these differences, there is consensus around the need to measure educational productivity based on completion and there is shared understanding of some of the principal concepts, such as dropout or early school leaver. To illustrate this point, Table 1.1 shows how a dropout is defined by researchers from different countries who wrote case study chapters for this book and were asked to use

Table 1.1 Definitions of a dropout used by researchers in 13 different countries

Country	A dropout is defined as someone who
Australia	leaves school before Year 12 (the final year of secondary school) or begins Year 12 but leaves without obtaining an upper secondary qualification
Canada	has not successfully completed high school and is not enrolled in education or in a work study program
England	does not hold an upper secondary qualification and is no longer in education, employment or training
Finland	does not hold an upper secondary qualification and is no longer in education, employment or training
France	is no longer in school and did not reach the recognised standard of achievement in the final year of their academic or vocational study
Germany	leaves school without gaining any official upper secondary qualification or certificate
Iceland	by the age of 24 has not completed an upper secondary qualification
Norway	left upper secondary education before the final year or who remained to the end, but failed to fulfil the graduation requirements
Poland	has not completed an upper secondary qualification in the 'regular' or specified period
Scotland	does not hold an upper secondary qualification and is no longer in education, employment or training
Spain	enrols in the <i>baccalaureate</i> or in vocational training but does not complete it
Switzerland	as an 18- to 24-year-old has not successfully completed post-compulsory education and does not enter another type of training
USA	does not complete a high school diploma or equivalent credential

national data to reflect national circumstances and institutional arrangements. When looking at the table, it is quite clear that all of the definitions actually share a similar understanding of a dropout and that is of a person who is no longer at school and does not hold an upper secondary qualification. While there may be classificatory distinctions based on current activity at the time of being measured (whether being in further education, employment or training), there is a broadly comparable view on who a dropout is.

However, shared understandings tend to fall away when it comes to measuring how many dropouts there are. There are few common measures. While systems may have a similar view about what dropout is, they do not share a similar way of measuring it. Even within countries, there is sometimes little consensus on how to measure dropout and completion. In the United States, for example, different agencies and jurisdictions often use different definitions of dropout. There are three different measures that tend to be used: the event dropout rate, the status dropout rate and the cohort dropout rate (Laird et al., 2006). The event rate measures the percentage of a specified or given group (such as students of a particular age enrolled in high school) who drop out of school in a particular time period, such as a single year. The status dropout rate measures the percentage in a population or sub-population (such as 16- to 24-year-olds) who are not enrolled in a high school

program and do not hold a high school diploma. The cohort rate refers to the rate of dropping out within an age or grade cohort over a specified period of time, such as the percentage of students in Grade 8 who had not attained a high school diploma by the age of 20. Each measure can produce different estimates and lead to different conclusions about the dimensions of dropout and completion.

Measuring dropout and completion across nations is also made complex by the levels of diversification involving programs (certificates and qualifications) and institutions. In some systems, such as the United States, Canada and Sweden, students who fulfil the graduation requirements for upper secondary education receive a diploma that permits them, theoretically at least, to continue their studies in higher education in both academic and vocational programs. However, this is not the case in a range of other countries where only a proportion of those who complete upper secondary education will receive qualifications enabling access to higher level academic programs. In the Netherlands, for example, the majority of students complete upper secondary education, but only a minority (about one third or less of all students) become qualified to enter university study. The reason is that upper secondary education is divided into separate tracks, often located in different types of schools, leading to different qualifications: academic (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* or VWO), vocational (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* or VMBO) and technical (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs* or HAVO). The diversity of programs and qualifications raises issues of equivalence in cross-national comparisons, of whether graduation or completion in one system provides the same foundation, and means the same, as in another.

This issue is often a source of debate within, let alone across, systems. For example, there is considerable debate within the United States about the role of the General Education Development (GED) certificate as an equivalent to the high school diploma, because research suggests that the earnings and employment returns to those with the GED certificate are significantly less than the returns to those with the regular high school diploma (e.g., Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2006). Therefore, should dropouts who attain the GED be counted as high school graduates or not? The same issue applies in comparative analyses of systems that offer vastly different types of upper secondary qualifications. Should shorter cycle upper secondary vocational qualifications available in some systems be treated as equivalent (in terms of the quality of learning and levels of skills acquisition) to longer cycle upper secondary programs provided in the same system, as well as to those in other systems? Students who complete vocational programs in upper secondary education in some systems are often qualified to enter higher-level vocational programs or seek entry to the labour market but not to pursue academic higher education leading to the professions. These differences need to be considered in making cross-national comparisons.

It is also the case in comparisons of dropout and completion rates that these terms are not necessarily complementary or equal opposites. It is possible for young people who drop out of school to later 'complete' by either returning to school or finishing their study in another setting. It is also possible for some young people to remain at school until the end of their school program and in some

systems, therefore, be counted as completers, yet they fail to complete the requirements for graduation. In some systems there is also a level of flexibility allowing young people to change programs or undertake their study in alternative settings without age restrictions. Graduation and dropout rates will then vary depending on the point or age at which they are measured.

The point or age at which dropout and completion are measured is important when comparing systems. The modal age at which young people complete upper secondary programs varies across systems, but in most systems, it is between 17 and 20 years of age. However, some systems provide flexibility in study options, in length of time to complete and in provision for study in alternative adult settings outside of secondary school systems. Therefore, if a modal completion age, such as 19 years, is used as the point at which to count those who have completed an upper secondary qualification or not, this might underestimate real completion levels and overestimate dropout rates in those systems. It is possible to make a distinction between ‘initial’ or ‘modal time’ estimates of dropout and completion based on measurements using modal ages and grade cohorts (notwithstanding differences in grade repeating) and ‘later point’ estimates, which are based on a delayed or older age for measurement (such as age 24 or more), in order to take account of varying arrangements (as illustrated in Fig. 1.1). In systems that have more flexible arrangements, later point estimates are likely to reveal lower dropout rates and higher completion rates than those obtained as initial estimates. The differences between initial and later point estimates are themselves likely to reveal important cross-national differences in the organisation and arrangements of programs and institutions and in opportunities.

There is also a need to consider starting points in making cross-national comparisons. Some countries only measure dropout and completion in the upper secondary years. In Norway, for example, official dropout and completion rates are often based on the cohort of students entering upper secondary education (Statistics Norway, 2009). Therefore, students who dropped out between the end of compulsory education and the beginning of upper secondary education are not counted. In other systems, the rates can reflect status and activities across all stages of schooling. In some systems, such as in the United States and Canada, concepts such as ‘compulsory’ and ‘post-compulsory’ education, ‘lower secondary,’ and ‘upper

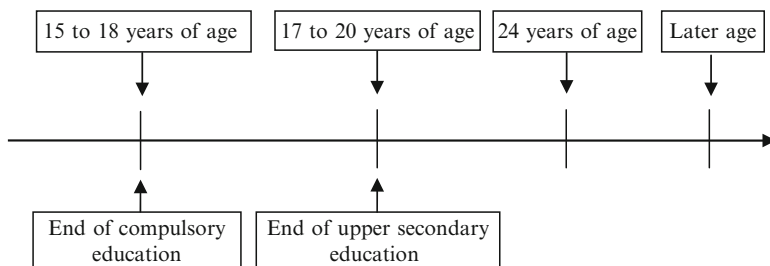


Fig. 1.1 When to measure dropout and completion?

secondary' do not have much meaning. Generally, high school covers Grades 9–12 and bridges the phases of lower and upper secondary defined in some other systems. Cohort estimates using longitudinal data often relate to those entering high school, which would be lower secondary or compulsory education in many European systems. The distinctions become an issue if in those systems where it is relevant, there are varying numbers of students who drop out of school before or at the end of compulsory schooling and who are not included when estimating the rates of dropout and completion.

While comparing dropout and completion across countries, it is, therefore, important to recognise that countries use different measures and classifications of dropout and completion. This is partly due to differences in the sorts of data that different countries employ. There are few commonly designed data sets with which to calculate comparable estimates. Some countries use administrative records while others use longitudinal survey data, data from school census returns, school leaver surveys or national population census surveys. Measures, classifications and sources of data vary. There is no common base or denominator: some use birth cohorts, others use age cohorts and some grade cohorts. Similarly, there is no common end or estimation point at which to count the numbers of completers and dropouts: sometimes it is at age 19, sometimes in the age range 20–24, and sometimes in the final school year.

Despite these differences, all systems recognise the importance of school attainment and report in a similar way on attainment levels, and most have measures of discontinuation ('early school leaving,' 'dropout,' 'NEET'). Even if there is variation in the classifications and methods of calculation, behind these differences there are commonalities making it possible to arrive at some shared and consistent understandings for comparing levels of dropout and completion across systems. Nearly all OECD nations can report on the proportion of an age group (such as 20- to 24-year-olds or a specific age, such as 20-year-olds) no longer in education or training and without an upper secondary qualification. This is often used by the European Union countries to define and report rates of early school leaving (e.g., see Van Es, 2008). It is very similar to the status dropout rate reported in the United States (see Laird et al., 2006) and age attainment rates reported in other countries such as Australia (see Lamb & Mason, 2008). Completion or graduation rates are often obtained using the same method, but not counting as completers those who are still enrolled in education or training and who have not yet attained an upper secondary qualification means that dropout and completion rates are not complementary. Of course, comparisons using such rates do not take into account equivalence of programs. Upper secondary qualifications and graduation requirements can vary in terms of quality, inclusiveness and criteria for attainment.

In this book, the aim is to use such measures to evaluate the scale and dimensions of school dropout and completion across different OECD countries. The indicator that is most frequently used in international comparisons of school completion is the upper secondary graduation rate reported annually in OECD's *Education at a Glance* (e.g., see OECD, 2008a). The rate is derived by dividing the number of upper secondary graduates in each country by the total population at the typical age of graduation (multiplied by 100). One problem with using this measure

is that it tends to inflate estimates in systems where upper secondary courses are of varying durations and can span different ages, such as in Germany, Greece and Norway. For example, the reported upper secondary graduation rate for Norway in 2004 was 100% – 86% for males and 114% for females (OECD, 2006). The rates reported by national sources in Norway place upper secondary completion at closer to 70% (Markussen et al., 2008; Statistics Norway, 2009). The preference in this book is to use published and reported estimates from recognised sources within each country rather than estimates based on international comparisons using the OECD indicator. Where available, cohort rates will be used in order to capture the number of young people of a given age or entering grade who, at a given point of measurement, have either attained an upper secondary qualification (completion) or who have not (dropout). As the focus of the book is on how different school systems work and the impact of differences in institutional and program arrangements on patterns of student dropout and completion, it will be important to obtain not only single national estimates, but also estimates for different programs and different groups. This will permit comparison of the roles of alternative programs and qualifications operating in different systems.

Social Inequality and School Completion

Despite international variations in dropout and completion rates, research undertaken in various countries reveals similar profiles of the characteristics of those who complete and those who drop out (e.g., see Rumberger & Lim, 2008, on the United States; Lamb et al., 2004, on Australia; Markussen et al., 2008, on Norway; the Applied Research Branch of Human Resources Development Council Canada, 2001, on Canada; and Traag & van de Velden, 2008, on the Netherlands). Most point to features of family background (such as socioeconomic status, family structure and parental education), demographic factors (such as gender, race, ethnicity, location), individual attributes (such as disability, health, self-esteem) and experiences in school (such as academic achievement, attitudes towards school, grade repetition or retention) as important. They also point to the impact of school context as well as community and economic settings.

The persistence of social patterns in dropout and completion remains a pressing issue because the costs of failure generated within systems continue to remain concentrated within the same social groups. This is despite the formal goals of governments to open up schooling to all. Social theories on reproduction point to the varying relations between family background and the structures of educational systems in which social power becomes embedded (e.g., see Bourdieu, 1984; Collins, 1979). To understand why inequality continues, as one study notes, there is a need to study ‘societal differences in the structure of educational systems and in the processes of educational stratification’ (Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993, p. 5).

It remains a major challenge facing all school systems in the provision of secondary education to construct and deliver programs that cater to diverse populations

of students. However, it is not only about providing space, it is also important to ensure evenness of quality so that all places generated within the structure of upper secondary opportunities deliver similar value or benefits from both a learning and outcomes perspective. Recent international comparisons of upper secondary graduation rates are revealing, both in terms of what they disclose about the success of some countries in building mass systems of secondary education capable of delivering programs to a whole cohort, and in what they conceal about differences in access and effectiveness in terms of quality of outcomes (e.g., see OECD, 2008a). In such comparisons, systems that are the most segmented in terms of provision can appear to provide the highest levels of completion, while school systems that are formally comprehensive and have advanced further down the road of democratisation can display higher levels of dropout. However, segmented systems tend to display marked patterns of social stratification across programs, while more comprehensive systems can provide greater opportunity for children from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds to qualify for university entry.

According to recent comparative studies on achievement, some nations have been more successful than others in reducing social gaps. In his work on cross-country differences in PISA achievement, Willms (2004) reports that while social differences in achievement are quite strong in some nations, others achieve both above-average levels of student achievement and weaker effects of socioeconomic status on educational success. To what extent does this apply to dropout and completion rates and what arrangements and features support outcomes leading to greater equality of educational opportunity?

Modern Growth in School Completion

There has been a marked increase in most countries in the proportion of the population that completes upper secondary education. This is evident in looking at generational differences in attainment profiles. Figure 1.2 reports the percentages of populations with upper secondary education qualifications broken out by age group: 25- to 34-year-olds, 35- to 44-year-olds, 45- to 54-year-olds and 55- to 64-year-olds. It shows that, apart from the United States, educational attainment levels are greater in younger age groups, highlighting recent growth in the numbers completing upper secondary education. The difference in attainment is quite marked in several countries, in some cases almost doubling across generations. For example, in France, about 49% of 55- to 64-year-olds attained an upper secondary qualification compared with 80% of 25- to 34-year-olds. Similar intergenerational growth is evident for Canada, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom. Generational change has seen major increases in access to upper secondary education.

Such growth is not as evident in the United States. The proportion of younger adults (25–34 years of age) who had completed upper secondary education was about the same as the proportion of the oldest adults (55–64 years of age). This reflects the fact that the United States had already achieved a mass system of upper

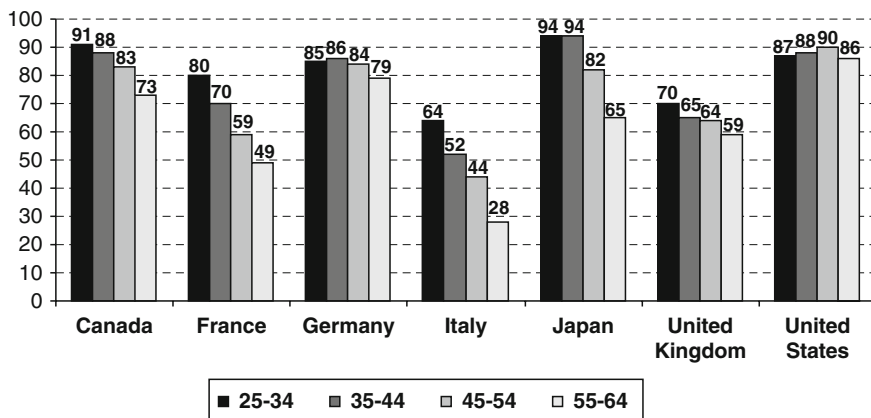


Fig. 1.2 Percentage of the population that has completed at least an upper secondary education, by age group and country: 1999 (Source: OECD, 2006)

secondary education many decades ago. Its relatively high and stable levels of access to senior schooling across generations suggests a much longer history of inclusive secondary education, at least in terms of overall levels of participation. The evident success in achieving mass participation almost two generations before many European countries, according to Goldin (2001) and Benavot (2006), has been based in part on strong public funding of education, the removal of a selective or elite model of institutional organisation and a comprehensive model of provision with a common general curriculum supplemented by a broad range of subject and course offerings. Recent concern has been expressed about the lack of further increases in graduation rates in the United States (e.g., see National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007), but history suggests stable longer term patterns of upper secondary participation when compared with other nations.

The recent expansion in upper secondary education in European as well as other OECD countries (see Lamb et al., 2004, for an outline of developments in Australia and OECD, 2006, for recent figures on other countries), representing large reductions in the levels of dropout, reflects several influences including labour market factors as well as changes in the provision and structure of upper secondary education.

Changing patterns of employment and the demands of employers for a better educated labour force have affected the demand for upper secondary education. In some countries, measured over the long term, there is a relationship between participation in upper secondary education and the state of labour markets. As Furlong (2007) has observed in the United Kingdom, as recently as 25 years ago, the majority of young people left school at the end of the compulsory phase to enter full-time jobs. However, opportunities for unqualified teenagers declined, due to both deterioration in the youth labour market, and long-term structural changes in industry and the demand for labour, which reduced full-time job opportunities for young people and led to rises in youth unemployment. Studies in several countries show long-term falls in full-time teenage job opportunities

(e.g., Lamb et al., 2004, in Australia; Furlong, 2006, in the United Kingdom). Structural changes to economies over the last 30 years have gradually, but dramatically, changed the number and types of jobs available to young people. In Norway, 31% of all young people aged 16–19 were working in 1975, while this proportion had fallen to 8% in 1990 (Grøgaard, 1992). The teenage labour market vanished and upper secondary education had to open its doors to whole cohorts. Accompanying the fall in full-time work has been the substantial growth in part-time jobs. These have been focused largely in areas (such as retail and related services) that tend to employ young people still in the education system, in jobs that are more often short-term. Such jobs are not those sought by young people wanting full-time work and careers.

As labour markets have changed and full-time jobs for young people have dried up, students have tended to remain longer at school and gain qualifications to facilitate labour market entry and career growth. In this sense, school has acted as a refuge from deteriorating teenage labour markets, leading to higher levels of upper secondary participation. One consequence of this is a decline in the value of upper secondary qualifications (qualification deflation). However, the corollary to this is that upper secondary qualifications have become, increasingly, a minimum requirement for labour market entry. Increased competitiveness for job opportunities makes dropouts and nonqualified school leavers less attractive to employers, placing pressure on students to stay on and complete school qualifications or enter alternative forms of upper secondary education and training. Upper secondary education has become the main educational point of entry into the full-time labour force across OECD countries and young people without upper secondary or equivalent qualifications increasingly struggle to find full-time work.

This point becomes apparent when looking at patterns of employment linked to educational attainment. Figure 1.3 presents the employment rates for young people 5 years after leaving initial education, by level of educational qualification, for eight OECD countries. It shows that in nearly all cases, the rates of employment are

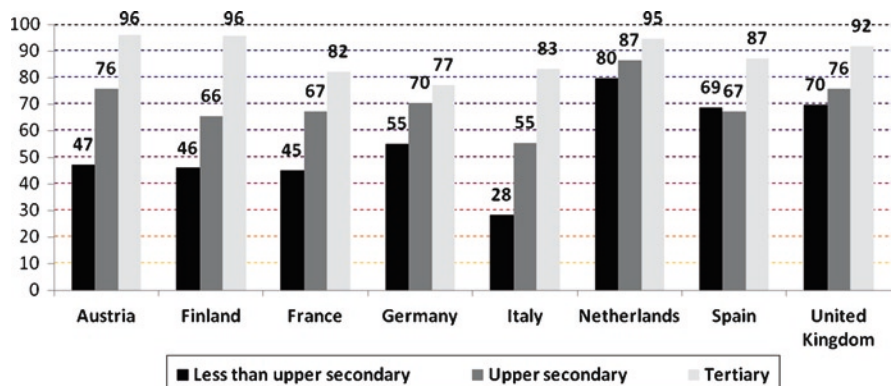


Fig. 1.3 Employment rates 5 years after leaving initial education, by educational attainment (%) (Source: OECD, 2008b)

markedly lower among those without upper secondary qualifications compared with those who either gain an upper secondary qualification or a tertiary education credential. The exception is Spain, where the rates are similar for those with and without upper secondary qualifications, though the rates are higher for those with tertiary qualifications. The pattern is consistent across nations even though the level of qualification gained varies. In the United Kingdom, for example, there was a 6 percentage point gap between dropouts (those with less than upper secondary attainment) and graduates (those with an upper secondary qualification). The gap in Austria was 29 points and in Italy, 27 points. The employment gains are even stronger for those with tertiary qualifications.

Similar patterns of returns are evident for spells of unemployment, types of occupations and earnings (OECD, 2008b).

Other works show that the returns to higher levels of upper secondary graduation relate not only to individuals. There are social and broad economic gains. The social returns to education include the monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits associated with improvements in health, family structure, fertility and child welfare, crime and environment. A range of studies suggest that higher levels of educational attainment are likely to lead to improvements in health and a reduction in poverty and associated problems (Behrman & Stacey, 1997; Levin et al., 2007). For example, while there may be debate about the exact amounts, increases in educational attainment are likely to lead to improvements in the quality of health for individuals leading to reductions in public expenditure on healthcare. There are also likely to be cost savings in other areas, such as from reduced criminal activity. Additionally, for communities, there are the broad economic gains associated with increased lifetime income and tax payments that accrue from higher levels of upper secondary graduation (see Levin et al., 2007; Hanushek, 2005).

Despite the economic and labour market pressures promoting growth in upper secondary education, the capacity for national systems of education to respond has varied depending on the structure of upper secondary provision. Growth has occurred in most systems, but not evenly. Some countries are doing better than others in promoting mass systems of upper secondary education. This is largely due to the institutional and certification arrangements that some nations have in place at upper secondary level to support broad participation.

However, even across countries that appear to have achieved mass systems, providing places for the vast majority of students and virtually eliminating dropout, it is not the case that all positions have equal value. Rather, the positions occupied within upper secondary education are not equal either across or within countries, reflecting differences in access and variations in quality of courses of study. Upper secondary programs are diverse and can include general, vocational and technical programs, with variations in entry requirements and in pathways to post-school opportunities. These variations are important to consider in order to gain a sense of which structures of provision operate to benefit the largest number and range of students. Which systems provide options that deliver not only quantity (making places available), but also quality (good outcomes for all) in terms of learning and outcomes?

Plan of the Book

This book is organised in three parts. Part One provides a comparative study of alternative pathways to upper secondary qualifications across OECD nations. The comparative study documents and evaluates some of the programs that different nations offer in upper secondary education. It examines both the range of different opportunities provided within schools and the alternative pathways provided for young people outside of school. It identifies and documents the main pathways, how they work, for whom they work and whether or not they are of equivalent value. Evidence collected from various national sources is used to examine the benefits and costs of alternatives provided in different systems. This includes a comparison of the pathways in terms of differentiation (content, rigor and graduation requirements), inclusiveness and outcomes. The comparative study notes that over recent decades many western nations have stepped up their efforts to reduce the numbers of dropouts by providing alternative pathways in upper secondary education. How systems have approached this, and how successful they are, varies. There is considerable diversification in upper secondary education.

Part Two of the book presents case studies of different educational systems. The case studies were prepared and written by educational researchers from 13 different OECD nations. The researchers have met regularly since 2005 as part of a collaboration called the *International Research Network for Youth Education and Training* (IRNYET). In preparing their chapters, the researchers agreed to address a set of common questions about dropout and completion in their country:

1. What are the main features of secondary education and training provision?
2. What are the main rates of dropout and completion, past and present?
3. Do dropout and completion vary by social background?
4. How have dropout and completion been studied and explained?
5. What alternative means are there for obtaining upper secondary qualifications for those who drop out of school?
6. What programs, policies and practices have been developed to reduce dropout and improve completion rates?

Authors were encouraged to focus on the features of their system which were most relevant to the theme of the book. The aim was to highlight the various options that nations offer students to complete an upper secondary certificate or diploma. Part of this involves a comparison of the different pathways in terms of content, rigor and completion requirements as well as how effectively they work to reduce dropout rates and deliver real benefits for those who participate. This means also considering the extent to which alternative pathways are inclusive and deliver quality learning and outcomes.

The countries are banded into three broad groups. The first group comprises countries of Western and Central Europe, namely England, Scotland, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Poland. The systems in these countries represent some of the older or more traditional models of secondary education provision, often based

originally on preparing an academic elite for university study and others for a technically and vocationally skilled workforce through alternative vocational programs (see Müller et al., 1987). There is, though, considerable diversity across these systems. The second group is based on the Nordic countries and includes Finland, Iceland and Norway. The systems of these countries are sometimes viewed as forming a more egalitarian model because of the adoption of a comprehensive upper secondary school catering more broadly across the population, even if programs remain diversified. The third group of countries is loosely termed the ‘new world’ and includes the United States, Canada and Australia. The more recently developed systems in these countries, particularly in the United States and Canada, have promoted the comprehensive school ideal as a part of creating mass systems (Trow, 1977).

The secondary school systems examined in Part Two represent a range of different models of programs and institutions. The range is marked by several dimensions including (1) comprehensive or stratified schooling, (2) academic and vocational elements, (3) differences in graduation requirements and (4) early or delayed academic selection.

Part Three presents some key reflections based on the material presented in the national case studies. These are in the form of syntheses of findings on key topics, which are presented in separate chapters. The first, Chapter 16, reflects on the role of vocational education programs and their importance to understanding differences in rates of dropout and completion. Vocational education is delivered in different ways across countries. It is the main alternative pathway in upper secondary education in some systems and yet negligible in others. To what extent is vocational education important in the way systems work, in which systems is it important and with what outcomes? The chapter examines the various approaches from primarily employment-based systems (e.g., Germany) or systems in which employment-based provision plays a large role (e.g., Norway) to systems where vocational education, if offered, is mainly school-based and weakly structured. The focus is on the role of vocational education, how it works in different systems and its importance to understanding differences in rates of dropout and completion.

School-based pathways are not the only opportunities for young people to gain upper secondary qualifications. Some countries provide alternative pathways to work and adult life for young people who are no longer at school and who dropped out without gaining a qualification. This reflects more of a focus on ‘external pathways’ to provide alternative opportunities for young people, particularly dropouts. Such external pathways can include extended opportunities for school graduation through recovery programs or study in alternative settings including adult education, provision of a breadth and depth of alternative qualifications and study opportunities through further education colleges, provision of work-based indentured training contracts such as apprenticeships, and alternative routes involving combinations of work, training and study. Chapter 17 compares these opportunities and pathways across various countries and their relevance to dropout and completion.

Chapter 18 takes up the issue of school completion and social inequality. Rates of school dropout and completion vary by social background in every nation, suggesting that there are commonalities of process that wealthy nations share. Yet,

the extent of inequality and its impact can be stronger or weaker depending on the form and architecture of institutional and program arrangements. In some nations, the social gaps in dropout and completion are weaker and the chances of success for the poor are stronger. This chapter explores this issue. It draws on the national case studies to examine patterns of inequality in relation to dropout and completion. It begins by looking at research from each country on the patterns of dropout and completion and the factors that influence them. Attention then turns to an examination of the effects of social background and how this varies across nations. The final section develops a framework for examining international differences in dropout and completion and in the levels of inequality.

Chapter 19, the final chapter, examines the important issue of policy and what systems are doing to reduce dropout and improve completion rates. The case studies reveal that rates of dropout and completion vary, but also that raising school completion rates is a major policy objective in all of the countries. There is an ongoing concern to reduce dropout and increase completion rates. Some systems have even set up ambitious goals or targets aiming to achieve completion rates in excess of 90%. To attempt to achieve these goals, some systems have transformed their programs or implemented large-scale interventions to address dropout. The case studies reveal that across countries, various types of policy measures have been or are being implemented, some of which are similar and some which are more specific and unique. This chapter draws together and compares the array of policy interventions to improve completion and reduce dropout, particularly for at-risk students. What strategies are systems employing to address the issue of dropout? With what success?

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Part I
Structures and Pathways

Chapter 2

Pathways to School Completion: An International Comparison

Stephen Lamb

Over recent decades, many western nations have stepped up their efforts to increase secondary school completion rates while maintaining high standards. How systems have approached this, and how successful they are, varies. One of the key differences is in the range of programs that are offered and the different pathways to completion. In some systems there is a menu of separate certificates and qualifications, each tied to a different strand of learning, and each representing a different pathway. In other systems there is a single certificate or qualification, but with structured options producing academic, general, and vocational tracks that work as pathways to different post-school options. This chapter compares some of the different pathways to completion of upper secondary qualifications offered by different countries. What are the main qualifications and pathways? How do they work? For whom do they work? Are they of equal value? Answers to these questions require an evaluation of the various options nations offer students to complete secondary school qualifications. The evaluation needs to consider criteria such as content, rigor and graduation requirements as well as how effectively the different options work to reduce dropout rates and deliver real benefits to those who participate. There is little use providing alternatives to deal with pupil diversity if the alternatives simply function to promote stratification by working as sources of relegation and offering only weak returns. For this reason, it is important to consider the extent to which different pathways are inclusive (who gets included) and promote equivalent standards of learning and outcomes. The discussion begins by comparing school-based pathways across countries, and then moves on to look in more detail first at academic pathways, then at alternatives such as vocational education. Finally, the discussion turns to alternative pathways to completion specifically available to dropouts.

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School-Based Pathways

Differences in Provision

The provision of upper secondary education tends to vary across two main dimensions. The first is the level of *program diversification* or the variety of programs that are offered. This can include differently focused strands or streams such as academic programs, professional and technical courses, vocational education, and in some countries, subject-based strands such as specialist art, music, humanities and science programs (as in Italy, for example). The different programs orient students toward different post-school outcomes. The second main dimension is the extent of *institutional segregation* (or integration), which refers to the extent to which young people are separated into different schools or streams and tracks on the basis of the programs or qualifications in which they enrol.¹ In some systems this can occur early and extends well back into lower secondary or even primary school. In Germany, for example, it is common at the end of the primary school years for many students to be separated into different schools based on interests and aptitudes. Schools tend to be divided into those offering a more academic, university-preparatory curriculum (*Gymnasium*), those offering specialist technical training (*Realschule*) and those with a more vocational focus (*Hauptschule*). Alternatively, in other systems, such as in Sweden, Canada and the United States, students tend to remain in the same type of school through both the lower and upper secondary years, able to pursue a variety of programs or courses within one institution.

Institutional segregation and *program diversification* are mutually linked. Both are driven by curriculum requirements, and the demands of the academic curriculum are central to this. All systems give pre-eminence to academic knowledge. Some call it *general education*, while others refer to it more directly as *academic*. Even when alternative programs and curricula are developed, the academic curriculum enjoys the highest prestige. This is in part because of its role in preparing and selecting students for highly valued and sought after places in university. This function has worked against the development of truly democratic, inclusive and universal programs of teaching and learning built around a common curriculum. The stratifying effect of providing academic programs geared to university preparation operates in all countries, with the extent varying by the structure and number of alternative programs and the organisation of schools.

Table 2.1 presents information for a number of OECD countries on features of school organisation. It reports on school settings including the ages at which

¹This is different to the process of residential segregation which produces marked divisions in some systems, separating students on the basis of where they live and their racial and social backgrounds. Regional or residential segregation can create sharp divisions between schools in terms of intake, separating students almost as effectively as selective schooling. It also has a marked impact on student progress and outcomes, at least according to a range of school effectiveness studies (see, for example, Willms, 2006).

Table 2.1 Comparisons of pathways to completion: features of school organisation

	Compulsory Years	Features of upper secondary schooling (organisational setting)		
	Age range	Age of entry	Level of segregation	Admission to type of upper secondary school
Australia	5–16	16	Mixed: largely comprehensive, some selective-entry schools	Partly selective: some schools use ability testing for entry
Austria	5–15	14	High: academic, technical, vocational, specialist schools	Selective: entry is dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement
Denmark	4–16	16	Mixed: some integration, though largely separate: general (gymnasium), technical, vocational	Partly selective: entry is dependent on completion of formal exams at the end of compulsory education and teacher recommendation
England	4–16	16	Low: largely comprehensive	Non-selective
Finland	6–16	16	Mixed: general (gymnasium) and vocational schools	Non-selective
France	3–16	15	Mixed: general (general and technological <i>lycées</i>) and vocational schools (<i>lycées professionnels</i>)	Partly selective: entry is dependent on completion of formal exams at the end of compulsory education
Germany	6–18	15	High: academic (gymnasium), technical, vocational, specialist schools	Selective: entry is dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement
Iceland	3–16	16	Mixed: some integration, though largely separate: general (gymnasium), comprehensives, vocational	Partly selective: Varied admission based on results at end of compulsory education
Italy	3–15	14	Mixed: general (<i>liceo</i>) and vocational schools (<i>istituti</i>)	Non-selective
Japan	4–15	15	High: academic senior high school and vocational and technical schools	Selective: highly competitive entrance exams
Netherlands	5–18	12	High: academic (VWO), general (HAVO), vocational (VMBO) schools	Selective: entry is dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement, selection at end of primary school

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

	Compulsory Years	Features of upper secondary schooling (organisational setting)		
	Age range	Age of entry	Level of segregation	Admission to type of upper secondary school
Norway	6–16	16	Low: largely comprehensive	Non-selective
Scotland	4–16	16	Low: largely comprehensive	Non-selective
Spain	3–16	16	Mixed: largely comprehensive (Institutes for Secondary Education), though some specialist vocational schools	Non-selective
Sweden	6–16	16	Low: largely comprehensive	Non-selective
United States	6–16	16	Low: largely comprehensive	Non-selective

Sources: OECD (2006); Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Archive; Eurydice: Eurybase – the information database on education systems in Europe.

young people enter secondary school and the level of institutional differentiation or segregation. High levels of segregation operate where young people attend different schools either because of the streams or courses that they enter, or because they are divided across schools on academic ability lines. Low levels of segregation occur in systems that more often operate comprehensive schools, catering for a range of student skills and interests within one type of school. There are also countries that have mixed arrangements in which there is some separation across schools on the basis of academic skills or program choices, though there also are integrated or comprehensive schools that cater to a wide variety of students. Admission requirements vary depending on the types of schools and their level of differentiation.

Table 2.2 presents features of secondary school programs and qualifications. It provides details on the various programs and qualifications that are offered in each country. This includes information on the typical duration of courses, program-specific entry requirements (what criteria are set to enter each type of program and qualification), broad course content (in terms of core subjects and electives and associated arrangements) and the main form of assessment (whether exams, school-based assessment or other forms). To compare differences in qualifications standards, which can vary both within and across national systems, it is important to consider the formal completion criteria – what the requirements are to graduate and obtain a qualification. These can affect both the post-school opportunities, such as entry to university, and the rates of completion. Details on these are

provided together with completion rates expressed in terms of the typical age cohort, revealing the proportions of young people in each country who are likely to graduate with each type of qualification.

Table 2.3 presents some broad outcome indicators. These are provided at a system level rather than at a qualification level, since qualification-specific outcomes are not available either widely or consistently in an appropriate form for valid comparison. The broad indicators that are presented give some insight into the overall function and performance of system arrangements. Measures include *achievement levels* (mathematics achievement measured through the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]), *access indicators* (how inclusive are the qualifications and programs for the whole student population) and *transition outcomes* (what the upper secondary arrangements deliver in terms of labour market experience). The levels of PISA achievement relate to 15-year-olds and, therefore, achievement prior to upper secondary schooling in many systems. However, they provide a measure of the impact of school organisation and differentiation. The measures selected for inclusion are those that relate to between-school differences in achievement (percentage of variation in student achievement that is linked to differences between schools rather than students, all else equal). The second PISA measure is the percentage of between-school differences accounted for by the SES backgrounds of students and schools. This gives us an indication of the extent to which school arrangements and diversification work to stratify or separate students along social lines. The *access indicators* include measures of the percentages of young people who have left school without obtaining a qualification. They provide an assessment of the capacity of secondary school programs to accommodate and retain students. The *transition indicators* assess returns to study. They report rates of unemployment for dropouts and for graduates. Also included is the university entry rate, expressed as a percentage difference from the OECD average.

Academic Pathways to Graduation

Every system provides programs and courses that work to prepare or select students for university, and this influences school and program organisation. Even so, there is considerable variation in the requirements for graduation and access to higher education.

In some systems, neither the number of subjects nor the disciplines to be studied for accreditation are prescribed. For example, students in England and Scotland may achieve accreditation in a single subject of their own choosing. In these systems, there are no compulsory subjects at upper secondary level – only electives, with the breadth of subject offerings dependent on school size and student demand. Students choose from a range of subjects available at *General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level* ('A level') and *GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level* ('AS level'). Assessment is academic and competitive, involving external examinations controlled

Table 2.2 Comparisons of pathways to completion: features of qualifications

		Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)							Cohort grad. rate
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	%
Australia	Varies by state	Senior school certificate (varies by state)	2	Open	Elective-based system, English compulsory in some states	External and school-based	Pass grades in at least four subjects	University, work, further education	68.0*
		VET certificates, school-based apprenticeships (single or dual)	1–2	Open	Module-based, industry specific	School/module-based assessment	Successfully completed course work	Work, further education	14.0*
		Certificate of Applied Learning (Victoria only)	1–2	Open	Elective-based system, VET focus	School-based assessment	Successfully completed course work	Work, further education	4.8
Austria	Separate	Certificate of Secondary Education (<i>Reifeprüfung</i> certificate)	4	Dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement	Core subjects (mathematics, German, foreign language) and small number of electives	School-based written and oral exams with examination panel including at least one external panel member	Passing grades in compulsory subjects and electives (matriculation)	University and professional schools	12.8

			4	Dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement	Core subjects (mathematics, German, foreign language) and electives	School-based written, practical and oral exams with examination panel	Passing grades in compulsory subjects and electives (matriculation)	University and professional schools	8.6
	CSE and TVE Diploma (<i>Reifeprüfung</i> and TVE Diploma)	4	4	Training certificate completion	Core subjects (mathematics, German, foreign language) and professionally relevant subject	External examination	Passing grades in compulsory subjects and electives (matriculation)	University and professional schools	20.5
	Apprenticeship certificate (dual system)	3-4	3-4	Open	Core subjects (mathematics, German, foreign language) and professionally relevant subjects	Examination	Passing grades in compulsory subjects	Trades, occupations, higher education	30.2
	Vocational certificates	2-4	2-4	Open	Core subjects (mathematics, German, foreign language) and professionally relevant subjects	School-based written, practical and oral exams with examination panel	Passing grades in compulsory and practical subjects	Trades, occupations, <i>Berufsreifeprüfung</i>	17.9

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)								Cohort grad. rate	
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	%
Denmark	Separate	Gymnasium upper secondary certificate (STX)	3	Dependent on successful completion of formal exams at the end of compulsory education and teacher recommendation	Two main programs (languages, mathematics). Core subjects common to both programs (Danish, history, biology, music, geography, visual arts, religious education, classical studies, physical education), core subjects unique to each program and specialist electives Some options can be taken at different levels (intermediate or high)	External written and oral exams in ten subjects	Successfully completed examinations and program work with a minimum grade point average	University	22.7

										4.0
										University
										Successfully completed examinations and program work with a minimum grade point average
										External written and/or oral exams in every subject studied
										Common core subjects, three optional subjects and a major written assignment Some options can be taken at different levels (intermediate or high)
										Dependent on successful completion of formal exams at the end of compulsory education and teacher recommendation
										2
										Higher preparatory upper secondary certificate (HF)
										Dependent on successful completion of formal exams at the end of compulsory education and teacher recommendation
										Business and commercial studies focus. Core subjects, optional subjects and a major written assignment. Subjects are offered at different skill levels (A, B, C)
										3
										Higher commercial upper secondary certificate (HHX)
										Successfully completed examinations and program work with a minimum grade point average. At least two of the subjects must be at 'A' (highest skill) Level
										External written and oral exams in ten subjects
										University
										7.9

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)								Cohort grad. rate
Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	%
	Higher technical upper secondary certificate (HTX)	3	Dependent on successful completion of formal exams at the end of compulsory education and teacher recommendation	Technical studies focus. Core subjects, optional subjects and a major written assignment. Subjects are offered at different skill levels (A, B, C)	External written and oral exams in ten subjects	Successfully completed examinations and program work with a minimum grade point average. At least two of the subjects must be at 'A' (highest skill) Level	University	2.8
	Vocational education and training (EUD)	1-4	Open	Seven programs comprising basic and main courses	School-based assessment with tests and an exam to measure proficiency	Successfully completed exam and program work with a final exam/proficiency mark	Trades and occupations	42.8
	Vocational education and training (EUD)	1-4	Open	Seven programs comprising basic and main courses	School-based assessment with tests and an exam to measure proficiency	Successfully completed exam and program work with a final exam/proficiency mark	Trades and occupations	42.8

England	Separate	General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (A Levels). Single subject qualifications	2	GCE AS Levels	Range of elective subjects, commonly between two and four taken by a student	External examination	Pass grade in exam	University	42.4
		GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS Levels). Single subject qualifications	1	No official criteria, though General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results can be considered	Range of elective subjects, cover half of the content of 'full' A Levels. Commonly four or more subjects selected	External examination	Pass grade in exam	University and further education	
		General Certificate of Education A Levels in Applied Subjects. Four qualifications available.	2	No official criteria, though GCSE results can be considered	Courses are available in ten vocational subject areas and are organised on the lines of the GCE AS and A format	External tests and internal assessment	Pass grade in requisite subjects	Work and further education	8.2

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)										Cohort grad. rate
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:		%
Finland	Separate	Matriculation examination certificate	3	Dependent on successful completion of the compulsory education syllabus	Mother tongue (Finnish or Swedish) and three other core subjects from the second national language, other language, mathematics, general studies (science and humanities subjects) and at least one elective. Subjects in some core areas are offered at different levels of difficulty	National written examinations	Passing grades in all compulsory subjects with at least one subject taken at the advanced level (matriculation)	University		27.6
		Certificate in general upper secondary education	3	Dependent on successful completion of the compulsory education syllabus	Core subjects and electives. Subjects in some core areas are offered at different levels of difficulty	School-based	Passing grades in program syllabus	Polytechnics (professional higher education)		3.8

		Certification in Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training	3	Dependent on successful completion of the compulsory education syllabus	Mixture of core general studies (same as national core curriculum), electives and workplace learning. 52 qualifications, 113 study programs across eight broad industry sectors	School work, theory and competence-based assessments	Successful completion of studies	Work and polytechnics	36.5
		Apprenticeship qualification certificate	1-4	Dependent on successful completion of the compulsory education syllabus	Mixture of core general studies (same as national core curriculum), electives and workplace learning	School work, theory and competence-based assessments	Successful completion of studies	Work and polytechnics	11.5
France	Separate	General Baccalaureate	3	Completion of lower secondary education	Three types of programs (literary, economic and social sciences, scientific). Minimum of eight or nine compulsory subjects plus a maximum of two optional subjects in each program	National written and/or oral examinations in core and elective subjects	Passing grades in examinations	University	34.6

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)								Cohort grad. rate
Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	%
	Technological Baccalaureate	3	Completion of lower secondary education	Four types of programs (sciences and tertiary technologies, sciences and industrial technologies, sciences and laboratory technologies, medico-social sciences). Three specific programs for the hotel trade, applied arts, music and dance. Core and elective subjects	National written and/or oral examinations in core and elective subjects	Passing grades in examinations	University	18.9
	Professional (Vocational) Baccalaureate	2	Completion of lower secondary education	Compulsory general subjects and professional studies relevant to different occupations and industries	Written, practical and oral examinations in core and elective subjects, as well as work and training assessments during the course	Successfully completed examination and program work	Work, further education, university	12.5

		<i>Certificat d'apintude 2 professionnelle</i> (CAP) or <i>Brevet d'etudes professionnelles</i> (BEP)	2	Completion of lower secondary education	Compulsory general subjects and professional studies relevant to different occupations and industries	Tests or exercises based on compulsory subjects and professional studies	Successfully completed examination and program work	Work, further education	17.0
Germany	Separate	<i>Zeugnis der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife</i>	3	Dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement	Small number of majors selected from three areas (languages, literature and the arts; social sciences; mathematics, natural sciences and technology) with each area needing to be included	Abitur examination (written and oral exams)	Passing grades in at least four subjects	University	27.3
		Vocational leaving and apprenticeship certificates (Dual System)	2-4	Open	Workplace training and school-based formal curricula established by the lander. Training covers 350 professions	Final examination before an examination board relevant to the training industry. Practical and written component	Successful completion of the exam	Trades and occupations	48.5

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)								Cohort grad. rate
Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	%
	Technical and professional certificates (such as the <i>Fachgebundene Hochschulreife</i> and the <i>Fachhochschulreife</i>)	2–3	Dependent on type of school attended and academic achievement	Specialise in subject areas such as engineering, economics, farming, the welfare system, and design. Students are also usually required to study core subjects (such as German, social sciences, mathematics, natural sciences, one foreign language and sport) from the three general subject areas	Final written and oral exams	Successful completion of the exam	Trades, occupations, higher education	12.2

Iceland	Separate	Matriculation examination certificate (<i>studentisprof</i>)	4	Varied admission based on results at end of compulsory education	Three main academic programs: foreign languages, natural sciences and social sciences. Students required to take core subjects (regardless of program), specialised subjects according to particular program of study, and electives	Examination and continuous assessment	Successfully completed examinations. Can also be awarded from the accumulation of internally set unit-credits.	University	39.4
		Journeyman's examination certificate (<i>sveinsprof</i>)	4	Open	Study comprises general academic subjects, theoretical vocational subjects and practical vocational subjects. Students must take a certain number of credits in general academic subjects	Journeyman's examination and continuous assessment of practical and theory work	Passing grades in exam and course work	Trades and occupations	40.6

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)										Cohort grad. rate
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:		
Italy	Separate	Upper secondary leaving certificate (<i>diploma di Stato</i>) (<i>Classical/Linguistical/Scientific/Tecnical/ Professionale/ Magistrate/Artistica</i>)	5	Lower secondary diploma (<i>primo ciclo di istruzione</i>)	Core and elective subjects, with electives varying by specialisation	Three written examinations and one oral examination	Successful completion of exams with a minimum grade point average	University	%	63.5
		Professional skills qualification (<i>Diploma di Qualifica Professionale</i>)	3–5	Lower secondary diploma (<i>primo ciclo di istruzione</i>)	Core and elective subjects, with electives varying by vocational specialisation. Specialisation involves basic training in either agriculture, industry and crafts, or the service sector	Examination	Successful completion of exam and course work	Work, further vocational education	5.8	

Japan	Separate	Upper secondary school leaving certificate (academic)	3	Entrance exam	Credit-based system of core subjects (Japanese language; geography and history; civics; mathematics; science; health and physical education; art; home economics) and small number of possible electives	School-based assessment	Achieving threshold of credits (80) by successfully completing the required number of core and elective subjects	University entrance exam	66.1
		Upper secondary school leaving certificate (vocational/technical)	3	Entrance exam	Credit-based system of core subjects and specialised vocational or technical electives	School-based assessment	Achieving threshold of credits (80) by successfully completing the required number of core and elective subjects	University and work	24.7
		High school graduation qualification test		Individuals who have not graduated upper secondary school	Exams cover core subjects in the general upper secondary curriculum	Examination	Passing grades in exams	University entrance exam	

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

		Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)							Cohort grad. rate
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	%
Netherlands	Separate	Upper Secondary Preparatory Diploma (VWO)	5	Achievement and school recommendation	Four programs (science and technology; science and health; economics and society; culture and society) with some common core subjects	National examination and school exam/assessment	Passing final grades with minimum overall grade	University	22.9
		Upper Secondary General Education Diploma (HAVO)	6	Achievement and school recommendation	Four programs (science and technology; science and health; economics and society; culture and society) with some common core subjects	National examination and school exam/assessment	Passing final grades with minimum overall grade	Professional higher education, VWO	21.2
		Upper Secondary Vocational Diploma (VMBO)	4	Achievement and school recommendation	Four programs associated with four industry or business sectors, each with its own combination of exam subjects	National and school-based examinations	Passing final grades with minimum overall grade	Work, further education	41.0

Norway	Separate	Upper Secondary Leaving Certificate (general)	3	Initially open, promotion can depend on achievement	Three general programs (general and business studies; music, dance and drama; sports and physical education)	Written and/or oral examinations and school-based assessment	Passes in all subjects and exams required for each program with minimum level of achievement in core subjects	University	44.0
		Vocational qualification/trade or journeyman's certificate	3	Open	Twelve vocational streams	Centrally set theoretical and practical examinations	Passes in all subjects and exams required for each program with minimum level of achievement in core subjects	Work, further education	29.9
Scotland	Integrated	National Qualification Certificates	1-3	Initially open, level of study depends on achievement	National Qualifications are available at five levels: Access, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher, and Advanced Higher. Courses cover both general and vocational subjects. There are no compulsory subjects. National courses often involve three subject-related units	Internal and external assessment	National Course Qualifications are awarded to those who pass all of the internally assessed components and achieve a passing grade in the external exam for the course	University, work, further education	

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)								Cohort grad. rate	
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:	
Spain	Separate	Baccalaureate Certificate (<i>Bachillerato</i>)	2	Lower secondary certificate (<i>Grado en Educación Secundaria</i>)	Four programs (arts; natural science and health; humanities and social studies; technology) with some common or core subjects	School-based assessment	Pass grade in all subjects	University entrance exam, advanced level specific vocational training	% 45.0
		Intermediate Specific Vocational Training Certificate (<i>Técnico</i>)	1–2	Lower secondary certificate (<i>Grado en Educación Secundaria</i>)	Modules of theoretical and practical training based on 22 vocational fields, with some core subjects and field-specific options. Workplace module is compulsory	School-based and workplace assessment	Pass grade in all subjects and modules	Work, advanced level specific vocational training	21.0

Sweden	Integrated	Upper secondary leaving certificate (<i>Slutbetyg från gymnasieskolan</i>)	3	Lower secondary certificate (<i>grundskola</i>)	Two academic and 16 vocational strands. There are core subjects (Swedish, English, mathematics, civics, religion, science studies, physical education and health, and artistic activities) common to all strands plus specialist subjects	School-based with national tests in three core subjects (Swedish, English, mathematics)	Requisite number of credits with a pass grade in at least 90% for a completed course of studies, including a pass in a compulsory upper secondary certificate project	University, work, further education	88.0
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(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Features of upper secondary qualifications (program setting)										Cohort grad. rate
	Structure	Qualification	Duration (Years)	Entry requirements	Content	Form of assessment	Minimum completion requirements	Provides access to:		%
United States	Integrated	High School Diploma (Regular/Standard, Vocational, Honor/ Regents, College Preparatory)	3	Open	Subjects can be clustered into vocational, general and academic tracks based on system of core subjects (often English, mathematics, social studies, science, health and physical education) and electives	School assessment on the basis of grades and work over the year	Satisfactory completion of a specified number of subjects (credits), designated for each diploma, varying by State. Minimum exit exam achievement scores in some states.	Higher education and work		75.0
		General Educational Development Certificate (GED)		Individuals who have not graduated from high school	Tests cover writing, social studies, science, reading and mathematics	Examination	Pass grade in all tests	Higher education and work		11.0

*= Not mutually exclusive

Sources: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Archive; Eurydice; Eurybase – the information database on education systems in Europe; National Ministries of Education – Austria, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics; Department for Children, Schools and Families, England; National Statistics Bureaus: Australia, Austria, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden.

Table 2.3 Comparisons of pathways to completion: selected outcome indicators

	Selected outcome indicators						
	Mathematics achievement (PISA)			Access		Transition	
	% of between-school variance in mathematics achievement	% of between-school variance explained by SES of students and schools	% in programs in compulsory years leading to upper secondary vocational education	% of 25- to 34-year-old dropouts	% of 15- to 19-year-olds not in education or employment	% of 20- to 24-year-olds not in education and unemployed by attainment	% deviation from OECD average in university entry
						Dropouts	Graduates
Australia	22.0	15.4	0.0	23.0		11.1	3.1
Austria	55.5	35.2	42.9	13.0	10.2	12.0	4.2
Denmark	13.1	9.3	0.0	14.0	3.0	6.0	4.7
England	21.1 ^a	15.3 ^a	na	30.0 ^a	9.4 ^a	10.7 ^a	3.7 ^a
Finland	3.9	0.9	0.0	11.0	9.8	10.5	6.0
France	na	na	9.5	20.0	14.0	23.7	9.8
Germany	56.4	43.8	47.1 ^b	15.0	4.7	12.6	8.8
Iceland	3.6	0.3	0.0	32.0	4.3		+26
Italy	56.8	30.5	na	36.0	10.5	16.2	8.0
Japan	62.1	42.0	25.4	6.0			-10
Netherlands	54.5	40.7	61.3	20.0	4.6	7.4	2.7
Norway	6.5	2.9	0.0	4.0	2.7	10.9	4.0
Scotland	21.1 ^a	15.3 ^a	na	30.0 ^a	9.4 ^a	10.7 ^a	3.7 ^a

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Selected outcome indicators							
Mathematics achievement (PISA)		Access			Transition		
% of between-school variance in mathematics achievement	% of between-school variance explained by SES of students and schools	% in programs in compulsory years leading to upper secondary vocational education	% of 25- to 34-year-old dropouts	% of 15- to 19-year-olds not in education or employment	% of 20- to 24-year-olds not in education and unemployed by attainment	% deviation from OECD average in university entry	
					Dropouts	Graduates	
Spain	17.2	9.8	0.0	39.0	7.3	2.8	-6
Sweden	10.9	5.8	0.0	9.0	4.2	11.9	+26
United States	27.1	18.7	0.0	13.0	7.0	11.3	+10

a = Figures are for United Kingdom

b = Figure from Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, Federal Republic of Germany (2009)

na = not available

Sources: OECD (2004, 2006).

and administered by GCE examining boards. High standards are required to pass a subject and gain accreditation, but the subjects can be of the student's own choosing. In terms of accreditation, this could be described as a system of standards, but standards without subject or knowledge prescription. For example, students could achieve high levels of learning in particular fields, such as history, while having poorly developed skills in other areas, such as mathematics. University preparation is sponsored in the areas of intensive study, and supported through a rigorous system of external examinations. However, accreditation is not based on a minimum number of subjects designed as a 'course' and covering a range of learning areas.

In other systems, the academic curriculum at upper secondary level is much more prescribed. In Austria, for example, students undertaking the matriculation certificate (*Reifeprüfung*) must study three compulsory subjects – mathematics, German, and a foreign language – and additional subjects from a range of specialist and interdisciplinary electives. The electives provide for some specialisation in certain areas depending on the school. The focus can be on classical languages, mathematics and the sciences, economics and business, instrumental music or art. Similarly, in Finland, students are required to study four compulsory subjects (mathematics, general studies, mother tongue, foreign language) and at least one elective. In both systems, assessment involves academically competitive examinations and graduation based on minimum grades.

Another common model is one involving a range of core and elective subjects grouped into specialist programs, with the course requirements varying depending on the length or duration of study. Denmark, for example, offers two main types of academic programs, one focused on languages and the other on mathematics. There are core subjects common to both programs (Danish, history, biology, music, geography, visual arts, religious education, classical studies, physical education) as well as core subjects unique to each program and specialist electives within each program. Graduation requires successful completion of externally administered written and oral exams with a minimum grade point average. France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Iceland all operate versions of this model of provision – separate specialist academic programs with core subjects common across all strands and either prescribed subjects or electives within each specialist course. Graduation is largely based on examinations, sometimes competitive national exams as in France and the Netherlands, with minimum passing grades or scores for individual subjects and a minimum overall score. Some systems, such as Sweden and Spain, use school-based assessment, though even in these systems there is sensitivity and pressure related to the issue of 'academic standards'. In Sweden, this has seen the introduction of national tests in key core subjects (mathematics, English, Swedish) which have to be used by teachers in the awarding of grades in these subjects.

Graduation (sometimes referred to as matriculation, or *matura*) in most countries requires successful completion of a minimum number of subjects. In Sweden, this means gaining a requisite number of subject credits through successfully completing a course of study. In many systems the requirement is for achieving minimum grades in at least five subjects including a set number of compulsory subjects

covering different key learning areas (such as mathematics and native language). An overall score, the equivalent of a grade point average derived from a minimum number of subjects, is sometimes used to set a threshold or standard for the successful completion of the award.

The function of academic programs in all systems, and the requirements around graduation and certification, are influenced by the process and needs of university selection. But there are some important differences in how this works. In some systems, successful completion of academic credentials at the end of schooling automatically qualifies students for entry to university without the need for further selection. In Germany, for example, candidates who are successful in the *Abitur* (the achievement examination taken on completion of upper secondary education) are awarded a general higher education entrance qualification (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife*). The *Abitur* grants access to all courses of study at universities and other higher education institutions. Similarly, in Austria, the *Reifeprüfung* or *Matura* entitles its holders to enrol in university studies of their choice, even though access to some specialist courses may require additional subject study and assessment. In the Netherlands, there may be different programs of academic study, but the VWO (matriculation) certificate qualifies pupils to enter university and higher professional education without further selection.

The onus of selection for university is removed from universities themselves in such countries because the whole organisational structure of schooling, programs and qualifications works to regulate the quality of students, delivering to universities a pool of academically selected and prepared students, homogeneous in skills, training and orientation. Numbers of students are also regulated because academic selection tends to occur early, more rigorously and more overtly than in other systems. The universities can distance themselves from involvement in the business of selection for entry because school organisation from an early stage is geared to the needs of academic recruitment and the promotion through matriculation of a minority of highly selected students. In all three systems (Germany, Austria and the Netherlands), the separation of students along academic lines occurs at the end of primary school or shortly thereafter. The majority of students in each system are channelled away from academic programs into vocational, professional and technical education paths at an early age. Table 2.3 shows that the three systems have the highest proportions of students in primary school and junior secondary years enrolled in programs leading to vocational education in high school (42.9% in Austria, 61.3% in the Netherlands and 47.1% in Germany). A minority of students – between 20% and 40% – are grouped into schools delivering intensive academic training leading to matriculation and university entry. The differentiation mainly occurs on the basis of students' ability and preference, and already orients students towards post-school study (university, higher education or other forms) or to the labour market on completion of school. Consequently, the rates of entry to university tend to be well below OECD averages in the three systems (see Table 2.3). These countries also tend to have high levels of variation in academic achievement across schools. Approximately 56% of the variance in mathematics achievement

among 15-year-olds in Germany is due to between-school differences (compared to 27.1% in the United States, 10.9% in Sweden and 3.9% in Finland, see Table 2.3).² In Austria, the rate was 55.5% and in the Netherlands 54.5%. Social differences in intake account for much of the between-school differences in all three countries (43.8% in Germany, 40.7% in the Netherlands and 35.2% in Austria). This is an indication that the school systems are highly segregated along social as well as academic lines.

University selection also influences the graduation requirements in other countries. However, where systems are more comprehensive and secondary education less differentiated, both in terms of school organisation and program structure, universities tend to undertake their own selection process or be heavily involved in the establishment of selection criteria. They are less likely to rely on school qualifications as the sole requirement for admission. In Sweden, for example, which has some similar features in school organisation to the United States, all upper secondary programs give access to higher education, formally at least. Admission decisions on the selection of students are made by the individual universities. This occurs within a national framework of credit points based on teacher assessment, other specific tests such as the university standard aptitude test, and previous education and work experience. In Spain, successful completion of the *bachillerato* (baccalaureate) grants access to the university selection process. To enter university, students must currently, in addition to obtaining the *bachillerato*, pass a national admissions examination.

The academic courses and graduation criteria work in such systems to provide access to the opportunity to compete for university selection, rather than to a university place itself (as would happen in Austria or Germany). The most extreme version of this is in Japan where, despite highly competitive academic exams at different stages of schooling, at which success is necessary for access to the next stage, students who graduate with a high school 'leaving certificate' still have to sit for a competitive national university entrance exam in order to be considered for admission to university.

In such systems, the universities do not rely on the school qualification alone as the entry status marker. This is in part because the number of university places falls far short of the numbers of students graduating from the academic school programs. In some countries, such as Australia, the response is to use high school subject grades translated into a university entrance score. In other systems, such as in Sweden and Spain, it is to impose further selection requirements such as entry exams. It may be no coincidence that such practices occur in countries that have

²These figures were derived through an analysis of mathematics achievement using the PISA mathematics scale (see OECD, 2004, pp. 161–163 for an explanation of method). Variance was measured based on percentages of the average variance between OECD countries in student performance. For example, the total variance in student performance in the United States was 9,016 compared to the average OECD variance level of 8,593 giving a percentage of 104.9. For each country, variance is divided between that attributable to achievement levels of students in different schools (between-school differences) and that attributable to the range of student results within schools (within-school differences).

been successful in promoting higher proportions of students into academic programs in secondary school by delaying selection of branches of study to much later in schooling. A sizeable group of countries possess a largely comprehensive model in which students continue with a core curriculum until the end of the compulsory years (often at age 16). This is the model that exists in England and Scotland, many of the Nordic countries, as well as Spain, France and Italy. In these countries, students only choose a particular branch or type of schooling at the end of the compulsory phase, often following exams or assessments that lead to an accredited school certificate or qualification. Few countries have the system of secondary schooling that characterises the United States, Canada and most states of Australia in which there is no secondary school certificate or formal assessment to mark the end of the compulsory years.

Countries that postpone the point at which students have to choose a particular branch or type of schooling (those with no or low percentages of students in programs in the junior years tracking to high school vocational courses, see Table 2.3) do tend to encourage more students into academic programs leading to higher education. This can operate within the structure of a single certificate arrangement, as in the United States, where all students who graduate formally or technically qualify for higher education, or in a diversified high school program and accreditation structure as in Norway, Denmark, Spain, Japan and France where there are academic and alternative qualifications and only part of the student population enters a program oriented to university entry, even though the latter tends to be the majority of students.

Systems that defer the point of program choice tend to encourage more students into academic courses. But it would be wrong to conclude that institutional and program arrangements in such systems are not geared around the selective requirements of academic preparation for university entry. Even the most integrated and formally open secondary school systems tend to be organised around the needs of academic selection. Norway, for example, offers a wide range of general and vocational upper secondary programs which work to accommodate diversity in aptitudes and interests, while maintaining a more homogeneous group of the most academically skilled in the university-preparatory courses. Graduation from the academic preparatory courses is based on examination success and minimum grades in core subjects. In the United States, tracking serves the same purpose. Subject selection or more formal ability selection can work to group higher achieving students together in higher tracks, usually in mathematics and science classes, and low achieving students in lower track classes. The system of college preparatory classes for advanced students and general education and vocational classes for others sifts and sorts along academic lines, working to serve the needs of academic selection as the primary function.

The standards debate around graduation, and the push in the United States to install hurdle requirements through exit examinations and high-stakes testing, is usually focused on the standards of those who are not college-bound and the minimum skill levels they should possess or display in order to earn a diploma. A problem is that if higher standards are set (and high-quality learning and

achievement for all is a worthy national goal for education), it is important to ensure that the conditions are in place to deliver that high-quality learning for all. Currently, the upper secondary structures in most countries effectively prepare selected numbers of students for academic pathways. The challenge is around how effectively they deal with the learning needs and achievement standards of the remaining groups of students.

Alternative Pathways

Not all students are able to or want to pursue academic pathways leading to university. While traditionally upper secondary courses were designed mainly for an academic elite, most countries have developed alternative courses and qualifications to enable an increasing number of young people, with a wider range of abilities, to complete school and graduate with a relevant qualification. The alternatives mainly involve technical or vocational education. In these developments, one challenge for systems has been to ensure that the programs are of high quality, fostering commitment to learning and personal development, and having valued employment or further education and training outcomes. Another challenge has been to ensure that the programs provide standards of learning that enable continued study in further education once students leave school, rather than being terminal options. The quality of programs is critical in addressing the problems of dropout because it is often the sorts of students at risk of dropping out – those who are not achieving well, those who have tended to become disaffected with school and formal academic work – who are likely to be attracted to available alternatives.

Countries have taken different approaches to these challenges. They differ, for example, in terms of whether vocational and general streams run in parallel or in integrated programs, in terms of the range and organisation of vocational qualifications, in terms of the timing and nature of the choices that young people have to make between distinct pathways and post-school destinations, and in terms of assessment and graduation requirements. Three broad approaches are evident, and these are discussed in detail below.

The first type of approach is to integrate or incorporate vocational options within the general structure and organisation of a more traditional school curriculum. This often involves offering a menu of vocational subject or unit options from which students choose, in combination with general and academic subjects, options that can be used as part of credit sequences which accumulate and are counted with other credits to meet completion requirements. This approach could be described as an ‘education or school-based’ model of vocational provision because it attempts to incorporate vocational education into the existing structure and logic of more traditional secondary school studies. Even though vocational units or subjects can be organised around areas of employment, industry or occupation, the modules of study tend to be school-based and school-delivered, designed in line with assessment and syllabus requirements of traditional school subjects. This approach is

more frequently provided in systems that have comprehensive school settings in the upper secondary years attended by university-bound students as well as those pursuing other destinations.

One example is provided by the United States where students have vocational choices as part of a menu of subject options. The vocational subjects tend to be designed around specific occupations in particular industries such as agriculture, business or health care. The sort of pathway vocational-track students would follow to graduation is to take a minimum number of credits in compulsory areas (such as English, mathematics, social studies, science, health and physical education), along with a number of credits in elective subjects from a menu including vocational options. The vocational electives can represent as much as one third of the required high school study. Alternatively, students may choose not to take any vocational subjects, since most high school students are free to take as much – or as little – vocational coursework as they want. This means that there can be varying levels of intensity of study in vocational education. Figures from the 1990s reveal that while the majority of high school students in the United States took at least one vocational education course (defined very broadly to cover a range of subjects from occupationally specific labour market preparation subjects to consumer education and technology), about 21% took a concentrated sequence of units that could be described as a vocational program or track (Laird et al., 2006). The rest enrolled in either a college-preparatory track (38%) or a general track (neither college-preparatory nor vocational, 41%). Of those taking largely a vocational program, about a quarter also completed a college-preparatory curriculum.

Based on outcomes data, vocational programs would appear to deliver some benefits as an alternative pathway for potential dropouts. Bishop and Mane (2004) reported that compared to other course takers, students taking larger numbers of vocational education units or subjects were more often lower achievers (based on Grade 8 grade point average) and from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Even so, in an analysis of short- and long-term returns to high school study, Bishop and Mane found that compared to other school leavers, those who opted for more vocational education tended, all else equal, to spend more time employed both in the initial post-school years and 8 years later. Other studies report equivalent employment outcomes, through lower levels of participation and completion in post-secondary education and lower earnings for those with stronger vocational preparation in school (Laird et al., 2006; Levesque et al., 2000). Bishop and Mane (2004) noted that stronger emphasis on vocational preparation courses in upper secondary education tended to increase school attendance of 15- to 19-year-olds. Other work also suggests that, all else equal, the more vocational education classes the students take, the less likely they are to drop out (Mertens et al., 1982, for example), and that part of the reason for this is the positive effects of vocational education courses on student engagement resulting from participation in applied, work-based learning (Hughes et al., 2001; Steinberg, 1998).

A similar model of vocational education to that found in the United States operates in Australian schools. The majority of young people enter a general education pathway at the end of compulsory education (Year 10 in most states). Usually completed

over 2 years, students can take vocational education subjects as part of their senior school certificate. To qualify for a certificate, students must generally complete a sequence of elective units or subjects with most final year students needing to successfully complete a minimum number of subjects, including English. One difference from the United States is that as well as obtaining a secondary school certificate, students enrolled in vocational education courses can also obtain a separate certificate for their vocational study, effectively providing a dual qualification. Vocational education programs can consist of stand-alone, nationally recognised, industry-specific courses based on industry training packages, which are also accredited for the secondary school certificate, though integration into school certificates varies across states. Some of the vocational education programs contain structured workplace learning with expected competency-based learning outcomes included in assessment.

In 2001, about 21% of Year 12 (final school year) students in Australian schools enrolled in at least one vocational education subject or course (Lamb & Vickers, 2006).³ The rate was 29% for students from low SES backgrounds, and 11% for those from high SES backgrounds. The chances of unemployment in the first post-school year were lower among graduates who had undertaken some vocational preparation than among dropouts, and about the same as graduates who did not take any vocational education, though this varied depending on the type of program studied. There is also some evidence that students who studied vocational education courses in school were more likely to complete school because their study (including experiences in the workplace) helped them to form more positive views about learning and school. Students in Year 9 who reported plans to drop out more often completed school if they entered vocational courses rather than academic or general programs (Lamb & Vickers, 2006).

A second broad approach to the provision of alternative upper secondary pathways is to provide stand-alone vocational education qualifications where there is little or no attempt at integration with the academic or general high school curriculum. Instead, the alternative pathways have much stronger connections to employment and enterprises. The content of programs (including identified occupation skills and competencies) and assessment are often designed by agencies associated with employer and craft guilds, usually accredited or administered by labour and commerce ministries rather than education departments, and often legally governed by vocational training or commerce acts rather than education statutes. In such systems, vocational programs and qualifications have close links with the labour market and weak links with higher education, even though further education is often possible in the same vocational area. The programs are therefore sharply differentiated from academic programs where the main focus is preparing students for university. The programs and qualifications are mainly provided in separate schools. It is also a feature of such systems that separation based on selection or preferences tends to occur earlier in

³The rate is closer to 14% using the approach applied in the United States by Laird et al. (2006) in defining a vocational program or course as a concentrated sequence of vocational units or subjects.

school, and students sometimes enter schools and courses in lower secondary education that already orient them towards vocational programs in upper secondary education. There are several examples.

In Austria, young people choose between a general education and several vocational pathways at a relatively young age. Most opt for vocational/technical pathways, with about 20% of all students completing their ninth year of compulsory schooling at a 1-year pre-vocational school (*Polytechnische Schule*), which qualifies them for transition to apprenticeship training within the dual system. There are a number of different types of schools offering technical and vocational education programs in the upper secondary years. In general, there are two pathways, the first involving apprenticeships as part of the dual system, and the second involving study either at a secondary technical or vocational school (*Berufsbildende mittlere Schule*), which provides intermediate vocational training, or at an advanced-level secondary vocational school (*Berufsbildende höhere Schule*). After reaching the end of the compulsory years, over 50% of students enter a school-based vocational route or an apprenticeship.

Similar structures are found in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Denmark. In Germany, after the universal 4-year primary-school period, educational pathways diverge within the secondary school system, which consists of vocationally focused schools (*Hauptschule*), general secondary schools (*Realschule*), academic schools (*Gymnasium*) and schools that combine these elements (*Gesamtschule*). The different pathways often converge within the dual system, which accepts graduates of all schools. At upper secondary level, the majority of German students (two thirds of each age cohort) undertake vocational training. In the Netherlands, secondary education, compulsory until the age of 16, is offered at several levels. Lower secondary vocational education (VMBO) programs combine general and vocational education, after which pupils can continue in upper secondary vocational education and training (MBO). Upper secondary vocational education (MBO) is offered in the areas of economics, technology, health, personal care, social welfare and agriculture. MBO programs vary in length from 1 to 4 years, as well as varying in level (from 1 to 4). About half of all upper secondary students take vocational programs.

There are variations to this broad approach, with some systems delaying the separation of students along academic and vocational pathways until the post-compulsory years. Examples are provided by Italy, Spain, Japan and France. In France, for example, many children enter vocational school after finishing lower secondary school. In vocational school, they do either a *certificate d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP) or a *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP). Neither of these qualifications gives access to tertiary-level courses, but most young people who do enter vocational school leave for work. Both courses are taken over 2 years, and both offer training in a wide range of occupations in industrial, commercial and service sectors. It is possible for pupils who pass the BEP to do a further 2 years study to get the *baccalauréat professionnel* (or *bac pro*), giving access to university. About 40% of secondary school students enrol in vocational programs, and about 17% leave school having completed the CAP or BEP. In Japan, of the 30% of high

school students who take a vocationally based program, approximately two thirds enter vocational high schools (either special training colleges or miscellaneous schools) for a 3-year course. The remaining third enter colleges of technology for a 5-year course. Vocational programs combine learning modes, with theoretical and practical education at a vocational school or college alternating with practical training in an approved company or organisation. Courses are based on promoting applied technical skills linked to key occupations.

A third broad approach to the provision of alternative pathways is one in which separate vocational education programs are offered in upper secondary education, but these programs retain links with academic and general education and keep open avenues to higher education. Examples are provided in several Nordic countries, in particular Sweden, Norway and Finland. In Sweden and Norway, upper secondary education is largely provided in comprehensive schools as in the United States and Australia. In Sweden, after completing compulsory schooling, students proceed to a 3-year upper secondary school. Starting upper secondary education means choosing between a wide set of different educational tracks or programs. There are 17 national programs and numerous regional special programs. Over 50% of students embark on one of 14 national vocational programs when they enter the post-compulsory years, with the remaining students taking up one of two general or academic courses. All programs include a common set of core subjects (Swedish/Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics, religion, civics, science studies, physical education and health, and artistic activities) with the core subjects accounting for about one third of the tuition. The remaining time, pupils study program-specific subjects and choices. The national programs are frameworks within which the pupils can choose various specialisations, based on a sequence of credit-based units, with graduation requiring successful completion of a requisite number of core and other credits. The vocational programs are based on specific occupations and industries. All national programs qualify students for further study including higher education.

Completion of basic education in Finland leads to a choice in upper secondary school between general education or a vocational program. Both alternatives last 3 years and completion of the studies provides eligibility to apply for higher education. About 50% of high school students undertake vocational education. There are 52 vocational qualifications which provide generic basic vocational skills for work (in any field) and more specialised skills in one employment sector. For every program, 25% is core or elective and 75% is vocational studies, including about 15% in on-the-job learning. As in Norway, a vocational qualification can be obtained either through school-based education, or in the form of apprenticeship training. Apprenticeship training is based on an employment agreement (apprenticeship contract) between the student and the employer, confirmed by the education provider. The completion of a vocational qualification takes 3 years and provides, formally at least, access to higher education.

In Norway, upper secondary education is split into 15 education programs: 3 prepare for higher education and 12 are vocational. About half of the commencing cohort enters vocational pathways, though it is possible for students to transfer to the general education pathway in order to qualify for tertiary education. As in

Sweden, students undertake a set of common core and specialist subjects. Each educational program comprises a more basic first year, and 2 years of specialisation. Most vocational programs convert the last year of specialisation into 2 years of apprenticeship training in enterprises. The vocational preparation is based on specific occupations and industries.

Impact of Alternative Pathways

There are few robust comparative evaluations of the effectiveness of the various alternative pathways looking at the issues of differentiation, inclusiveness and outcomes. It is possible to look in a descriptive way at the relationship between vocational pathways and graduation rates across countries by mapping rates of school completion against proportions of vocational graduates. This information is displayed in Fig. 2.1. The completion rates presented in Fig. 2.1 are cohort-based rates rather than the OECD measure using the percentage of upper secondary graduates to the population at the typical age of graduation. The rates were derived from reports provided by individual Ministries of Education and National Bureaus of Statistics.⁴

Figure 2.1 suggests that the different approaches to providing vocational pathways are related, on the surface at least, to differences in overall rates of completion. It shows that there is a tendency for countries that have higher completion rates to also have higher proportions of vocational education graduates.

The group of nations that operate vocational education programs as separate qualifications or tracks, including Germany, Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands, tend to have the highest rates of school completion. Sweden, which offers vocational programs that can qualify students for higher education, also has a relatively high graduation rate. Other factors need to be considered before drawing any causal conclusions, but the patterns suggest that systems enrolling more students in vocational education tend to have high rates of school completion.

Do high school completion rates promoted through program diversification come at the cost of stronger levels of social stratification? Diversification does contribute to social and achievement differentiation within nations: participation in different pathways is strongly linked to family background, and the different pathways promote social stratification. One measure of this is provided by OECD research using PISA data on the achievement of 15-year-olds collected from more than 35 OECD and other nations in 2000 (OECD, 2005). The data were used to measure the degree of institutional differentiation in each education system, and revealed that the countries that have more program and institutional diversification, such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, also have substantially higher levels of between-school variance in SES (OECD, 2005, p. 54). Differences in SES

⁴For a comparison using OECD estimates of graduation, see Bishop and Mane (2004, pp. 384–385).

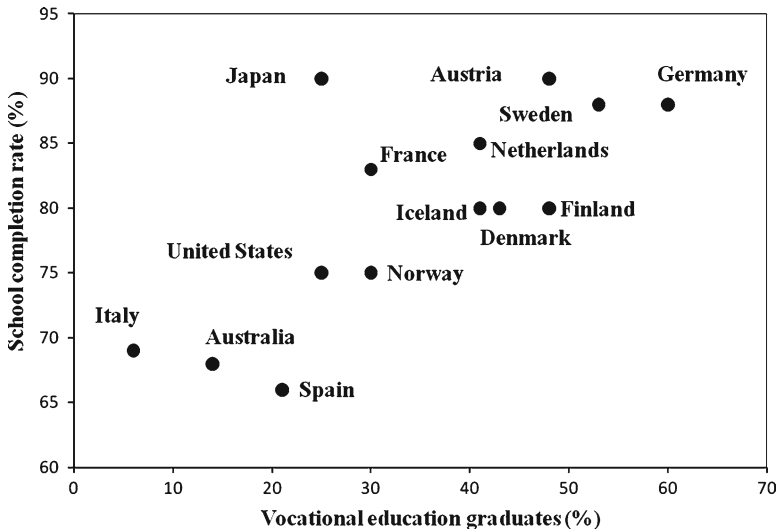


Fig. 2.1 Upper secondary vocational education graduates, by school completion rates: selected OECD nations (Sources: see list at bottom of Table 2.2)

composition are more marked in those systems that promote selection of students into different schools and tracks at younger ages, even if these systems ultimately achieve high rates of school completion. Levels of social stratification across schools and programs are lower in systems that operate more comprehensive models of schooling. In highly diversified or segmented systems, social background is strongly linked to the school one attends and the curriculum track one takes.

Program and institutional diversification also promote stronger inequality in achievement. The second column in Table 2.3 shows cross-national differences in the levels of between-school variance in student mathematics achievement reported by the OECD using PISA data from the 2003 survey. The proportion of between-school variance in student performance was obtained through multilevel analysis and expressed as a percentage of total variance in student performance within a country (OECD, 2006). Total variance for each country is an aggregate of estimated levels of differences between schools and differences between students within schools. The figures show that the more diversified systems had the highest levels of between-school differences in achievement. Austria (55.5%), Germany (56.4%) and the Netherlands (54.5%) recorded between-school variance in mathematics achievement for 15-year-olds at rates more than double the rates for the United States (27.1%), England (21.1%), Spain (17.2%) and Sweden (10.9%). In the more diversified systems, students' achievement levels are strongly affected by the schools that they attend and the courses that they take. Recent *Education at a Glance* figures (OECD, 2007, p. 279) show that in many countries, even after controlling for social and other background differences, achievement levels of vocational education students are significantly lower than for students in academic and general programs. This suggests that the vocational education pathways attract

lower achieving students and can also be associated with lower standards of learning and achievement in areas such as mathematics (OECD, 2007).

A measure of the impact of social segregation on achievement in highly segmented systems is provided in the amount of between-school variance in student achievement that is accounted for by differences in student and school SES. Column 3 in Table 2.3 reports the percentage of variance in mathematics achievement explained by student SES and school social intake. In the highly segmented systems, student and school SES account for high proportions of between-school achievement differences. In Austria (35.2%), Germany (43.8%) and the Netherlands (40.7%), the percentage of between-school variance explained by the SES of students and schools is nearly double or more than the level of the United States (18.7%), and larger again when compared against England (15.3%), Spain (9.8%), Sweden (5.8%) and Australia (15.4%). Highly segmented systems are also more socially segregated.

While heightened social stratification may well be a risk of program and institutional diversification implemented as a means to achieving high upper secondary completion rates, this may be offset to some extent if the vocational and other alternative qualifications provide tangible benefits. This is a point made by Shavit and Muller (2000) in their cross-national study of vocational secondary education. They argue that alternative pathways provided by vocational education can work as a safety net, enhancing students' chances of finding gainful employment as skilled workers, while at the same time operating as a mechanism of social reproduction by diverting working-class students from upper secondary programs that lead to higher education and the professions. From this perspective, students who remain at school and complete a vocational or other non-academic upper secondary qualification are in a better position than those who drop out without completing any qualification, even if gaining the qualification has been achieved by being diverted away from more highly valued academic programs.

Do the alternative pathways offered in different systems provide good outcomes for students? Do they enhance students' chances of finding gainful employment as skilled workers? Estimates of economic prospects in the transition to the labour market suggest that there are returns to upper secondary qualifications in aggregate. OECD-derived estimates of unemployment among 20- to 24-year-olds show that unemployment rates are much lower for those with an upper secondary qualification than for those without, and as much as three times lower in some countries (see columns 7 and 8 in Table 2.3 for comparative rates across countries). However, these estimates do not separate out the effects of different types of upper secondary qualifications and pathways. While there are few robust international comparative evaluations of the effectiveness of the various alternative pathways, assessments of impact are available for individual systems and they tend to highlight the importance and value of vocational education qualifications, at least in comparison with dropping out and not gaining an upper secondary qualification.

Figure 2.2, for example, shows employment and unemployment experiences of a sample of 1998 school leavers over seven post-school years in France, by school attainment (Moncel, 2007). Long-term unemployment refers to those with either long

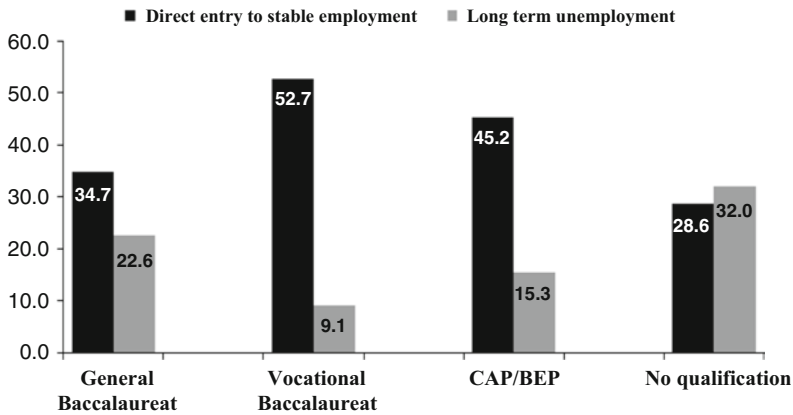


Fig. 2.2 Stable employment and long-term unemployment as main labour market experiences over seven post-school years, by attainment: France (%) (Source: Moncel, 2007)

periods looking for work over the first seven post-school years, or recurrent spells of unemployment over that time. The patterns suggest that school leavers with vocational qualifications, either vocational baccalaureate or the shorter CAP and BEP certificates, are far less likely to experience long-term unemployment (9.1% and 15.3%, respectively) compared to either those who graduate with a general baccalaureate (22.6%) or those who do not gain any upper secondary qualification (32%). Those with vocational qualifications are also more successful at gaining early direct entry from school to stable long-term employment. The results suggest positive returns to alternative pathways in France.

The results in France are consistent with patterns in other countries. Figure 2.3 presents unemployment rates by qualification in four countries: the Netherlands, Ireland, Scotland and Sweden. The figures were derived by Ianelli and Raffe (2007) from national school leavers' surveys undertaken in the mid-1990s and are based on activities of leavers up to 4 years after leaving school. The results show that in each country, there is a lower rate of unemployment amongst those who have upper secondary qualifications than amongst dropouts (those with less than an upper secondary qualification). The gap can be quite large. In Sweden, for example, the rate of unemployment for those with vocational qualifications is almost three times lower than the rate for dropouts. In Scotland and Ireland, there are also positive effects for vocational qualifications. In the Netherlands, young people with vocational non-apprenticeship qualifications are half as likely to be unemployed as those without an upper secondary qualification. In all countries, those with an academic qualification were least likely to be unemployed.

The results for France and these other four nations are consistent with studies in other countries showing positive effects for upper secondary vocational qualifications compared to lower secondary education only or no qualifications (Payne, 1995; Dearden et al., 2001; Ryan, 2001, 2003; Van de Werfhorst, 2002; Gangl, 2003; Silverberg et al., 2004).

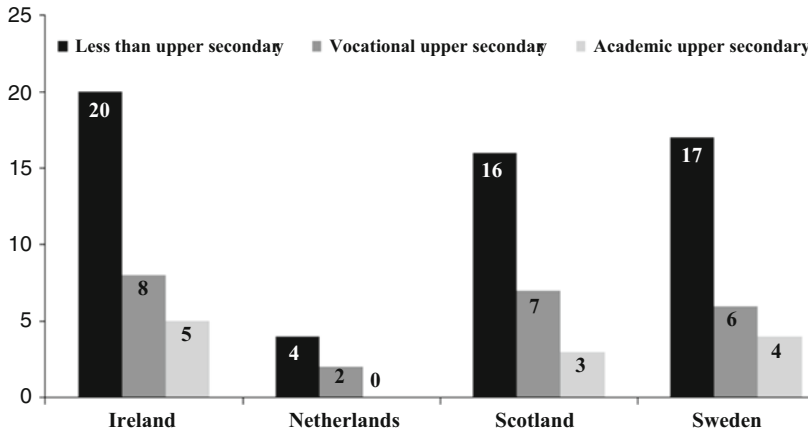


Fig. 2.3 Unemployment rates, by school attainment and qualification type: Ireland, Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden (%) (Source: Ianello & Raffe, 2007)

The results for France shown in Fig. 2.2 reveal an unexpected feature, which is the suggestion that there are positive returns for vocational qualifications when compared with academic qualifications, at least as measured by long-term unemployment. The results on other labour market outcome measures, however, reverse this pattern. According to Moncel's (2007) analysis, fewer graduates from vocational compared to academic programs enter higher education, and for those in the labour market, the vocational education effect is not evident when it comes to earnings or occupational prestige, at least for those with a CAP or BEP certificate compared to those with a general baccalaureate.

Making valid cross-national comparisons of the impact of different models of program provision and pathways on student outcomes is not a simple matter, partly because there are so few comparisons and little available comparative data that can support robust analytical modelling. In terms of inclusiveness, at a broad system level, the simple comparisons shown in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 and Fig. 2.1 suggest that despite the social segregation, the highly diversified models of provision in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria can promote high levels of completion. The percentage of 15- to 19-year-olds not in education or training is relatively low in countries that have such arrangements (4.7% in Germany, 4.6 in the Netherlands and 3.0% in Denmark). This is partly due to older compulsory leaving age (at least in Germany) and long duration of all of the pathways, but also due to the diversity of programs that these systems offer to meet the needs and interests of a wide range of young people. The attainment levels of 20- to 24-year-olds suggest that these systems do well in getting high proportions of school leavers to graduate with an upper secondary qualification, even if for the majority it is from a vocational education pathway.

The highest attainment levels are in the systems that provide separate vocational programs in upper secondary education, but which permit movement between such

programs and academic or general education and provide avenues from alternative pathways to higher education. In Finland and Sweden, fewer than 10% of 20- to 24-year-olds are without an upper secondary qualification or not in education and training. Furthermore, these countries have comparatively high rates of graduation from general and academic pathways and strong entry rates into higher education (20% or more above the OECD average).

In terms of labour market outcomes, the simple comparisons at a system level shown in Table 2.3 may reflect at least in part the nature and structure of pathways taken. In every country, the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds not in education and unemployed in 2004 is larger for those who left school without an upper secondary qualification than for those who left with a qualification. In some countries, the rates of unemployment are quite large. For example, the rates of unemployment in France are comparatively high for both groups (23.7% for dropouts and 9.8% for graduates). Yet, the large gap between the two groups suggests, particularly when viewed in conjunction with the cohort graduation rates presented in Fig. 2.2, some capacity for the vocational pathways in France to connect a proportion of young people to the labour market in the initial school-to-work transition period. In some countries, the provision of alternative pathways can also be associated with high rates of transition to higher education, suggesting that the range of upper secondary pathways is providing part of the youth cohort with high-quality vocational education qualifications combined with university entry certification. Sweden and Finland both have above average rates of entry to higher education, high rates of school completion, low rates of social segregation across schools and strong returns to upper secondary qualifications when compared against those outcomes for dropouts.

It is difficult to conclude much from the comparisons of outcomes in Table 2.3, however, because the results do not separate out the effects of the different alternative pathways in each country. Nor do they take account of differences between the populations of students who did and did not graduate, which is needed to assess the independent effects of the alternative qualifications. It is not possible to accurately measure effects without more rigorous modelling of the returns to qualifications. Such studies comparing returns to upper secondary qualifications, particularly cross-national studies, are rare. One exception is the study by Shavit and Muller (1998, 2000). They examined the impact of vocational education qualifications on occupational attainment in the early post-school years using similarly structured country data sets (from the 1980s and 1990s). Some of their results are presented in Table 2.4.

The results in columns 2 and 3 of the table are the log odds ratios of getting a first job as a skilled rather than unskilled worker. The numbers (presented as log odds ratios) are a way of representing the probability of gaining skilled work rather than unskilled work. The larger the number above 1, the more positive the effect of vocational education in helping graduates gain a job as a skilled worker. The results suggest that in most countries, upper secondary vocational qualifications have positive effects compared against dropout (not gaining any school qualifications), though not in Sweden or the United States. There are mixed patterns when effects of vocational qualifications are compared against academic education. In the

Table 2.4 Country differences in the effects of vocational education qualifications on occupational outcomes for males

	Log chances of entering labour market as skilled rather than unskilled worker		Occupational prestige (standard deviation units)
	Compared to dropout	Compared to academic qualification	Compared to academic qualification
Australia	2.53	2.57	0.04
United Kingdom	1.72	0.62	-0.15
France	1.54	0.45	-0.28
Germany	3.05	na	-0.30
Italy	1.11	0.22	-0.16
Netherlands	1.14	1.10	-0.36
Sweden	0.59	0.52	-0.51
United States	0.71	0.20	-0.11

Source: Shavit & Muller (2000).

Netherlands and Australia, the results are positive (numbers greater than 1) for vocational qualifications, suggesting that there are gains to vocational training in school. In all of the other countries, the results favour academic education. The same is true in looking at the results for occupational prestige (the social standing or status of occupations). The authors claim that cross-national differences in effects of vocational education are in part related to differences in institutional characteristics and program design, with effects bigger in countries where programs have a strong occupational specificity and where there are strong linkages with labour market organisations (Shavit & Muller, 2000). It is important to note that the results relate only to the first job on entry to the labour market and may not reflect longer-term career effects. Vocational education effects in career beginnings may be short-lived as students who gained academic training take advantage of better career advancement. No account is taken of rates of entry to higher education and further study. Furthermore, in some countries such as Australia, the data relate to periods when vocational education in schools was undeveloped and involved only very small numbers.

A more recent study of four countries by Iannelli and Raffe (2007) examined employment outcomes for young people making the transition from school to work in four countries: the Netherlands, Ireland, Scotland and Sweden. They compared outcomes according to different types of school qualifications and across countries. The study included calculations of the probabilities of employment outcomes controlling for country, qualification level and grades. The findings revealed that at a broad level vocational qualifications were more likely than lower secondary education to lead to participation in post-secondary education (at least for males). Vocational education options were less likely than academic qualifications to lead to study in post-secondary education. There was a positive vocational education effect for entry to employment rather than being unemployed when compared with

dropouts, but no effect in comparison with academic graduates. Differences were also reported across countries, with the vocational education effects appearing stronger in the country that emphasised employment-linked or employment-based vocational programs.

Pathways to Completion for School Dropouts

Despite the range of alternative programs offered to encourage more young people to remain in school and complete, most countries have numbers of students who drop out before gaining a qualification and the numbers can be large. In Australia, the dropout rate is about 30% (Lamb et al., 2004). In the United Kingdom, one estimate places it at about 25%, though much higher if it includes those who did not obtain five or more A* to C grade General Certificate of Secondary Education (end of compulsory education) results – this would place the dropout rate at closer to 40% according to estimates for 2005/2006 published by the Office for National Statistics (2006). For the Netherlands, the level is around 15%, with a rate of 10% for those entering vocational pathways and 4% for those in general or academic programs (ven de Steeg & Webbink, 2006; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2007). In Denmark and Finland, it is about 10% (Ministry of Education, 2005; Statistics Finland, 2007), in Spain over 30% (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006), and in France around 17% (Moncel, 2007).

Systems have responded to the problem of dropout in different ways. Some have resorted to legal and rather blunt measures by increasing the compulsory school leaving age, a measure which may keep students at school, but does not guarantee successful graduation, in part because it does not address the reasons why young people want to quit school in the first place. But many have responded by strengthening or putting in place opportunities for dropouts to gain upper secondary or equivalent qualifications outside of school. These external or post-school alternative pathways provide opportunities for study and graduation mainly through a range of educational or employment-based schemes. Some of these measures are occasionally criticised for their potential to encourage or induce young people to drop out of school – young people who may otherwise have remained in school and obtained a qualification. One pattern that may reflect this is the gender difference in dropout rates. The tendency for males to drop out of school at a greater rate than females in some countries may be linked to the availability of a wider range of alternatives for males, such as apprenticeships, as well as changes in labour demand (for example, in Australia, see Lamb et al., 2004). Some alternatives may work this way; however, systems face a critical dilemma – students may choose to drop out even if alternatives are not available. With large existing numbers of dropouts in an era where skills and education are more important than ever, can systems afford to restrict opportunities for young people to re-engage in study? Some econometric modelling of alternatives in the United States suggests that while alternative schemes may encourage some to drop out, their removal would not necessarily produce major reductions in dropout rates (Agodini & Dynarski, 2000; Tyler, 2003).

This section will look briefly at some of the main alternative pathways for dropouts to gain upper secondary or equivalent qualifications. There are three main categories examined: (1) those that are equivalent upper secondary credentialing programs, (2) those that provide employment-based education and training pathways such as apprenticeships, and (3) those that involve education-based qualifications through tertiary education institutions.

Upper Secondary Credential Equivalents

Some systems have developed equivalency credentialing programs for young people who do not gain a school-based diploma or certificate. The programs represent equivalents to the general or main high school graduation qualifications. There are two main examples. The first is the General Educational Development (GED) tests in the United States and Canada – a series of tests (in writing, social studies, science, reading and mathematics) that can be taken by those who have not gained a high school diploma. If successful in these tests, a qualification is awarded attesting to the achievement of high-school level academic skills.

The second scheme is the high school graduation proficiency qualification test in Japan. It is similar to the GED in that it is open to those who have not gained their high school diploma (usually those who have been truant from school or home schooled) and it aims to assess the level of skills across key subject areas to secondary school graduation level. The examination gives young people the opportunity to be certified that they have an academic ability equivalent to mainstream secondary school graduates. Success in the tests gives candidates the opportunity to then take the competitive university entry examinations.

In the United States, according to recent figures, about 9% of school leavers successfully complete a GED within 8 years of leaving school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Studies on returns suggest that those who obtain a GED are less likely to go to college than those who obtain a traditional high school diploma, and they have lower earnings in later life (Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Murnane et al., 2000; Rumberger & Lamb, 2003). Murnane et al. (2000) estimate that about 30% of GED recipients had entered college by age 27 compared to 69% of those with a regular diploma. Recent work suggests that in terms of returns the benefits of completing the GED work differently depending on skill levels, providing benefits mainly to those dropouts with the lowest cognitive skills. For dropouts with stronger skills, completion of the GED is not associated with higher earnings (Boesel et al., 1998; Murnane et al., 2000; Tyler et al., 2000). While the returns for those who gain a GED may not be as positive as for those who achieve a high school diploma, GED certification does play a role in the educational attainment of high school dropouts (a point made by Maralani, 2003). Many dropouts resume their schooling at some point and go on to earn a GED. According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (1998), those who gain a GED are three times more likely to enter a post-secondary institution than dropouts who do not earn a high school credential.

Apprenticeship Qualifications

In some nations, apprenticeship training is an important pathway for school dropouts. While in countries such as Germany and Austria, through the dual system, apprenticeships are linked to the school system, in other countries such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, they are generally provided as post-secondary education and training. Apprenticeship-type programs generally involve an indenture or contractual agreement with an employer where a young person is expected to undertake a period of formal training in a classroom setting, sometimes referred to as *block release*, as well as on-the-job experience. The programs are designed to equip young people with the skills associated with a particular craft or trade and to provide certification through widely recognised qualifications. In most systems, apprenticeships are a structured program of vocational preparation sponsored by an employer, involving both part-time education and on-the-job training and work experience, leading to a recognised vocational qualification, and taking up to 4 years to complete. Such schemes are often appealing to young people who drop out of school because they provide a wage while learning (often a training wage, and usually below average earnings for young people not in training). They also involve the acquisition of skills through applied learning in workplaces, again often appealing to dropouts who have become disengaged from formal classroom learning in school settings, providing an alternative for young people not attracted by full-time school. Formally, most systems provide the possibility for moving to higher levels of training after completion of apprenticeship qualifications, though actual progression rates are often low (Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle [CEDEFOP], 2001).

Apprenticeships and apprenticeship arrangements vary widely across nations. In some countries, such as the United States, apprenticeships are less well developed as a system of training for young people, organised around a smaller number of occupations, and mainly operate for young adults; therefore, they play less of a role for dropouts. In other systems, such as Australia, they are the major form of education and training available to dropouts. Across nations, apprenticeship programs vary on such matters as length of training (from 6 months to 4 years), how they are entered (through employment contract or formal college enrolment), the requirements around formal learning (initial period of formal training, or on-going mixture of workplace and classroom training, for example), time in the workplace and areas of training. The traditional model of apprenticeship in many systems has been a 4-year indenture in a traditional craft area such as an electrical trade, plumbing, carpentry or automotive trade. However, there have been major reforms in several countries, expanding the areas of occupational training and the length of training. In Ireland and Australia, for example, traineeships have been introduced which provide training in white-collar occupations, such as clerical work (Barry, 2007; Dockery et al., 2005). The traineeships are usually for 12 months rather than 4 years. Modern apprenticeships in the United Kingdom can be short in duration – less than 12 months – and resemble more a program of youth training than a formal apprenticeship indenture program (Ryan & Unwin, 2001; Ryan, 2001).

The evidence available to compare the effects and value of apprenticeships as a pathway for dropouts across nations is meagre. There is information available on individual systems comparing the relative merits of apprenticeships with other qualifications, though. In Australia, for example, the national school dropout rate (numbers of young people entering secondary school and leaving without having gained a senior school qualification) is about 30%, 36% for males and 24% for females (Lamb et al., 2004). In the 1990s, up to 36% of male dropouts took up an apprenticeship and 28% gained a qualification by age 24 (Lamb et al., 1998). For females, the rate of take-up was about 8% and the qualification rate was about 6%. Recent figures suggest similar levels (Lamb & Mason, 2008). Traineeships extend structured training programs to a wider range of occupations than those represented by apprenticeships. Like apprenticeships, traineeships provide wages, but these are usually lower than those of apprenticeships, and traineeships generally provide one year of training rather than four. About 12% of male dropouts gain a traineeship qualification and about 9% of female dropouts do.

Returns to apprenticeships in Australia appear favourable for male dropouts. Regression estimates of the length of time unemployed at age 24 suggest that males gaining apprenticeship qualifications spend significantly less time unemployed than dropouts without qualifications and those with other types of vocational qualifications (Lamb et al., 1998). The rate is similar to that for school graduates. The patterns are similar for females with apprenticeship qualifications though the gaps are not significant. In terms of earnings, average weekly earnings regression equations for 24-year-old full-time workers suggest that males who complete apprenticeships earn 10–11% more than male 24-year-old graduates who do not undertake any post-school education or training. The wage benefits for females are lower, with female apprenticeship graduates earning 2% more than 24-year-olds who had graduated from high school without undertaking any further study.

The effects may hold over careers. Borland et al. (2000) estimated returns using the results of a wage regression equation for male weekly earnings from 1997 data. The equation was estimated for employed males (full- and part-time) aged 18–59. The estimates suggest that those with trade or apprenticeship qualifications earn marginally less than school graduates (3% less), but they earn significantly more than dropouts without any qualifications (14% more).

Evidence from other countries suggests some differences in effects. In France, compared to other labour market entrants, apprentices are likely to have more stable early labour market experiences, spending more of their early working lives in employment compared to other labour market entrants, though their pay is lower at the end of 5 years (Bonnal et al., 1999). In the United Kingdom, apprenticeship graduates tend to have higher employment rates, though only for moderate and low achievers. They also tend to have higher earnings, but only for males (Payne, 1995). In several countries, apprenticeship training appears to do less for women than for men, in terms of entry rates, occupational access and subsequent labour market outcomes. This may be because there is considerable gender segregation in the areas of apprenticeship training, consistent with patterns of gender segmentation in occupations and labour markets.

In sum, apprenticeships provide an important alternative pathway for school dropouts. Compared to those who attempt to enter the labour market without post-school education and training, apprenticeship graduates enjoy benefits in terms of stable employment, less risk of unemployment and higher earnings. Apprenticeship shows up particularly well in such comparisons, being associated with gains in pay as well as employment. The returns may not hold up as well compared against mainstream high school qualifications, but for male dropouts the evidence suggests that they are an important avenue of successful transition from school to full-time work.

Vocational Education Qualifications

Another avenue for school dropouts to obtain qualifications is the range of vocational education qualifications usually offered through tertiary institutions such as further education colleges, polytechnics, and adult and community colleges, depending on the country. In many countries, more and more young people have come to rely on opportunities in community and adult education and training as they make the transition from school to work. As a result, the numbers of school leavers who enter employment without participating in some recognised form of further education or training have declined (for example, see OECD, 2006, p. 329, for trends in participation in education and training of 20- to 24-year-olds). It is through the tertiary education and training system that dropouts who struggle to find work can acquire the skills and attain the upper secondary or equivalent qualifications that can help make them more competitive in the labour market. The parts of the tertiary education sector that offer opportunities for dropouts to gain vocational qualifications comprise a vast number of public and private providers catering to the needs of a wide range of clients. The principal role they play for dropouts is to help provide alternative pathways through which dropouts can enter study, gain qualifications and pursue work, as well as proceed to higher levels of vocational education and general study within the vocational or the higher education sector.

The evidence available for comparisons of the way tertiary education opportunities work for dropouts in different countries is meagre. Data on individual systems looking at comparative returns to qualifications are more readily available. One such study in the United Kingdom was undertaken by McIntosh (2004) who studied the outcomes of the vocational qualifications pathways for 25% of school leavers at 23–25 years of age who had dropped out of school without any qualifications. The study took data on the cohort of individuals who left school in 1993, 1994 and 1995, and examined their further education decisions and early labour market outcomes. The results revealed that 56% of male and 54% of female dropouts gained at least one vocational qualification by their mid-20s. Vocational qualifications are provided at different levels associated with length of study and depth of skills training, with Level 3 qualifications equivalent to A levels (academic high school qualifications). Table 2.5 shows the proportions of dropouts gaining qualifications at each level from Level 1 (low) to Level 3 and above (high).

Table 2.5 Qualification pathways of 23- to 25-year-old dropouts: United Kingdom

No school qualifications	Males (%)	Females (%)
+ no vocational qualification	44.1	46.1
+ vocational level 1 (GCSE D-G standard)	30.7	29.9
+ vocational level 2 (GCSE A-C standard)	11.1	10.8
+ vocational level 3 (A levels)	5.4	4.1
+ above level 3	8.7	9.1

Source: McIntosh (2004).

Table 2.6 Employment and earnings of 23- to 25-year-old school leavers with no qualifications: United Kingdom

	Females		Males	
	Employed (%)	HRLY wage	Employed (%)	HRLY wage
No school qualifications				
+ no vocational qualification	30.6	5.53	68.2	6.05
+ vocational level 1	58.3	7.35	75.3	7.25
+ vocational level 2	70.3	5.44	88.7	7.14
+ vocational level 3	77.4	5.79	94.3	6.22
+ above level 3	93.5	8.23	77.9	9.45
High school qualifications				
+ no vocational qualification	83.9	6.87	94.4	8.14
+ vocational level 1	90.6	7.81	91.5	7.38
+ vocational level 2	78.0	6.69	94.8	7.98
+ vocational level 3	90.5	8.19	95.8	8.18
+ above level 3	92.0	8.85	91.6	10.03

Source: McIntosh (2004).

The analysis then went on to show that vocational qualifications can significantly impact labour market success, with the group of unqualified school leavers being much less likely to be employed than both dropouts who later gained vocational qualifications, and school leavers who had obtained upper secondary qualifications at school (see Table 2.6). The analysis reveals that those dropouts who do obtain vocational Level 2 or 3 qualifications are much more likely to be in employment than those who do not, their employment likelihood closing significantly on that of those individuals who reach these levels via the academic route at school. To a lesser extent, the wage gap also closes with vocational qualification acquisition, at least for initially unqualified males.

Results obtained in similar studies undertaken for dropouts in Australia are more equivocal. As in the United Kingdom, vocational qualifications in Australia are provided at different levels associated with length of study and depth of skills training. Basic and middle level vocational qualifications, which are the main qualifications undertaken by dropouts in their initial post-school years, are associated with weak, sometimes negative, employment and earnings returns when compared against school

graduation, and provide little advantage over dropouts who do not undertake any further study (Lamb et al., 1998). This is not the case with higher level vocational qualifications, which show positive returns, but the participation and graduation rates for dropouts at these levels are low. In the 1990s, approximately 18% of male dropouts gained basic or middle-level vocational qualifications by age 24, with 3% of male and 7% of female dropouts gaining high-level vocational qualifications.

Figures are available on rates of entry to post-secondary education and training for dropouts in other countries (see for example, Berkthold et al., 1998, for results on the subsequent educational attainment of dropouts in the United States, and Human Resources Development Canada, 2000, for Canadian estimates). However, data are not readily available to assess the outcomes of gaining alternative qualifications.

Conclusion

In building mass systems of secondary schooling, all nations face the challenge of finding ways to deal with pupil diversity – of finding a place for all – while maintaining high standards of learning. Some nations have been more successful in doing this than others. Historically, the development of the comprehensive high school and the high school diploma in the United States led the way in providing an architecture for secondary education that was inclusive and could promote mass rates of completion. This did not mean that the largely elective-based model did not continue to act as a powerful mechanism of social stratification, but it did help provide a system of mass delivery well in advance of other systems. Today, however, it is a different picture. Rates of graduation in the United States have tended to become stable, entrenched, whereas in other countries the rates have continued to grow, with some systems now achieving high levels of upper secondary completion.

Improvements in other countries have been partly achieved through developments based on the United States model. The Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway and Finland have all reformed their secondary school systems, implementing a comprehensive school model. In addition, during the 1980s and 1990s, these three nations implemented a number of educational reforms to upper secondary program provision focusing largely on vocational education as a means of encouraging students to stay in school. The approach in Sweden, for example, involves a group of vocational and general programs incorporated into a single school certificate. There are 14 vocational programs, structured around different occupational fields. All programs have a number of common subjects (providing a broad-based, general education) as well as generic and specialist options within vocational fields. The structure bridges the divide between vocational and general education by providing a stronger initial foundation in the early stages of all programs to prepare students for further learning. Foundation learning is followed by specialised training. Assessment is continuous with successful completion involving national tests for core subjects. Sweden has a fairly high proportion of vocational graduates, and a comparatively high overall graduation rate.

Another approach to dealing with the issues of pupil diversity and dropout is through offering an array of programs leading to separate qualifications, rather than a single certificate. National models that deal with the problem of pupil diversity through institutional, program and certificate diversification – providing alternative pathways through separate qualifications or certificates (academic, vocational, technical, specialist) – can also successfully promote high rates of graduation. Austria and Germany are good examples; they achieve high overall graduation rates. Vocational education graduates make up the majority of school graduates. Both systems have frameworks that find a place for everyone, though the places are not necessarily of equal value in terms of access to knowledge, learning and outcomes. They are also based on early selection, with students grouped along different school and program paths well before the senior years. The system is based on a selective rather than comprehensive school model. Social divisions across the different levels of qualifications in such systems can be quite marked. In such systems, inclusion can come at the cost of relegation for students from working class backgrounds. This leads to weaker opportunities for social mobility and a greater tendency for the reproduction of social differences in education across generations, even if the vocational alternatives provide positive labour market returns and work as a safety net.

As systems implement further reforms to raise completion rates and eliminate dropout, they will need to build programs and institutional arrangements that can cater for students from diverse backgrounds and with varying talents. The challenge for systems in doing this will be to ensure quality and consistency in the standards of learning for all students across all programs. To date, some nations have been more successful in doing this than others. Providing rigorous and meaningful alternative pathways, built on common foundations of learning that keep open further study options for all, will be the key.

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Part II

Case Studies

Introduction to the European Education Systems

Stephen Lamb

Historically, in European nations school dropout was not an issue that received much research attention. Secondary school systems were largely designed to be selective and dropout was a natural consequence. The traditional academic secondary school, such as the *lycée*, *gymnasium* or *grammar school*, provided a classical education preparing a selected few from the wealthy classes for higher status positions and lifestyles. By their nature these schools were selective, serving the filtering and preparation needs of universities and the professions.¹

The modern need for expansion of secondary education saw the development of alternative forms of school and the diversification of programs, though academic selection remained a dominating feature. Programs at upper secondary level have diversified to include shorter and longer cycles of study, often without common standards of learning and achievement – meaning that while some streams of study prepare students for higher education, others are short-term and terminal, preparing students for the labour market rather than further study.

Therefore, nowadays not all streams of study or training in upper secondary education in European countries give access to tertiary education. In many countries, schools are divided into different types. Some types are more vocational, others are academic. The most obvious example is Germany. Here, many children (although in declining numbers) enter the *Hauptschule*. This ends with the *Hauptschulabschluss* – a certificate which does not give access to tertiary studies. Many children also enter the *Realschule*. This is concluded by the *Realschulabschluss*. If students do well enough, they can then transfer to a *Fachoberschule* (a vocational college). If they graduate with the *Fachhochschulreife*, they can then enter a *Fachhochschule* or a *Gymnasium*, from which they can access university or other

¹See Benavot's paper (The diversification of secondary education: School curricula in comparative perspective, *Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 10(1), 1–26, 2006) and the study by Mueller, Ringer and Simon (*The Rise of the Modern Education System*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for more extensive discussion of these issues.

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types of tertiary education. Thus children who enter either a *Hauptschule* or a *Realschule* and successfully complete their studies are not able to go directly into tertiary-level courses. They must do further studies and be successful at these higher levels.

Some other countries such as Switzerland and Poland have similar systems, so the German model can be considered important and of fairly wide relevance.

Another example is France. Many children there enter vocational school after finishing lower secondary education. In vocational school, they study towards either a *certificate d'aptitude professionnelle (CAP)* or a *brevet d'études professionnelles (BEP)*. Neither of these qualifications gives access to tertiary-level courses, and most young people who do enter vocational school leave for work. This pathway involves a large number of young people. The problems that it poses by not providing access to tertiary level courses have been officially recognised. As a result, these days an increasing number of young people who do the BEP are taking further vocational training by enrolling in the *baccalauréat professionnel* (or *bac pro*). This can lead to tertiary study, but the great majority (around two thirds) of *bac pro* students leave for work. If they do continue, only about three in ten actually finish the tertiary course because they do not have the academic preparation.

Spain also has important differences between curriculum streams. High school students who undertake intermediate-level vocational studies (*Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio*) go to work or further training (*Grado Superior*). If they wish to go to university, they must either enrol in the *Bachillerato* and gain their *Título de Bachiller*, or graduate with the *Técnico Superior* which then gives access to university.

Briefly, also, England and Scotland offer various alternative streams of study to young people at the end of compulsory education. Traditional 'A levels' (England) or *Advanced Highers* (Scotland) can be taken by students wanting to enter university, while other students may take a range of alternatives including vocational qualifications leading to work or further training.

Germany, France, England, Scotland, Switzerland, Poland, and Spain do things differently. But importantly, all of these countries have internally different streams and types of schools that (1) take in young people with different characteristics, and (2) lead in different directions. Thus differences between young people come to be associated with different directions. The implications of these differences for rates of dropout and completion vary between the countries, as the following case studies reveal.

Chapter 3

The Question of School Dropout: A French Perspective

Marianne Blanchard and Rémi Sinthon*

Introduction

At the start of the 1980s, with unemployment rates continuing to rise, the French government targeted the particular difficulties faced by young people who were entering the workforce without qualifications.¹ The Minister for Education called for higher qualification levels from the French population, and this objective was later made official in the law relating to education and careers guidance of 1989. This projected a development over the next decade in which the whole of the age-group would attain a recognised qualification of at least the level of basic vocational awards – the Certificate of Vocational Aptitude (CAP) or the Certificate of Vocational Studies (BEP).² This law would contribute to the issue of school dropout coming fully onto the political agenda at the beginning of the 1990s.

The government-led effort to increase qualification rates was reinforced in the course of the next decade by European Union directives. At the time of the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the member states of the Union emphasised the need to train a skilled workforce. Given that it was the least well-qualified individuals who were also the most affected by unemployment, the priority became one of reducing early school leaving. Today, the objective is to ensure that by 2010 at least 80% of young people aged 20–24 years have an upper secondary qualification.

In France, the growing government concern about early school leavers, along with the development of research in the area, has resulted in a fuller understanding of a phenomenon whose contours can be described as fluid. To understand the specific features of the French context, the discussion begins with a sketch of the organisation of the education system. Following that, there is an overview of how

*(translated by Richard Teese)

¹In 1985, the unemployment rate in France for young people aged 15–24 years was 23.7%. It was 19.7% in 2007.

²CAP and BEP are awards granted at the end of 2 years of vocational study in school.

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much is known about the issue of dropout. Finally the discussion turns to public policies aimed at tackling the issue.

The French Context of Schooling: A Centralised System, Strongly Hierarchical and Recently Transformed to a Mass System

The French school system is entirely centralised. The powers delegated to regional and local authorities – *région*, *département*, and local councils – mainly relate to the management of buildings and equipment. The French state takes charge of the broader directions of educational policy, including curriculum, timetable and school year, examinations, and recruitment and management of staff. Centralised, the French schooling system is also equally very hierarchical. It is true that the creation of a common junior high school (*collège unique*) in 1975 displayed a will to offer comprehensive schooling to the whole of an age cohort. However, from the end of junior high school, the system becomes complex and breaks into numerous streams which are markedly hierarchical. Thus, only the ‘better’ student reaches academic senior high school (*lycée général*).

Lower Secondary Education: Junior High School (Collège)

In 1975, the reforms led by the Minister of National Education, René Haby, ended the streamed programs of lower secondary education and created the common junior high school (*collège unique*). The guiding concern was to avoid early selection of pupils (separation into different streams), and through this approach to raise general levels of achievement.

Junior high school is organised into four year-levels, starting with the class of ‘the sixth’ and ending with the class of ‘the third’. All pupils are expected to follow the same educational program over these 4 years across a range of subject areas: French, mathematics, history, geography and physical sciences. In contrast to primary schools, where class teachers usually teach all subjects, in junior high school teachers usually teach one or two subjects to different classes.

Today, almost all children continue their studies until the end of the fourth year of junior high school: the continuation rate in 2001 was 97%. However, junior high school is not as ‘common’ as it might appear. Of pupils entering the fourth and final year in 2001, 85% came from the mainstream general program, while 15% had been guided into special streams. Since 1996, junior high schools have been able to make specific arrangements for students in difficulty, covering both programs and timetables (Ministry of Education Nationale, 2008). These arrangements differ according to year-level. In the penultimate year, ‘support classes’ are run to help students reintegrate into the mainstream program. Teaching is organised around ‘projects’ within defined subject areas, but linked with the world of work through short placements.

In the final year of junior high school, 'transition classes' are more directly geared to vocational training, with work placements taking up half of the student's total time.

Pupils who have experienced the greatest difficulties in primary school are oriented from the start of junior high school to pre-vocational classes (*classes préparatoires à l'apprentissage* [CPA], and *classes d'initiation préprofessionnelle par alternance* [CLIPA]) or to adaptation classes (*section d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté* [SEGPA]). Pre-vocational classes are located in apprenticeship centres and concern only a small minority of students (9,700 in 2007–08). The SEGPA stream enables children judged to be 'poorly adjusted' to school to continue their schooling until age 16. There were more than 100,000 pupils in SEGPA classes in 2006, 70% of whose parents were in blue-collar jobs, were unemployed or were not in the labour force, and 61% of whom were boys. Each class comprises about 16 pupils, and this enables individualised study programs to be developed. Pupils follow a general program of the type that mainstream pupils in the first and second year of junior high school follow, with the difference being in how SEGPA pupils are managed, that is, smaller classes, an individualised learning program, and a combination of general and vocational studies. From the third year of the program, the emphasis falls more on vocational training.

At the end of junior high school, and regardless of stream, all pupils sit their *brevet* (or school certificate) examination. Results are based on written tests and also continuous assessment in French, mathematics and history-geography. The national success rate in 2008 was 81.7%. Almost all of each new cohort now gains this award: in 2007, only 3.2% of 15- to 19-year-olds did not hold it, while amongst people over 65 years of age, the rate is 64.6%.

But behind these aggregate figures important differences are found. In fact, junior high school is far from being 'comprehensive', even within the 'general' stream. For a start, there are quite sharp differences between schools themselves, linked to their location. Numerous studies, spanning urban sociology and the sociology of education, have demonstrated the magnitude of inequalities between schools in different locations in terms of social composition, teaching conditions, and rates of success. For example, in the city of Paris, the rate of success in attaining the school leaving certificate (*brevet*) varies from 44% to 100%, depending on the school.

General and Technological Education

While earlier stages of schooling are marked by a policy of wide pupil mix and common core of curricular subjects, senior high school divides into distinct programs through choice of educational routes. Thus, at the end of the last year of junior high school, pupils are guided through a counselling process into either a general or technological senior high school or a vocational senior high school. Among students enrolled in the final year of junior high school in 2006, 57% entered the general and technological stream in senior high school in 2007, and 27% took the vocational route. A further 6% were repeating the year, while 10% did not continue in education (at least in schools or training under the control of the

Ministry of Education). This figure includes both dropouts and young people entering education or training programs under the control of other Ministries, including work-study or work-training programs.

The program in general and technological high schools lasts for 3 years ('second form', 'first form', and 'final year'). During the first year, pupils follow a common program of study. At the same time, they are expected to choose two components which are 'determinative' in their later allocation to specialised streams, based on options. At the end of the first year of senior high school, pupils are separated between the 'general' stream and the 'technological' stream. Orientation towards stream is often based on results in the first year of the high school course, with more successful pupils entering the general stream. This route, which recruits about 60% of students completing the first year of senior high, is designed to prepare for extended study. It comprises three series: economics and social science (ES), humanities/arts (L), and science (S). Depending on the series, the course of study will differ.

The 'technological' stream includes both 'general' subjects (French, mathematics, history-geography, science, English) and 'technological' studies which comprise vocational studies, like accounting. There are many areas of specialisation in the technological stream, the most important of which are laboratory technology, industrial technology, management, health and social welfare. When students complete the third and final year of senior high school, they sit for the national *baccalaureat* examination which opens the way to higher education.

Vocational Training: Institutional Duality

Vocational Senior High School and Apprenticeship Centres

Vocational training currently enrolls about 40% of young people who complete junior high school. Courses lead to the award of various qualifications – BEP, CAP, vocational baccalaureat. These programs prepare young people for employment or, in some cases, tertiary education. They mostly enrol students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds: in 2007–08, those from a low SES background accounted for 63% of students studying for a CAP, 54.2% of those studying for a BEP and 51.4% studying for a vocational baccalaureat. While the general and technological streams of the baccalaureat are frequently offered in the same school, vocational courses are delivered in two different institutions: either vocational high schools or apprenticeship centres.

In vocational senior high schools, pupils have the status of a tertiary education student (*statut d'étudiant*) and, in addition to campus-based studies, undertake a work placement. But in CFA (apprenticeship centres), they work under contract with a business and are paid wages. They do both theoretical and practical studies in the apprenticeship centres for about one week in every four. For the most part, apprentices are young people judged to have failed at school. One in three has been excluded from mainstream programs from the end of the second year of junior high school.

Qualifications

Young people in vocational training can work towards the award of a BEP, CAP, or a vocational baccalaureat. The CAP and the BEP give the same level of qualification, while the vocational baccalaureat gives selective access to higher education.

The CAP (*certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*) takes 2 years, and is offered in more than 200 specialities. The program includes general studies (French, history, mathematics) as well as vocational training. CAP courses also include work placements, which vary according to specialisation. Numbers in CAP programs have been declining over the long term – 264,000 enrolments in 1980–81 compared to only 110,000 in 2007–08. Fifty-two per cent of CAP students are females. Today, a majority of CAP students undertake their training in an apprenticeship centre – 74,000 compared to 46,000 in vocational senior high school.

The BEP (*brevet d'études professionnelles*) aims to be more general than the CAP. There are some 50 specialities, with courses generally running for 2 years. Where with a CAP, the choice of training is fairly specific – 'butcher', 'fishmonger', 'small meats butcher', etc. – BEP courses relate to a family of occupations or an industry area, such as the 'food industry'. In 2007–08, 403,459 students were preparing a BEP, of whom 44.3% were female.

CAP graduates usually enter the workforce, while a majority of BEP graduates undertake either a technological or a vocational baccalaureat. In 2007–08, of the total number of pupils enrolled in the second year of CAP, 5.6% had repeated a grade, 11.7% were streamed into BEP, 10.7% had chosen to enrol in a vocational baccalaureat, and 65% had left the education system (information not available on the remaining 7%).

Regarding BEP pupils, 8.3% repeated a grade, 42.5% were streamed into a vocational baccalaureat, 10.9% took a technological baccalaureat over 2 years (the first of which is an 'adaptation' year), and 35% had left the education system.

The vocational baccalaureat was created in 1985 in a context when BEP and CAP courses appeared inadequate, especially in industry areas such as information technology (IT) or communications. The idea was to allow students with a CAP or a BEP to prepare for this exam in 2 years. Incorporating a minimum of 16 weeks work placement, the vocational baccalaureat was conceived of as a qualification giving direct access to the labour market; however, nearly a third of graduates enter tertiary education courses.

Since 2007, it has been possible to study for the vocational baccalaureat over 3 years. From 2010, this approach will be generalised and will bring to an end the total training period of 4 years (CAP/BEP plus vocational baccalaureat). According to the Minister of National Education, Xavier Darcos:

The baccalaureat in 3 years should change outlooks on vocational courses by ensuring that there is 'parity of esteem' between general baccalaureats and vocational. The objective is also to help more young people reach baccalaureat level. For while 6 months after completing a vocational baccalaureat 60% of young people have a job, less than 50% of BEP graduates do.

Upper secondary education							
Age	Baccalaureat General		Baccalaureat Technology			Bacc. Vocational	
	Final year 312,882		Final year 161,308			Final (voc.) 87,062	
	1st 323,200	1st tech 140,521	1st (adapt.) 15,655	BEP 2 nd year of BEP 196,342		97,895	CAP 2 nd year of CAP 42,205
	2nd 513,344			1 st year of BEP 207,117		11,668	1 st year of CAP
Lower secondary education							
Age	Brevet					Brevet	
	3rd 744,214	3rd transition 13,060	Relay classes + junior vocational classes (CLIPA-CPA) 1,043			SEGPA 104,000	
	4th 754,214						
	5th 763,647						
	6th 796,227						

Fig. 3.1 Numbers of students in secondary education in France in 2007–08, by major stream or section

The structure of secondary education in France, with student numbers to show the relative importance of each of the different types of upper secondary qualifications, is provided in Fig. 3.1.

Graduation Rates: Trends Over Time

Democratisation: Qualitative or Quantitative?

Appearing on the agenda during the 19th century, the theme of ‘democratisation’ of education has remained very much to the fore in France. It has been linked with republican meritocratic ideology, according to which individuals should no longer inherit, but should earn their social position. Since the Ferry laws which

established free, compulsory and secular schooling in the early 1880s, the objective of reformers has been not only to raise rates of participation in school as well as length of schooling, but also to ensure that educational success is more equally experienced. The historian Antoine Prost (1997) describes this kind of democratisation as ‘qualitative’ to the extent that it involves a weakening of the link between social origin and eventual social position. He contrasts this with quantitative democratisation – or ‘massification’ – which describes an increase in numbers of pupils, but without social inequalities disappearing. The latter are simply displaced into other forms.

What kind of democratisation has occurred in France? From a purely quantitative perspective, the chances of access to secondary education have undoubtedly increased. Following government policy to raise general levels of education, the decade of 1985–95 saw an unprecedented rise in senior high school numbers and in graduations from senior high school (see Fig. 3.2). The proportion of a generation holding a general, technological or vocational baccalaureat rose from 5% in 1950 to 29.4% in 1985, and to 62.7% in 1995. It stood at 64.2% in 2007. It should be stressed that this increase is due in large measure to the creation and expansion of the technological baccalaureat (1965) and vocational baccalaureat (1985).

Nevertheless, if qualification rates in the population have continued to grow, social inequalities in access to different levels of schooling and different streams have continued. Expansion in high school graduations has not been uniformly experienced across all social ranks. Amongst graduates in the general (or academic) streams of the baccalaureat, more than a third are from a senior management or liberal professions background, a category representing only about 8.4% of the

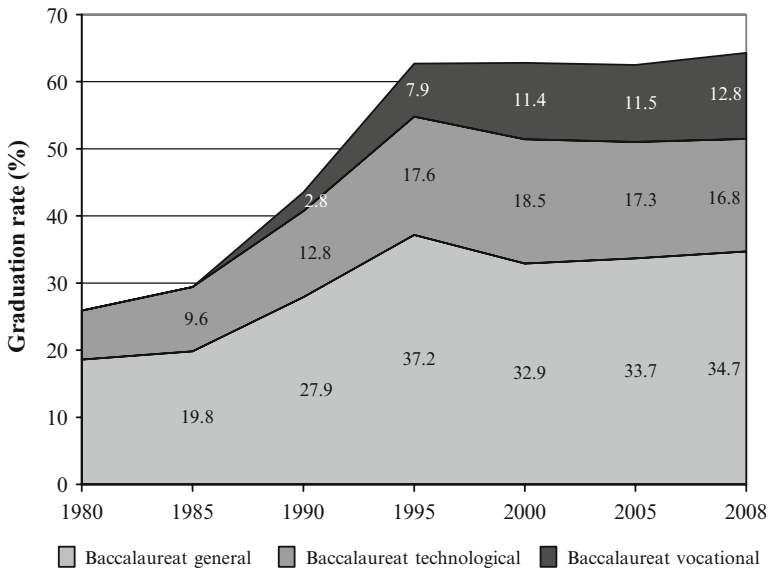


Fig. 3.2 Evolution of graduation rates, by type of baccalaureat: 1980–2008

French workforce. On the other hand, every fourth graduate in the vocational stream is from a manual worker's home, and only eight in 100 are from a high SES family.

Similarly, geographical inequalities persist both across France and within particular localities and regions. For example, within the academic region of the city of Lille, the proportion of young people holding the baccalaureat is 60% compared to 80% in Paris. And within the greater region of Paris, success at the baccalaureat exams varies widely according to school. In 2005, 100% of candidates in the prestigious and selective establishments of the inner city and rich suburbs succeeded, as opposed to fewer than 50% in some senior high schools located in areas with the most disadvantaged populations.

An Increasingly Qualified Population

In 1985, nearly one in ten 16-year-olds discontinued studies, with the majority of these leaving school without any qualification. In 1989, the Orientation and Guidance law laid down an objective of 80% of a generation reaching baccalaureat level, announcing, in effect, that the whole of an age cohort should attain a level of schooling at least equivalent to a CAP or BEP. It was an ambitious goal to take all young people beyond compulsory schooling and to ensure that the whole of the population should hold a qualification of recognised value in the labour market.

In France, the proportion of young people who quit school or other education without a qualification has remained at about 18% for some time. These are young people who have not graduated from upper secondary education, and they have no baccalaureat, CAP or BEP. Between 1982 and 2007, amongst young people from working class backgrounds, the rate has fallen from 53% to 32%, but remains very much higher than for the children of professionals and senior managers (5% in 2007) or office-workers (18.7%).

An ongoing high proportion of dropout has contributed to an ever-growing interest on the part of government and of social scientists. What then, is the state of our knowledge of this phenomenon?

School Dropout in France: An Overview of What We Know

School Dropout Meaning What?

'School dropout' (*décrochage scolaire*), 'disconnection from school' (*déscolarisation*), 'early leaving' (*abandon scolaire*), 'leaving school without a qualification' (*arrêt d'études sans qualification*) – there exists no single term in French corresponding to the term, school dropout. A range of terms is used by researchers and

observers in the education system, testifying to the relatively recent nature of policy and scholarly interest in this question in France. Indeed, attention was for a long time centred on the question of ‘scholastic failure’ and on democratisation and equality of opportunity. But vagueness in language can equally be read as vagueness in the nature of the phenomenon itself. Strictly speaking, early termination of studies could be defined as leaving the school system before the statutory age of 16. However, this concerns only a very small group, kept small by the high rate of grade-repeating and a set of institutional processes discussed later in this chapter.

The level of education and training in France has traditionally been assessed using measures established in 1969. These define early leavers as young people who have quit education without reaching the final year of the CAP or BEP, or the first year of the general or technological baccalaureat (Léger, 2008). In France, the size of this group has fallen from 25% of a generation (or 170,000 young people) in 1975, to only 6%, or 42,000 young people, in 2005.

However, the statistical concept of early leaving as ‘not reaching a defined stage of schooling’ has progressively been abandoned in favour of the concept of ‘not completing qualifications’. The Lisbon protocol, to which France is a signatory, views the issue as one of completing upper secondary education, obtaining a diploma and accessing employment. What matters from this perspective is failure to complete a program – cessation of studies before obtaining an award (CAP, BEP, baccalauréat). Since 2000, completion of an upper secondary program has been considered as the minimum necessary level of qualification. Applied to France in 2005 to 2007, the numbers failing this test would represent about 134,000 young people, or 18% of the relevant school population.

Thus, there are in France two different statistical concepts in circulation: an older approach in which the highest stage of schooling attempted is the issue, and a newer approach in which a minimum level of qualification is the criterion.

Fluidity in the Measure, and Measurement of Flows

As well as definitional problems, it should be stressed that estimating the number of pupils who fail to reach a certain stage of schooling or who fail to complete a qualification is far from an exact science. There does not exist in France any definition which is common to different administrative departments, and definitions can also vary from one academic region to another. It is thus difficult to do a precise stocktake at a local level, given that numbers can vary simply as a function of the particular organisation processing them. A report by the general inspectorate of national education stresses, indeed, that figures given for the same region can vary from 8% to 25% (Dubreuil et al., 2005).

Despite the vagueness which surrounds the concept of dropout and the difficulties of measurement, it is possible to establish a number of tendencies at a national level.

Who Are the Dropouts? A Statistical Profile

Most statistical series highlight the fact that dropout is a big issue. Far from being a marginal tendency, they show that growing official concern with school dropout is fully justified by its magnitude. Secondly, dropout involves pupils from as young as 14- to 15-years-old, and the level rises with age. Finally, all studies of the phenomenon have demonstrated the over-representation of pupils from working-class backgrounds.

All the data show a general tendency for ‘exits without qualifications’ to decline. But at the same time, they reveal a maintenance of social inequalities. Moreover, they testify to the importance of a pupil’s ‘school career’ – for grade repeating prior to entry to secondary school plays a big role.

Logistic regression enables us to demonstrate the relative weight of different factors, and notably the importance of curriculum stream, in explaining school dropout. The analysis is based on the ‘cohort of 1995’ panel study conducted by the *Direction de l’évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance, Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale*.

The two senior high school streams of the general and the technological baccalaureat are clearly distinguished from the others by the low probability of dropout. The difference could perhaps be explained by the general, as compared to the vocational, nature of a baccalaureat stream, but hinges more on the social prestige hierarchy of the different streams which is implicit, but widely understood. The more that a stream is considered as prestigious, the weaker the likelihood of abandoning it. The importance of stream points to the fundamental role played by school guidance.

As Table 3.1 suggests, school career plays an important role in what happens to a young person since, all other factors remaining equal, repeating a grade in primary school makes dropping out likely (66.6% of those repeating a grade drop out). This confirms the results of numerous qualitative studies (as cited above) which show that early learning difficulties lead eventually to dropping out.

There is a slight tendency for boys to quit school more often than girls. But family background factors play a much bigger role than gender. The chances of dropout weaken as parental level of education rises. This is consistent with analyses inspired by Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, or more specifically with studies based on interviews or small-scale surveys which show that poorly-educated parents experience more difficulties helping their children with the demands of school or assisting them to construct an academic or vocational plan (Terrail & Bedi, 2002).

At a given level of parental education, children whose fathers are in intermediate professional jobs have a lower chance of dropping out than those from a skilled manual worker’s background; while the children of semi-skilled manual workers and even more those where the fathers have never worked or where job is not reported have a higher chance of dropping out. There are several possible explanations which are relevant here. When parents have a stable job which permits them to live comfortably, the family environment is in itself more stable for the child and

Table 3.1 Determinants of school dropout

Categories	Per cent (%)	Estimate
(Intercept)	35.3	0.12*
Gender		
Boy	40.4	Reference
Girl	29.9	-0.14***
Stream		
Senior high (general)	4.8	-3.02***
Senior high (tech)	10.9	-2.69***
BEP	58.0	Reference
CAP	69.2	0.40***
Never enrolled in above	74.4	0.65***
Father's occupation		
Manager, professional	16.2	-0.08
Associate professional	23.2	-0.18***
Small business, indep.	36.0	0.09
Office worker	35.1	-0.05
Skilled manual	43.0	Reference
Semi-skilled manual	53.1	0.16**
Unknown/never worked	55.1	0.27***
Parents' highest level of qualification		
Higher education	13.0	-0.25***
Baccalaureat or equivalent	22.6	-0.14*
BEP	31.5	-0.13*
CAP	40.7	Reference
Leaving certificate (brevet)	44.1	0.07
No qualification	55.2	0.29***
No response	52.2	0.36***
Type of municipality of junior high school attended		
Paris region	35.3	0.22***
Over 100,000 inhabitants	34.1	0.11*
20,000 up to 100,000	34.3	Reference
5,000 up to 20,000	37.0	0.00
Less than 5,000 inhabitants	36.7	0.03
Repeated a grade in primary school		
No	30.7	Reference
Yes	66.6	0.57***

Notes: *, **, *** = 10%, 5% and 1% thresholds.

the parents offer a role model of success, giving meaning to achievement at school. Moreover, parents try to prevent any social demotion of their children and are thus so much more conscious of the problems of incomplete schooling (*déscolarisation*) which risks the future social position of their children.

Finally, it is important to note the higher probability of dropping out associated with attending a junior high school in the Paris region by comparison with going to an establishment located in a municipality of between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. This highlights the importance of the geographical context of schooling.

Analyses of the Dropout Phenomenon in French Sociology

Studies of school dropout have multiplied in France in the course of the 1990s, notably under the influence of several Ministries which launched a very large research project on the question in 1999. Most research has been conducted from a qualitative view.

Moreover, in the last few years most French researchers have studied dropping out of school as a ‘combinatory process’ (Millet & Thin, 2003), with research based on a reconstruction of schooling histories. Starting from the premise that ‘the comprehension of the processes of dropping out cannot be reduced to the search for determinant factors’, the task has been to show how family life, school life and peer culture interact.

A distinctively sociological approach to the process of dropping out takes differences of situation as a key element. The sociologist adopts a critical view of the concept of dropout itself, instead of merely inheriting it from institutional authority. As Stephane Bonn  ry (2004) shows, ‘the emergence of the category of dropout used by schools to depict the problems it faces runs the risk of homogenising under a single de-sociological term the different processes which lead pupils to cease attending school or at least to show no interest in schooling’.

Bonn  ry rejects, moreover, a fatalistic vision which presupposes a link between ‘pupil origin’ and academic future. To him, if school dropout is more frequent amongst working classes, this is a question in the first place of achievement problems. Thus, the task is to understand why it is that pupils struggle to learn.

Conceptualising Dropping Out as a Process

Research by Glasman (2000) questions the assumed ‘specificity’ of school dropouts.

In terms of objective and quantifiable attributes, there does not appear to be any radical difference between senior high school students who drop out and those who, poorly motivated by school work as they may be, remain on the inside of school. Given this, the task should be to study how the objectives of dropouts differ from students who continue – the particular processes which distinguish trajectories – rather than looking at how pupils themselves might differ.

Taking dropout as the outcome of a cumulative process of difficulties, Broccolichi’s originality lies in having looked at the antecedents of dropping out (2000). Focusing on the relationship between the dropout and school knowledge, Broccolichi has demonstrated the central role of ‘cognitive disengagement’ (*d  crochage cognitif*). This concerns an often ‘silent’ phenomenon, not marked by displays of indiscipline, violence, or absenteeism. Pupils do not reach the point of entry to their ‘craft’ as ‘students’, the demands of which are not clear to them, and they lose perspective on the meaning of school work, thus breaking with the expectations of the system even while remaining ‘on the inside’ of school.

The Role of the Institution

Not focused simply on pathways of young people, most French researchers insist on the fact that dropping out calls into question how well schooling works as an institution, and particularly its capacity to give positive meaning to the experience of school and to help guide young people within it.

Reaching junior high school often marks a turning point in the trajectory of dropouts. Learning difficulties and a feeling of demoralisation tend to increase once children enter this new institution where demands on students increase and the experience of deepening failure is no longer offset by a personal link with the teacher (Broccolichi & Ben Ayed, 1999). On the basis of the personal accounts they reviewed, Broccolichi and Ben Ayed observe that ‘this type of situation leads logically to indiscipline in classes where the possibilities exist for connivance in it on the part of other pupils, similarly motivated’.

Besides changes linked to conditions under which learning occurs, junior high school as an institution also plays a role in how pupils perceive and respond to schooling, in that school can oppose the pathways that pupils might wish to take, notably at the end of the second last year. Indeed, a decision on stream that is imposed and not wanted by either parent or pupil contributes to a loss of meaning and can encourage a progressive disengagement from school.

Public Policies and Programs Put in Place to Reduce Dropout

For many years in France, dropout was considered to be a marginal problem, limited to particular populations, such as gypsies or recent arrivals. In fact, it is only from around the second half of the 1990s that it is possible to really speak of an institutional concern for young people with ‘incomplete schooling’ (*élèves déscolarisés*), a concern that was matched by the implementation of specific educational interventions. That school dropout could occur before that time without becoming an issue recognised by educational institutions or by researchers is linked to a convergence of factors (Glasman, 2000): ‘Giving up school had less visibility as long as the labour market could absorb unskilled labour’ and school was thus not seen as necessary for workforce transition. Moreover the institutional priority was on ‘democratisation’ of school, particularly access to senior high school: the issue was above all how to raise the general level of school qualifications in order to meet the needs of the economy.

In fact, most of the education policies implemented since the 1960s (at both system and school level) have been aimed at lifting the general level of qualification of the population, checking failure of school, and promoting equal opportunity. The emergence of dropout as a ‘policy problem’ seems to have favoured the development of intervention measures at an individual level.

System Level

At the system level, major structural changes mark the history of French schooling and its much greater democratisation since the 1960s. From the outset, these changes involved transforming the mixed types of lower secondary education into a new type of school: the *collège* (junior high school). Between 1966 and 1975, some 2,354 junior high schools were built to accommodate pupils from the formerly diverse range of school types that once represented lower secondary education. From the 1980s, the concern shifted to promoting the greatest access to senior high school and the baccalaureat. Between 1982 and 1992, the rate of access to the final year of the baccalaureat rose from 35.7% to 66%. In 1993, the different streams of senior high school were reorganised with a view to ‘parity of esteem’ for all specialisations and to put an end to the supremacy of mathematics. This involved allowing greater individual support and supervision for the weakest learners, and the establishment of supplementary classes for small groups. As it has turned out, this reform has had few positive effects, and since 1995 there has been stagnation in the number of senior high school graduates as well as a maintenance of the hierarchy of difficult streams.

School Level

At the start of the 1980s, French education policy took an important turn. While, since the 1960s, the idea had been to create a uniform system to offer the same programs to all students, the 1980s saw a switch to give ‘more to those who have less’, with the implementation in 1981 of Education Priority Zones or EPZ.

Born of the ‘observation that educational inequalities are due to the great diversity of social and cultural settings’, Educational Priority Zones involve designating selected schools (both senior high and junior high) to receive supplementary funding.

The effectiveness of the EPZ is, however, increasingly disputed. According to a study by the national statistics institute (INSEE) relating to the period 1982–93, ‘the implementation of Education Priority Zones has had no significant effect on the success of pupils’. Indeed according to this study, all additional funds benefit teachers – who, since 1991, have received a premium of €1,097 per year – rather than pupils directly. Moreover the EPZ label is seen by parents as a signal that a school is ‘bad’, and thus plays the role of stigmatising. As a result, the numbers of pupils attending EPZ schools has been in continuous decline, with many parents seeking to avoid them.

In 2006, the Educational Priority Zone policy was revamped and Ambition to Succeed networks were established, initially involving 249 junior high schools. These establishments are former EPZ schools, but selected from amongst the most disadvantaged. Under the reform, these schools were intended to receive a

reinforcement of four ‘guiding teachers’ (*professeurs référents*) – innovative teachers intended to help the teams already in place. Teaching assistants – university students under supervision – have also been promised. In practice, it appears that these measures have not always been applied to the letter and have been criticised by some teacher unions.

Individual Level

The measures implemented at a system and a school level show that the emphasis of public policy has not been on school dropout as such. It is helpful to recall the convergence of factors that resulted in ‘dropout’ being placed on the policy agenda (Glasman, 2003) in the 1990s. Firstly, there was a concern for public order. Pupils who are not where they should be are considered a threat. Secondly, young people with no qualifications represent the ‘hard core’ of teenage unemployment, and while successive governments have made tackling unemployment a priority, the workforce transition of young unqualified people has never been more problematic. Finally, in an epoch when half the age cohort stays on at school until age 20, those who leave before age 18 and without qualifications appear out of step.

As Bonnéry (2004) recalls, before early leaving became an issue in national education policy, it was ‘scholastic failure’ which mobilised agencies within the Ministry of Education, and led to policies at the individual level. According to Bonnéry, dropout is often seen as an advanced form of scholastic failure. As a consequence, the arrangements set in place to tackle failure – an ‘old’ phenomenon – have been redefined as targeting early leaving, more recently identified.

More precisely, measures combined to control early leaving have a double genealogy. They are not only heirs of strategies to tackle failure at school: the arrangements put in place by public authorities to tackle unemployment amongst young people now serve to support actions to reduce dropping out. Given these dual origins, it is difficult to isolate those measures that specifically address the problem of early leaving in the jungle of individual intervention. In fact, the missions of reducing failure at school, preventing dropout, and facilitating workforce transition are closely linked.

A Brief History of Intervention

Starting in the middle of the 1980s, the question of workforce transition became increasingly important in educational policy, and the ‘alternance’ model of training and transition schemes expanded (Geay, 2003). In 1986, the program Transition Provision for Young People in the Education System (DIJEN, *dispositive d’insertion des jeunes de l’éducation nationale*) was established. This brought together the totality of diverse and localised measures for young people quitting junior high

school or senior high school without a qualification. The General Transition Mission (MGI, *Mission générale d'insertion*) replaced the DIJEN in 1992. As well as coordinating local arrangements, the MGI is meant to map students exiting from school who do not enrol in another school. Its role is also to intervene directly with families and young people and to encourage schools to adopt policies to prevent early leaving.

In 1999, the measures that were piloted under the MGI were formalised and expanded through the adoption of the New Chances program (*Nouvelle Chance*). Three major principles have guided this new program. Firstly is the idea that 'there is no uniformly valid solution for each young person, but rather a personal response'. The policy thus favoured individualised pathways. Secondly, the aim was to encourage innovation in teaching and experimental approaches. Finally, links with the world of work were necessary.

Given the large numbers of measures implemented under the MGI and their strongly local nature, it is possible to offer only a general overview here. Discussion will be limited to some preventative measures and training programs under the MGI and leave to one side other actions which relate directly to transition. Finally, it should be stressed that counter dropout measures do not all fall under the MGI banner. Many interventions occur at the local level, managed by schools or other agencies, and are too various and numerous to be reviewed here.

Prevention Measures Under Mission Générale d'Insertion, MGI

These solutions aim at identifying pupils who are struggling with school work from junior high school on. The aim is to provide them with personalised support through 'on-site interviews' in which each young person can discuss issues with a psychology and guidance counsellor. Transition Support Groups (GAIN, *Groupes d'Aides à l'insertion*), also called 'oversight cells' (*cellules de veille*), are responsible for the tasks of monitoring and support. The groups are organised locally by school principals.

In 2006–07, nearly three in four of the 54,364 students benefitting from these one-to-one interviews subsequently undertook a training program; 3% entered the labour market.

Training Programs Under Mission Générale d'Insertion, MGI

MGI networks also organise training programs. These can be part-time or full-time, and aim either to give short-term assistance to a young person or help them complete a recognised program of study or training.

1. Preparatory programs undertaken part-time

There are numerous schemes under this broad heading. In some cases, the larger group comprises young people who at the beginning of the school year are not enrolled in a school and who come under the wing of local guidance agencies. In other cases, the target group involves students in mainstream schooling, who in view of the difficulties they are experiencing, undertake supplementary classes or 're-engagement modules' (*modules de remotivation*) for a period ranging from several weeks to a full school year.

Amongst these measures, it is possible to distinguish 'relay classes' (*classes relais*), implemented from 1998 to 1999, and 'relay workshops' (*ateliers relais*) since 2002. The objective is to help 'tackle under-achievement and prevent social marginalisation' (Circular, 12 June 1998). 'Relay' programs enrol students from junior high school (and ultimately also senior high school) who are considered to have 'entered into a process of rejection of school' (*un processus de reject de l'institution scolaire*) as evident in 'failure to observe internal rules, persistent absenteeism from class, and even absence from school'. Relay classes are based on a partnership led by different government departments (education, justice, local government) and involve regional authorities and the voluntary sector.

Since their creation in 1998, the number of these programs has continued to grow. In 1999–2000, there were 180 with an intake of 2,600 students; this had grown to 360 by 2005–06, including 254 relay classes and 106 relay workshops. About 6,511 students were enrolled in the relay programs that year (Alluin, 2007; Poncet & Alluin, 2003).

Participation in these programs is overwhelmingly male: 78% in 2004–05, generally from 13 to 15 years old. Students usually come from the first to the fourth (and final) year of junior high school, mainly the general or mainstream programs (88% of all participants in 2004–05).

On average, students spend about 3 months in these programs. In 2004–05, 74% of students subsequently returned to junior high school and 4% entered vocational senior high school. No solution was found for 1–2% of participants.

After-exit statistics on participating students are weak: for all existing cohorts in 2003–04, non-response to a (follow-up) survey 6 months after exit was 35%.

2. Full-time programs

Full-time programs enrol students defined as having 'broken with school' and whose likelihood of completing a qualification within the usual time appears weak, given that they have already left school or are in the course of doing so. These programs run for varying periods, with year-round enrolment of students. They are characterised by individual support and supervision, workplace experience, and a focus on the 'basics' (literacy, numeracy).

Finally, some programs are designed mainly for young people exiting from the final year of vocational, technological or general senior high school streams who have failed the exams at least twice, or who have experienced severe problems in their school work. The aim is to help them prepare for the exams or to re-sit an examination.

Of the students who took part in a special learning program (N = 32,458), some 64% returned to a mainstream education program or undertook a new program, while 8% entered the labour market. Figures produced by the administering authority (MGI) tend to show that these initiatives, as well as preventative ones, are relatively effective. However, there is no available information on long-term outcomes, and the proportion of students who have neither returned to study nor found work is not small.

Alternative Pathways

Outside of the measures which aim to prevent dropout or to intervene at the first signs of early leaving, there are few possibilities for dropouts to resume study once they have left. A ‘second chance’ school – the first to be created – was opened in 1998 in Marseille in response to the European Commission. Today, 36 such schools (called E2C or *école de la seconde chance*) enable about 4,000 young people aged 16–25 years and who left school at least 2 years ago to reacquire the fundamentals – reading, writing, numeracy – for a period of between 6 and 24 months, all the while learning for a job through a work placement. The training course is free. The schools are operated by associations which bring together numerous agencies within the local economy and various public authorities (Ministry of National Education, the council of the region, National Employment Association, municipalities, chambers of commerce, etc.) For the moment, no data are available on the outcomes from these second-chance schools.

Regarding continuing education, this has been progressively developed since 1971 under the umbrella of the Ministry of National Education. But by comparison with other European countries, this sector is fairly small. According to Eurostat, only 7.4% of adults aged 25–64 years took a ‘formal’ course in 2007 – that is, one leading to a qualification – or a ‘non-formal’ course designed by teaching staff, whereas the average for the European Union reaches 9.7%.

Critical Views

While a solid statistical picture of outcomes is lacking in the medium to long term, certain aspects of the ‘relay’ programs (programs designed for those who have or are becoming disengaged from school) have been criticised. Geay (2005), in particular, has attacked the multiplication of relay measures in the absence of a debate about the stakes involved, whether social or academic.

With the ‘massification’ of school, which has occurred in a context of under-employment, segmentations internal to the population of school have developed. The diversification of tools to manage populations judged to be ‘academically deviant’ answers to this new state of play in which schooling becomes organised to cope with

diversity through the establishment of alternative programs that become treated as legitimate pathways rather than through tools to combat the antecedents of dropout.

The multiplication of localised programs would, on this interpretation, be symptomatic of a ‘massified’ school system which, unable to offer adaptive conditions of learning – to avoid difficulties from the outset – does not succeed in treating its dysfunctions other than through specific and localised initiatives, thus throwing into question the notion of genuine comprehensive schooling (*l'école unique*).

What ‘Lines of Action’ Are Needed for Reconnection with School?

Concluding a study of dropping out, Glasman has sought to identify ‘lines of action’, keeping in mind that reflection on what is possible and pertinent should not assume that there is one set of solutions corresponding to a set of typical situations: ‘there’s nothing to say that what reconnects one student will reconnect another’ (Glasman & Oeuvarard, 2004). Glasman also invites us to consider the problem under its wider social aspect, and thus not to ask schooling to do what it cannot do. For research shows that the practices of disconnecting from school are fuelled largely by the socioeconomic conditions of families, influenced directly by poverty, unemployment and precariousness.

Stressing these limits, what are the lines of action for a ‘reconnection with school’? Disengagement from school owes its origins in many cases to a failure to connect and progress in school, and this can occur from the youngest age – the point of entry to school. Given this, it would be necessary to address growing gaps in student learning in primary school, with support in the first and second years of junior high school often coming too late (even if early learning problems are not always detectable).

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Chapter 4

School Dropout and Completion in Spain

Rafael Merino and Maribel Garcia

What Are the Main Features of Spain's Upper Secondary Education and Training Provision?

Secondary education in Spain is structured into two parts. Lower secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*) is compulsory and lasts over four school years divided into two cycles each of 2 years. It begins after the conclusion of primary school at the age of 12; therefore, when a student finishes compulsory education, he or she is 16 years old. After this period, upper secondary education begins, which includes three main tracks: the academic (baccalaureate), the professional and the occupational.

Until the 1990 Educational Reform, only primary schooling was comprehensive; secondary schools were divided into baccalaureate secondary schools (*institutos de bachillerato*) and vocational training schools (*institutos de formación profesional*). However, the 1990 Reform extended the comprehensive curriculum to compulsory secondary education, and integrated the two types of training into secondary education schools (*institutos de enseñanza secundaria*), although keeping separate academic and professional tracks.

The application of comprehensiveness to compulsory secondary education has caused much controversy within the educational community and in political debates. It may be said that, at present, and since the educational reform of 2006, the comprehensiveness of compulsory secondary education is limited. This is because the Programs of Curricular Diversification (*Programas de Diversificación Curricular*), in which the curriculum is adapted to low-performing students by means of less abstract learning and more practical activities, are implemented in the second cycle. Although it is not accurate to say that upper secondary education is comprehensive, more and more links are being fostered between academic and professional tracks,

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thus moving from a tracked system to a linked one (Raffe & Spours, 1997). It should also be added that although there is only one curriculum within compulsory education, there are important differences between schools, as will be shown later on – for instance, between state-supported and private schools.

The students who succeed in acquiring the basic competences contained in the compulsory secondary education curriculum obtain the Secondary Education Certificate (*Graduado en Secundaria*). The evaluation to award this certificate is done by the secondary school's team of teachers; they may also give the certificate to students who have not passed two or, exceptionally, three subjects. There is no external evaluation on a national level: each secondary school and each team of teachers within it carries out the evaluation based on the aims and the criteria established by the educational administration. Students who have not achieved the goals of the cycle receive something similar to an O-level Certificate (*Certificado de Escolaridad*) that has no academic value.

To access the baccalaureate or the Intermediate Level of Vocational Training (*Formación Profesional de Grado Medio*), it is necessary to hold the Secondary Education Certificate (*Graduado en Secundaria*).

Baccalaureate studies are taken over two school years, though owing to a high rate of students repeating a year, and also a high rate of dropout, the possibility of studying it over three school years is being discussed by policy-makers. There are five branches of study: nature and health sciences, sciences and engineering, social sciences, humanities and arts (although the latter is taught in only a few secondary schools). Approximately half the subjects (language, philosophy, history, physical education) are common across all branches, 40% are in the specialism, and 10% are optional, although there may be regional differences according to each Autonomous Community.¹ To obtain the Baccalaureate Certificate (*Título de Bachiller*), students must pass all the subjects, with an evaluation being carried out by the school team of teachers.

There is no external test for validating the Baccalaureate Certificate – an attempt to impose such a test in 2002 aroused large-scale opposition. Instead, there is an admission examination to access university (*selectividad*), the aim of which is to order the students' preferences according to the grade they obtained (using the average grade between the baccalaureate and the admission examination).

Vocational training in upper secondary education includes two levels: Intermediate Vocational Training (*Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio*, CFGM) and Advanced Vocational Training (*Ciclos Formativos de Grado Superior*, CFGS). To access CFGM, students must hold the Secondary Education Certificate (*Graduado de Secundaria*) or pass an admission examination; to access CFGS, students must hold the Baccalaureate Certificate (*Título de Bachiller*) or pass an admission examination. It should be noted

¹ Although Spain is not a federal state, educational powers have been transferred to the regional or territorial governments, the so-called Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autónomas*). Even though the general regulation of the system is still carried out by the state government, the development of the curriculum, the management of the schools and some important educational policies such as, for instance, the prevention of school failure depend on the autonomous governments, in collaboration with the local authorities.

that there is no direct access for students completing a CFGM and willing to study a CFGS; for those students, the normal track would be to study the baccalaureate. This has provoked many complaints that have led to the establishment, still in an experimental stage, of some promotion courses for those students holding a CFGM Certificate who are preparing themselves for the admission examinations to CFGS.

Both CFGM and CFGS are taught in secondary schools; they require about 1,300 and 2,000 hours, usually distributed over two school years. The curriculum is vocationally driven, with no optional subjects, and includes 25% work-based learning, with the remaining time being spent in the school. However, there are experiments in some Autonomous Communities, with more hours being spent in companies. Courses are provided in 26 special fields or professional families and correspond to Level 2 (CFGM) and Level 3 (CFGS) of the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (*Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales*).

Students who pass a CFGM obtain the Technician Diploma (*Título de Técnico*), and those who pass a CFGS, the Higher Technician Diploma (*Título de Técnico Superior*). Assessments are carried out by the teachers in the secondary school. Students holding a Higher Technician Diploma may access university, especially the first cycles of technical degrees. One of the problems of these qualifications is that they do not yet have a clear correspondence with the occupational categories defined in collective agreements. Except for some very unusual cases for which the qualification is a requirement in order to be able to work in a specific profession (as in the case of healthcare, for instance), the fact of having obtained such a vocational qualification does not provide students with clear guarantees of obtaining a job related to their training. Furthermore, there is a paradox: some of the requirements to carry out a specific job are obtained in the training for the unemployed, which is provided outside of the educational system.

The students who do not obtain the Secondary Education Certificate (*Graduado en Secundaria*) have the possibility of joining some programs of First-Level Vocational Training (*Programas de Formación Profesional de Nivel I*), presently called Programs of Initial Professional Qualification (*Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial*), which last for a school year (between 800 and 1,200 hours). These programs are provided in secondary schools or in authorised schools (non-profit making foundations, city councils or guilds), and have a small component of work-based training. They give students access to professional certificates (*certificados de profesionalidad*) issued by the work authority, or a second chance at the Secondary Education Certificate (*Graduado de Secundaria*) if they study a specific and voluntary module of basic skills. These programs will be analysed more thoroughly later in this chapter.

What Are the Main Rates of School Graduation or Dropout? Have These Changed from Previous Decades?

In Spain, the debate on school failure has been very important and has involved much controversy. For many years, it was considered that school failure was the result of the student's lack of adaptation, in accordance with deficit or handicap theories.

According to these theories, the students who failed in school had their own characteristics, psychological and social, which distanced them from their classmates. The introduction of the sociological theories of Bourdieu and Bernstein, among others, shifted the focus to the role of school as the cause of school failure. In the last few years, the discourse on inclusive school has introduced the concept of 'school failure', which holds that the *institution* is responsible for student failure, because of its inability to adjust to the different needs and motivations of its students.

Although there are many dimensions of school failure, there is some consensus on the basic indicator of failure, which is the rate of non-graduation at the end of compulsory education; that is, the percentage of an age cohort that does not succeed in obtaining the Secondary Education Certificate when completing compulsory secondary education.

Another indicator is that of the 'schooling net participation rate', defined as the number of students enrolled according to age, divided by the total number of the population belonging to the age group. The dropout concept is also used, but related to school absenteeism; that is to say, the number of boys and girls who do not succeed in completing compulsory secondary education, although this phenomenon is much more complex to analyse and measure (Garcia, 2008). But it is the rate of non-graduation that appears in the official statistics.

The concept of dropout in post-compulsory education, which is the number of students who have enrolled in the baccalaureate or in vocational training but who do not complete it, is also commonly used. Finally, and according to the Lisbon Goals, a standard and comparable indicator of school success presently being used is the percentage of young people between 20- and 24-years-old holding a certificate of post-compulsory education.

First is an analysis of the schooling net participation rate, allowing examination of changes over the last 3 decades. According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Education, these rates at ages 15 and 17 are shown in Table 4.1.

Full schooling by the age of 15 was not achieved until the end of the 1990s for two reasons. Until the 1990s, compulsory primary education lasted up to age 14, and although, theoretically, the students who did not pass this cycle were compelled to follow a program of initial vocational training, in practice, many students did not attend it or quit it during the first course (Merino & Llosada, 2007). Educational and social policies were not able (or it was not considered a priority objective enough) to do something more for this group. In 1990, the Law on the General Planning of the Educational System (*Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo*, LOGSE) was passed that established compulsory secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*) from 12 to 16 years. Despite its many problems, it has achieved almost full schooling of students at age 15. However, some aspects of the quality of this schooling have been very much criticised, such as high rates of school failure. The percentage in schooling at age 17 (that is, in the post-compulsory stage) has steadily increased: from the beginning of the 1980s to the middle of the 1990s, it rose from 50% to 75% of the cohort. But since the end of the 1990s, this figure has not changed, especially due to the persistence of a high 30% rate of school failure in compulsory education. Spanish educational authorities and the public are well aware of these data, which show that the country is far from

Table 4.1 Schooling net participation rates at significant ages, 1983–84 to 2006–07

Schooling net rate	At age 15	At age 17
1983–84	71.3	48.3
1984–85	73.8	50.9
1985–86	76.7	51.9
1986–87	79.4	53.6
1987–88	82.6	56.6
1988–89	83.7	59.6
1989–90	86.2	62.1
1990–91	89.5	64.3
1991–92	91.5	66.6
1992–93	93.8	69.1
1993–94	n.d	71.7
1994–95	n.d	73.3
1995–96	n.d	74.4
1996–97	n.d	75.1
1997–98	n.d	76.1
1998–99	n.d	75.9
1999–2000	100	74.9
2000–01	100	74.8
2001–02	100	75.7
2002–03	100	75.3
2003–04	100	74.9
2004–05	100	74.8
2005–06	100	75.5
2006–07	100	75.7(p)

n.d = no data available; p = provisional

Source: Estadística de la Enseñanza en España (Statistics of Education in Spain). Several years. Ministry of Science and Education.

achieving the goal of 85% of young people between 18- and 24-years-old holding a certificate of post-compulsory education, as established by the Lisbon Strategy.

To calculate the rates of students who obtain the Secondary Education Certificate and the rates of dropout at the different levels and educational stages, two approaches may be used. The first approach is based on official statistics. Figure 4.1 shows the flows of students in the transition from compulsory education to the different post-compulsory pathways over the period 2000–05 (Merino & Garcia, 2008).

Percentages have been calculated for each level and program; those in brackets are for the total age cohort. The first point to note is the student failure to complete compulsory secondary education, which happens in about a third (33%) of the cohort. For this group, the 1990 Law designed the Social Guarantee Program (*Programa de Garantía Social*), which offered a first-level vocational training. However, it was scarcely appealing, for it did not allow students to continue on in the educational system. If added to that is the lack of resources allotted to these programs, it may very well be understood why only a little over one quarter (27%)

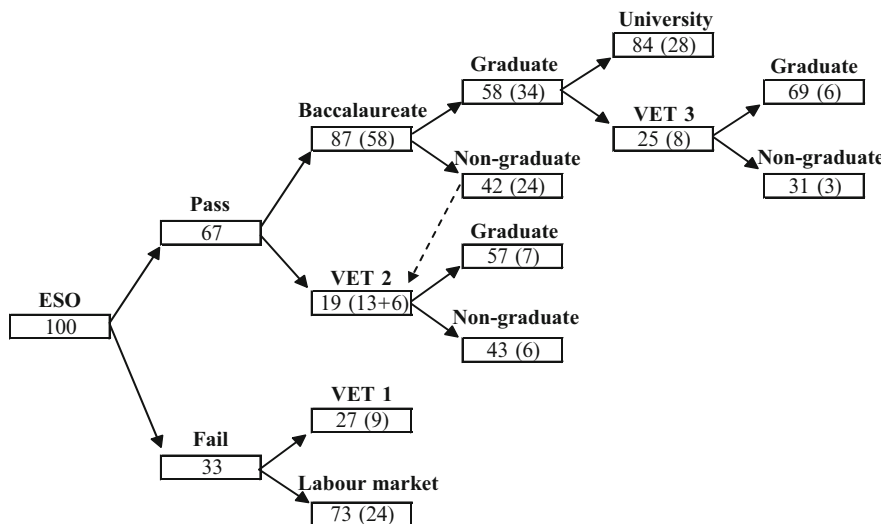


Fig. 4.1 Educational flows in Spain, 2000–05 (%)

of those who had failed have enrolled in these programs. The others, about one quarter of the age cohort (this figure is similar to the schooling net participation rate at the age of 17), are facing a transition to the labour market without any kind of certificate or professional training.

The academic track, the baccalaureate, shows a non-graduation rate of just over 40%, including both those students who drop out and those who do not pass. To reduce this percentage, in the last few years some measures of flexibility have been undertaken, such as the possibility of studying a third year, but only the subjects that the students have not passed. Another set of students who have dropped out of the academic track reorient into vocational training, thus contributing to the image of vocational training as the place where students who have failed the baccalaureate end up going (Merino, 2007).

Intermediate Vocational Training (CFGM), taken by almost 20% of the young people who have passed compulsory secondary education, shows a dropout rate of 43%. This very high rate may be accounted for by many who take up employment opportunities that have been offered, thus raising the opportunity costs of pursuing studies (Merino, 2006). It may well be that what happens during the economic crisis that began in 2008, which is predicted to be a long one, will lower these opportunity costs, and, therefore, will (potentially) reduce the very high dropout rate. Some indices regarding occupational training point to this trend.

After the 1990 reform, a professional track – the Advanced Vocational Training (*Ciclos Formativos de Grado Superior*, CFGS) – was established for those students who completed the baccalaureate, partly as an alternative to the academic track in university. This newly created higher professional track has ended up attracting 25% of the students holding a baccalaureate certificate. However, it is not exactly

an alternative track to the university, for a significant percentage of these students use Advanced Vocational Training (CFGS) as a different pathway to attain the former, as sample data will show. Although to a lesser extent than in Intermediate Vocational Training (CFGM), due to students joining the labour market, the dropout rate in these courses is about 30%.

Figure 4.1 was built on official enrolment data gathered and published by the Ministry of Education. But these are stock data, and the flow reconstruction has important limitations. For instance, it does not show the real tracks that young people follow when they go from first-level programs to Intermediate Vocational Training through admission examinations or special preparation courses. To analyse these tracks, it is necessary to use data from a survey carried out in 2005 showing the educational options in a sample of young people including both those holding and others who did not hold the Compulsory Education Certificate (*Graduado en ESO*) from school year 2000–01 to school year 2004–05. The relevant data appear in Fig. 4.2.

These data, which come from a different statistical source, are similar but not identical, and confirm some previously described trends, such as the preference of young Spanish people for the academic pathway and for considering vocational training a second option when the previous one fails. This is also confirmed by the fact that a third of Intermediate Vocational Training (CFGM) students have failed in the baccalaureate, and that the students who have taken more years to complete the baccalaureate are those who tend to choose Advanced Vocational Training rather than university study. They also account for phenomena that do not appear in official statistics, such as the dropout from the educational system of those students who obtained the Secondary Education Certificate. Although the latter do not represent a large percentage (3.5% of the whole age cohort, 5% of those who have

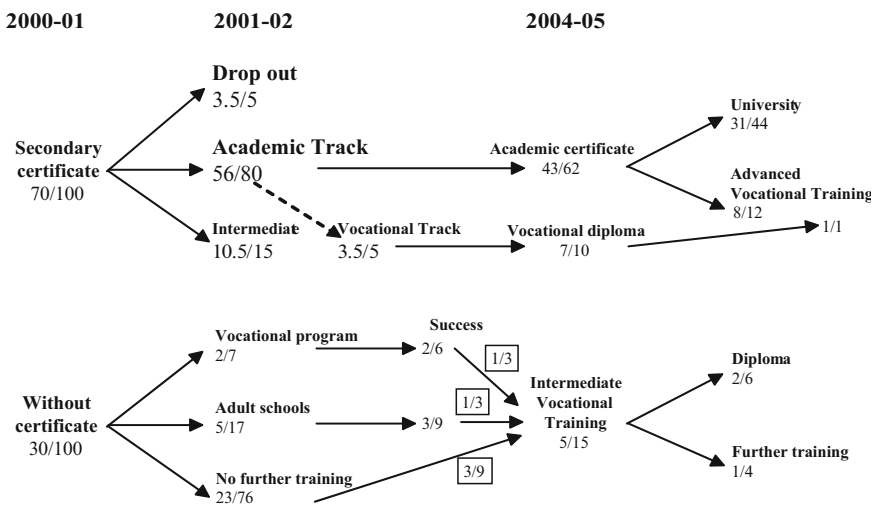


Fig. 4.2 Educational flows based on Spanish young people’s pathways, 2000–05 (Source: ETEFIL)

obtained the Certificate, as shown in Fig. 4.2), they deserve to be thoroughly studied. This dropout makes failure in the baccalaureate appear to be less than the one detected in official statistics; however, one out of every four students enrolled do not complete it. Of those, some move into vocational training, where dropout also occurs: almost 50% do not obtain the Technician Diploma. Another phenomenon that official statistics do not show is the transition from Intermediate Vocational Training to Advanced Vocational Training: although it is not a major pathway, the fact that it exists is nevertheless significant in itself. Legislation is being introduced so that this transition may take place more easily.

There is much more information, apart from the official statistics, about the students who do not obtain the Certificate. Approximately one quarter (24%) of these students start a program of recovery, be it a vocational or an academic one, to obtain the Secondary Education Certificate. The vocational programs (the so-called Social Guarantee Programs) have less weight, for they enjoy very little prestige and almost all the students who enrol (2% of the cohort, or 8% of those not obtaining their Secondary Education Certificate) complete them. The academic programs (taken by 5% of the cohort, or 17% of those without a Certificate) are available in adult schools and are not necessarily courses aimed at young people who have not obtained the Certificate; rather these programs have been designed for the general adult population. They are less successful but allow students to obtain an official certificate. At any rate, the most interesting success or recovery measure is the access to Intermediate Vocational Training, which involves one out of every six students (16%) who have not obtained the Secondary General Certificate. These students have been able to continue post-compulsory studies, although a third of them have not been able to complete them.

In summary, the Spanish educational system faces a very important challenge when compared with the other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): almost one quarter of each age cohort does not continue post-compulsory studies. Of the students who do undertake these academic studies or vocational training, almost one third do not complete them. And of those who do not enrol for them, only a small percentage make use of the recovery programs, which are far from being a true recovery for a significant percentage of the potential population.

Who Graduates and Who Drops Out?

In the empirical studies on school failure, the classic variables of social inequalities have been used: those that are related to social class, gender and ethnic groups. Regarding social class, basically two variables have been used: the type of work or occupation and the parents' level of education. The parents' career appears in several surveys, mainly in the EPA (*Encuesta de población activa*; Survey of the Working Population), and is classified according to the National Classification of Occupations (*Clasificación Nacional de Ocupaciones*) matrix. Based on this

classification, different socioeconomic classifications may be carried out that are an approximation to the reference social class.

According to the data analysed by Martínez (2007a), a child from an upper class family had a 5.8% (1 in 17) chance of not obtaining the certificate of compulsory education by the age of 20, whereas for a child of a working class family it was a 24.4% (1 in 4) chance, and for a child of a farmer's family, a 31.4% (1 in 3) chance. These differences have remained more or less equal since compulsory schooling was introduced. In 1995, a book was published in Catalonia on school success and failure that prompted some debate, for it showed the social differences of students obtaining the certificate at the end of compulsory education, but also that middle class children did not avoid the risk of non-completion: 13% had not obtained the certificate (Cirem, 1995). Despite economic means, and despite the educational strategies of families, school failure was not only a problem affecting the working class.

Regarding the level of education, the relationship between the parents' education and their children's school performance has been demonstrated, especially mother's level of education (Calero, 2006). Using data from the European Household Panel and multinomial logistic regression, this author analysed the different probabilities of pursuing the academic path in post-compulsory education; the most discriminating variable was mother's level of education. Although the latter is not a specific indicator of school success or failure, it is nevertheless related to it, for students who study the baccalaureate have the best results in compulsory education.

The studies based on statistical correlations are somewhat limited when interpreting data. First, they do not explain non-expected situations; for instance, why some working class boys and girls obtain good results and pursue their studies and even go to university. Second, and related to this first aspect, they do not account for the specific mechanisms that cause parents' social inequality to bring about their children's educational inequality. To do this requires studies of a qualitative kind that analyse how, based on similar objective conditions (of occupation and education), families belonging to the same social class are different regarding expectations and educational strategies. This is what a team of Spanish sociologists have attempted to do (Martín Criado et al., 2000), that is to say to study the different attitudes of working class families regarding education. Thus, subjective aspects such as the relationships established with school, the priority given to studying by the family environment or passing responsibilities on to the children must be incorporated into the explanation of the different school outcomes and of the probabilities of school success or failure.

Gender and educational inequalities have also prompted much debate in the scientific community and, no doubt, in the educational one. The new datum is that over the last decades, school failure has been more frequent among male students; also, more female students are in post-compulsory secondary education (mostly in baccalaureate) and even the university. This phenomenon has taken place in many countries from the 1980s onwards (Baudelot & Establet, 1992). Several explanations have been provided (Merino et al., 2006a) ranging from biological to cultural factors. At any rate, female students have adapted much better overall than male

students to school environment, which has paradoxically caused the phenomenon of girls' school failure to become 'invisible'. This has consequences for the programs of transition to work, as will be seen in the following section; these programs are often designed for occupational areas to which young women with low skills have very few opportunities to access.

Regarding ethnic groups, in Spain, studies have been carried out on the schooling of the Rom population, an ethnic group with an established presence that has traditionally been marginalised in several domains – work, housing and obviously in education too. In fact, the incorporation of Rom girls and boys into compulsory education has involved difficulties, and, still today, for this group absenteeism rates in secondary education are high. Many boys quit school when they are 14 years of age due to a lack of interest or because they must help to financially support the household; girls quit even earlier to help the family with housework or due to the reluctance of the family to allow them to continue their studies. Furthermore, the presence of ethnic boys and girls in post-compulsory and higher education is difficult to quantify. Neither statistics on education nor national population surveys record the Rom people as a different group; thus, most studies that have been carried out are on a local level or are qualitative approximations. It should be pointed out that a study by a team of anthropologists analysed school success factors in Rom boys and girls (Abajo & Carrasco, 2004), in which, by means of qualitative methods, they found factors of school success, among which non-segregated schooling stood out; however, the risk of non-segregated schooling is that it may lead to a process of acculturation.

The relationship between the ethnic groups and educational inequalities has undergone a very important development in the last few years due to the very important arrival of immigrants. In a 10-year span, Spain has gone from being a country of emigrants to becoming a country of immigrants (from 2.3% of foreigners in 2000 to 10% in 2008; the percentage of students in compulsory education has also followed this pace) and, therefore, a multicultural country. This situation has remarkably changed the social scenery in urban and rural areas, and has provoked conflicts and tensions, the most important setting of which has been school. Prompted by social and political concern regarding this issue, in the last few years a considerable number of research studies have been carried out on the access and incorporation of children who, together with their families, go through their migratory or second-generation processes. Although sometimes the media exaggerate the negative impact of immigrant students entering the educational system, it clearly appears to be harder for immigrant students to obtain the compulsory education certificate and to continue in post-compulsory education. Whereas for Spain as a whole, in the 2007–08 school year, 10% of the students in compulsory secondary education were foreigners, they only amounted to 4% of baccalaureate students and to 6% of vocational training students (Carabaña, 2008). The explanations for such differences are more or less the same ones that were used to explain school failure among working class young people, perhaps just emphasising more the cultural dimensions, but it is very difficult to establish correlations with a situation as heterogeneous as immigration.

From a statistical point of view, only citizenship (Spanish or foreign) is recorded. This in itself causes problems as increasingly more and more people from immigrant origins obtain Spanish citizenship. However, from the point of view of the internal composition of immigration, there is large diversity. Although majority groups come from Latin America (especially Ecuador and Colombia), or from Morocco, families also come from Argentina, Romania, Senegal, Pakistan or China, to name a few, to settle in Spain. This is a recent phenomenon, and there is still need to study in depth the education and training trajectories of these young men and women.

In addition to factors related to the biographic profile of the students and their families, another factor partially explaining differences in rates of school failure is the regional context, more specifically, the economic structure and local labour markets. In the early 1990s, it was already clear that school failure was very different in areas of Spain such as Catalonia, Galicia and Andalusia (Planas & Comas, 1994). Whereas in Catalonia, the non-graduation rate when finishing compulsory education was 30%, in Andalusia and Galicia it was only 20%. The explanation is twofold. The industrial structure of Catalonia provided more job opportunities, thus vocational training was more attractive. Instead, the tendency to pursue studies is higher in areas where the economy is weaker and where the educational system functions as a temporary buffer. But this tendency happened with the educational system defined by the Law of 1970, which made it compulsory for students who did not pass primary education to enrol in lower-level vocational training (*Formación Profesional de Primer Grado*). With the application of the educational reform of 1990, this mandatory connection disappeared, and so this factor could no longer explain the higher level of school failure in Catalonia.

Furthermore, in the beginning of the 1990s, the Spanish economy was in recession. Then, from 1996 onwards, there was a cycle of great economic growth, when millions of jobs were created, partially explaining the increase in the immigrant workforce (although this was generally in those sectors requiring low skills, such as construction and tourism). This economic boom accounts for the fact that in the last few years, the differences in school failure have increased throughout the country. In the 'Mediterranean Arc', where there are high levels of employment, dropout and school failure rates are higher than in other areas of the country. It is relevant to highlight the case of the Balearic Islands, with a school failure rate of almost 40% (Calero, 2006), which is a case of a labour market that basically offers low-quality jobs related to mass tourism. This often encourages students to give up their studies and enter the labour market. This is referring to what economists call 'opportunity cost': the lack of difficulty finding a job and a salary means a lack of incentive to make an effort to study and to pursue secondary education. This phenomenon is well known in vocational training, where between 30% and 50% of enrolled students do not complete the course, generally because they find a job (Merino, *in press*). The period of economic growth ceased in the first part of 2008, with increasing numbers of unemployed people. It is still necessary to verify empirically if this economic downturn will lower opportunity costs and therefore encourage young people to continue studying, or whether school failure rates will continue to be as high as they are now.

To sum up, explanatory factors for school failure can be found in the ‘supply-side’ characteristics of individuals and their families and in the ‘demand-side’ characteristics of local labour markets. To these two sets of factors can be added a third, which here is called the ‘institutional’ factors – what schools can do and actually do to increase or reduce school failure. This issue is analysed in the following section.

Programs, Policies and Practices to Reduce Dropout

There is a general consensus today in Spain that the dropout and school failure rate is too high. Over previous decades, political priority was given to schooling participation rates, to ensure that schooling during compulsory primary education (and in the last few years, in the non-compulsory pre-school period) was provided to all children. In this way, historical discrimination experienced by many generations excluded from school was rectified. But once participation rates of almost 100% in compulsory education and 70% in post-compulsory education had been achieved, emphasis has been put on the efficiency of the system. The public agenda has moved from quantity to quality. When the data on non-graduation from compulsory education for students who are aged 16 are compared, the Spanish rate is far from the average of the other countries in the European Union or the OECD.

Every time a survey or a report (such as PISA) discussing graduation and dropout rates is made public, the focus of Spain’s media, in its political debates, and within the educational community is that something has to be done to reduce the school failure rate of approximately 30%. The problem is to achieve consensus in what must be done, which inevitably involves hardships. In addition to logical (and legitimate) ideological differences regarding the definition and treatment that school failure deserves, there are important intrinsic difficulties, such as the appearance of unwanted effects.

If the diagnosis is focused on *individual* variables, then emphasis is put on the *compensatory* dimension of the programs to be implemented; they focus on offering more hours to the students so that they may be able to follow the normal pace of the group. Compensatory education may be private; for instance, a middle class family that provides private lessons to their child, because he or she learns more slowly than other classmates. It may be state-supported, like the support programs of afternoon centres for students with such family problems that they cannot normally follow their studies. It may also be mixed, with the collaboration of the Administration and of cooperative and associative networks to carry out so-called ‘school reinforcement’ (*refuerzo escolar*).

If the diagnosis focuses on the *external* variable, eventual solutions are very difficult. This is another of the weak points of statistical correlations when trying to give them shape in political proposals. The fact that working class young people or those who have illiterate mothers have a higher probability of failing in school tells us little about what could be done, for neither their class nor their mothers can be

changed. Grant policies may be established (and they actually are) to compensate for the direct and indirect school costs, but they have greater impact on access to the different educational levels than on school performance (Martínez, 2007b). In addition, it is also very difficult to impinge on the structure of the labour market; although the knowledge economy might be fostered, reality is reality and the demand for a low-skilled workforce will continue to be a lack of incentive for educational endeavour. Calls for active employment programs focus on training and operate under the assumption that unemployed individuals are those who do not adjust to the requirements of the labour market, so that they appear as responsible for their situation (Walther & Stauber, 2002).

Finally, what can schools do? Educational policy has been the scene of strong ideological, political and academic debates about the steps to be taken to reduce school failure. As discussed in the first section, one of the aims of every educational reform from the last 40 years in Spain has been to reduce the rate of early dropout and non-graduation in compulsory education. To achieve this aim, basically two kinds of proposals have been made: organisational and didactic, each of them focusing on discussion of the positive and negative aspects of comprehensive education. In the 1980s, consensus was reached regarding 14 as the age for students to complete compulsory education, and to decide between the academic path and the professional one. The 1990 reform extended the common curriculum by 2 years and fostered the methodology of significant learning based on constructivist theories to address the obvious difficulty of managing classes with a greater diversity of students. The first years of the application of this reform were extremely conflicted; the second cycle of compulsory secondary school, from ages 14 to 16, was the most difficult one. Many teenagers behaved badly and they started to be called 'school objectors' (*objetores escolares*); also, many teachers complained about the increasing impossibility of controlling their classrooms and secondary schools, about the lack of resources and the unavoidable fall in the levels of school performance of all students. Many families also complained about the fact that interested and motivated students were combined in classrooms with students who wanted to quit school (Merino, 2005).

At the bottom line of this whole debate, beyond biased exaggerations, the internalisation or externalisation of school failure was being debated (Planas et al., 1998), as well as the role and aims of compulsory education. Either school engages itself to make every student acquire the so-called 'basic competences', or it has only a fundamentally classificatory function to sort students according to their attainment. The responses to school failure very much depend on this dilemma.

From the first point of view, the response is basically a didactic one: methodology should be changed and teachers' training should be improved. From the second point of view, the response to school failure is clear: the reason why students fail at school is because it cannot offer them anything that may interest them. Therefore, what school should do is to diversify its curriculum, for example, by offering programs based on manual skills with a vocational orientation, even if this is at the risk of creating a hierarchy of status among the different paths of the curriculum; or these programs could be provided by institutions outside the secondary school system.

The 1990 educational reform chose the former way, whereas the 2002 reform chose the latter. In a law passed in 2006, the importance of didactic orientation was partly reinforced, but doors were also opened to curricular diversification, which *de facto* already existed in many secondary schools.

This first important debate focuses on how to reduce school failure at the end of compulsory education; however, there is a second important debate on what to do with the students who have not obtained the Secondary Education Certificate. As already mentioned, the 1990 reform prevented these students from entering school-based vocational training and instead established specific programs called Social Guarantee Programs (*Programas de Garantía Social*, PGS). These had a vocational orientation, but greater possibilities of becoming stigmatised programs. In fact, the PGS have only interested a third of the students who have not obtained their Secondary Education Certificate, and most classes have been provided in institutions outside the secondary school system despite serious problems maintaining stability (Merino et al., 2006b). The idea was to establish programs that lasted one school year and that were based on professional-skill modules. However, they did not enable students to either obtain the Secondary Education Certificate or pursue vocational training studies.

The *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (Organic Law on Education) of 2006 rectified these fundamental problems by establishing the Programs of Initial Professional Qualification (*Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial*, PCPI), which are programs that last 2 years, incorporate a module of basic skills that allows students to obtain the compulsory Secondary Education Certificate and makes access to intermediate-level vocational training (*Formación Profesional de Grado Medio*, CFGM) easier. Although the external character of educational institutions has been maintained, it seems that educational administrators have taken the structuring and follow-up of these programs more seriously. Because they were to be implemented for the first time in the 2008–09 school year, it is still too early to carry out an assessment of the programs as to whether they become a true second opportunity for students who have failed in school.

The evaluation of educational reforms, in general, and of the policies against school failure, in particular, is not easy to resolve. To the technical difficulty related to this kind of assessment should be added the ongoing ideological and political disputes regarding the best way of approaching the problem of school failure. An example of this is the substitution of the new Programs of Initial Professional Qualification (*Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial*, PCPI) for Social Guarantee Programs (*Programas de Garantía Social*, PGS). The PGSs have been criticised, but no assessment of their strong and weak points has been carried out. In November 2006, when the Ministry of Education was beginning to enforce the LOE (*Ley Orgánica de Educación*, Organic Law of Education), a monograph on how the new PCPIs should be implemented was published, in which the present authors participated (Merino et al., 2006a). However, this was done without an assessment of the results over the previous 15 years that PGSs have been in operation.

One possibility for obtaining the Secondary Education Certificate, for those who did not obtain it while they were at secondary school, is to attend courses in adult

schools. These schools, which in the beginning were a response to the high rate of illiteracy of the adult population, are increasingly 'being rejuvenated' as a result of this possibility (Planas & Monturiol, 2006). According to some data of the Ministry of Education, in the 2006–07 school year, 40% of students who enrolled in adult schools to obtain the Secondary Education Certificate were aged under 20. At these schools, students can also prepare themselves for the examinations to enter vocational training; however, not many young people actually do so.

An aspect that must be taken into account is that Spain is a strongly decentralised country with regard to education. Although the State Administration still holds power over the general regulation of the educational system, territorial or regional governments (the Autonomous Communities) have some regulatory power and, more than anything else, a management role. In the curriculum of compulsory secondary education, for instance, some Communities have transformed the optional subjects to obligatory ones in either the academic or vocational paths. Also, some specific devices have been set up for groups of students with special difficulties, such as language immersion classrooms (*aulas de enlace*) for teenagers of immigrant origin who join the educational system but who are not literate in Spanish. Some Communities have designed their own Social Guarantee Programs, such as the Programs of Transition to Work (*Programas de Transición al Trabajo*) in Catalonia, in very close collaboration with the local administrations.

Despite having virtually no powers in educational matters, these local administrations have taken on great responsibility in the establishment of programs to encourage school success; many of the problems derived from early dropout and school failure are concentrated in some specific areas, and are usually linked to social problems that appear in the local community. It is worth highlighting the programs against school absenteeism (Garcia, 2008), launched by many city councils with the participation of the social services, the local police and other agencies in order to identify those children and teenagers not attending school. The network of municipal institutions of occupational training is also very important; these institutions provide a broad offering of training courses, counselling workshops and other resources for young people who lack academic training. Although part of this counselling and training is regulated by the Ministry of Employment and the Autonomous Governments (with the financing of the European Funds), city councils are in charge of giving momentum to and managing many programs. All of the programs managed or fostered by local administrations have two main problems, which make them less efficient: not enough financing, since financing is unstable and subject to political or administrative changes in the higher levels; and lack of networking among various areas and departments.

Finally, many secondary schools have developed innovative projects to reduce their dropout and/or school failure rates. While there may not be official records of these projects, some research has been carried out on them (Ferrer, 2007). The vast majority of these projects are based on diversification or on curricular adaptation, with some degree of external training, which provides students with different educational agents and environments. The aim of these projects is to offer something more interesting and appealing than mathematics, language or history to the

percentage of teenagers (who, depending on the school, may number between 40% and 50%) who are not motivated regarding their studies. Project classrooms (*aulas de proyecto*) or open classrooms (*aulas abiertas*) replace the ordinary curriculum, with practical activities within or outside the school premises, often with the collaboration of local associations and companies that take these students for some hours in order to get them away from the routine of secondary school and to increase their motivation in a 'real' environment.

Basically, these projects have two limitations: they are mostly fostered and carried out on the initiative of teachers who are very motivated and feel empathy for these students, with no clear institutional support, and they may have a boomerang effect, increasing the temptation of ordinary teachers to direct more students towards these programs so that the complex management of mainstream classrooms diminishes.

The problem of school failure is on the public agenda, especially in the context of the common aim of the European Union countries that was part of the Lisbon Declaration. Spain is still far from the 10% dropout rate that European countries established as a goal for 2010, and, even worse, there is not any downward trend in the rate of dropout. The structural programs may make it difficult to find solutions in the mid and long run, which is the reason why the challenge for the educational community and for policy-makers is much greater and more urgent.

The importance of this issue is such that on November 11, 2008, an agreement between the Ministry of Education and the Autonomous Governments was announced. This was to develop a plan to combat premature school dropout, aiming at reducing by half the dropout rate in 2012 and thus getting closer to the OECD average. This plan has been provided with funds (the idea is to obtain €240 million) and will focus on strengthening the aforementioned strategies (including PCPI, admission examinations to vocational training, schools for adults, improved counselling and teacher training), as well as completely new ones, such as schools for parents, and the recognition of non-formal learning. The hope is that it will be more than just another plan, and that it will be implemented over the next few years.

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Chapter 5

Towards Compulsory Participation in England

Alice Sullivan and Lorna Unwin

Introduction

Children in England who started secondary school in September 2008 have a special claim to fame: they form the first cohort obliged by law to participate in some form of officially recognised education or training until they reach their 17th birthday (Department of Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2007). This is because they will be 16 in 2013, the date that marks the first stage in the government's plan to raise what it refers to as the 'participation age'. In 2015, the second stage of the plan will require all young people to participate until they are 18. There have been calls for the school-leaving age to be extended to 18 since the end of the First World War (see Simon, 1986). The current age at which young people can leave school has stood at 16 since 1972, having risen from 14 to 15 in 1947 following the 1944 Education Act. The Act also announced that although young people could leave school at 15 and enter the labour market, they would be required to attend county colleges for the purposes of part-time 'continuation education'. In her discussion of these proposals, Tinkler (2001, p. 79) explains that policy-makers of the time felt that anyone who left school at 15 had 'received an education inadequate to their needs as individuals, citizens and workers', and that 'no wage earning occupation could in itself be a "proper" education for those who had left school at 15'. Furthermore, it was argued that young people would be happier and have richer lives if they remained in contact with an educational institution for some years after entering employment, particularly as the jobs they were likely to get might promote 'physical, mental and moral degeneration'.

The county colleges were never built and the call for 'continuation education' was dropped, but the ambition to make education or training compulsory in some form or other has been a matter of debate ever since. The focus in the 1944 Education Act on the protection of young people from the potential dangers of the labour market and the desire to continue their intellectual development for as long as possible has given way to a new set of imperatives for keeping young people in some form of officially

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recognised education or training. The main focus of today's policy-makers is on the economic and social consequences of early leaving (for the individual, the economy and society), plus a desire to arrest England's poor showing in the league tables from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for national participation and 'dropout' rates. The current participation rate in post-compulsory education and training has not changed since 1994 when it plateaued at around 75%. These concerns are set within what the government refers to as a context of change (economic and social), and thus the background paper for the new legislation argued that:

Young people growing up now can expect a life of change – and we must equip them not just with the cognitive capacity but also with the personal capabilities, resilience, interpersonal skills and the attitudes that will enable them to benefit from the opportunities this will bring. (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2007, p. 10)

It is important to draw attention at this stage to the fact that the new legislation is significantly different from previous changes to the school-leaving age. In 2013, the compulsory phase of schooling will still end at 16, and young people will be able to leave school. The new requirement to continue participating means young people will have to find a place in one of the following parts of the English system:

Full-time education – including school, college and home education

Work-based learning – such as an apprenticeship or other form of government-supported training (GST) program

Part-time education or training – if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering more than 20 hours a week

Although this variety of contexts means that the concept of 'school dropout', as used in other countries, still won't apply in England, the new legislation will build stronger walls around the publicly funded education and training system to the age of 18. The prison metaphor is not inappropriate: those young people who refuse to 'participate' will be subject to a series of penalties, the highest level of which would result in them appearing before a youth court and their parents or guardians being subjected to a 'parenting order' (DCSF, 2007). A parenting order, which can last for up to 12 months, is issued by a magistrate's court and usually requires the parent or guardian to attend counselling or guidance sessions for a period of up to 3 months. In some cases, they may have to attend meetings with teachers at their child's school, ensure their child does not visit a particular place unsupervised or make sure their child is at home at particular times. Failure to meet these requirements can result in prosecution.

This chapter examines the current inequalities in terms of the outcomes of the English system for young people aged 16–18. It is argued that whilst the ambition to raise the levels of participation in education and training beyond 16 is justified, much will need to be done to ensure that the education and training programs available to young people are of equal quality.

The chapter is divided into four further sections: the first discusses the nature of compulsory education in England to the age of 16; the second discusses the different pathways that comprise post-compulsory education and training; the third examines the impact of gender in relation to education and training; and the fourth provides some concluding remarks.

Compulsory Education in England

Children in England enter the ‘primary stage’ of education in the year in which they have their fifth birthday. Prior to this, children from the age of 3 who attend some form of pre-school provision are in what the 2002 Education Act termed the Foundation Stage of education. At the age of 11, children then transfer to new schools to start the ‘secondary stage’ of education. Depending on the part of the country, some secondary schools take pupils to the age of 18, and some to the age of 16. A minority of ‘middle schools’, which take pupils from the age of 8 or 9 to the age of 12 or 13, still exist. The vast majority of schools are funded and maintained by the state, but there are privately funded primary and secondary schools (which usually refer to themselves as ‘independent’ schools), and they have a significant impact on the rest of the system. The status of private schools in Britain is quite different from that of the private schools in either the United States or continental Europe. Whereas in most developed countries, private schools are primarily religious and often highly subsidised (by church or state), British private schools are in the main socially and (often) academically exclusive institutions, which, being unsubsidised, are far too expensive for the bulk of the population. Because Britain incorporated most denominational schools within the state sector, its private sector is relatively small. As Hillman (1994, p. 403) puts it: ‘In most countries private schools provide for religious, ethnic and cultural diversity. In Britain they provide an often high-powered preparation for a significant proportion of the future members of high-status occupations.’ The domination of elite occupations by alumni of the top private schools (often, for historical reasons, termed ‘public schools’) has long been apparent (Boyd, 1973). The majority of secondary schools do not select by ability, but there are still 164 state-funded grammar schools covering pupils in around one third of England, entry to which is determined by an entrance examination taken at the age of 11. Grammar schools also exist in Northern Ireland, but not in Wales or Scotland. In 2007, only 7% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11) were attending private schools. Sixty per cent of private school pupils gained five or more A*-C grade passes in their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams, including English and mathematics, compared with 46% of state-maintained school pupils. Evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of the apparent academic advantage at the private schools is due to the academically and socially selective nature of their intake (Sullivan & Heath, 2003). Pupils at state schools defined as ‘selective’ outperformed private school pupils at GCSE, with 98% gaining (five or more) 5 + A*-C GCSE exam passes.¹ Despite efforts towards ‘widening participation’, students from private schools still gain a disproportionate level of places at elite universities. For example, nearly half of the home undergraduates at Oxford University come from private schools (Oxford University Gazette, 2008).

¹Source: Table 3 <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000768/reviseGCSE2008sfrtables.xls>

Under both Conservative and Labour governments, education policy over the past 20 years or so has promoted ‘diversity’ (of types of school) and ‘parental choice’ within the state system in England. In contrast, and as Raffe (2010) notes, the advocacy of diversity is something that Scotland has resisted. Where once, Labour governments regarded the shift to a totally non-selective comprehensive system of secondary schooling as crucial to creating a more equal society (see Lodge & Blackstone, 1982), Tony Blair’s New Labour government elected in 1997 signalled a significant change to the so-called old Labour principles. This saw the introduction of various initiatives to encourage greater involvement from employers and other interested parties from the wider community in the running of schools. Part of the argument is that schools (and other educational institutions) need to learn how to innovate and be more enterprising, and this is connected to a belief that it is only through such an approach that so-called failing schools, mainly found in deprived areas, will be turned around. Sammons (2008) argues that the origins of the intense pressure on schools to improve their performance since the election of the New Labour government, and since 2007, under Blair’s successor, Gordon Brown, can be traced to a lecture in 1995 given by Michael Barber (now Lord Barber) who was a key New Labour education adviser and former Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. Barber advocated the need to challenge what he saw as deep-rooted low expectations and poor quality of education in schools in disadvantaged communities.

In 2000, the Labour government announced that it intended to create a number of ‘academies’, a new type of secondary school partly inspired by the previous Conservative government’s establishment of city technology colleges (CTCs) and which, in turn, had been influenced by the charter schools initiative in the United States. Academies are state-funded schools, which are established and managed by sponsors, including existing schools and colleges of further education, universities, philanthropists, businesses, the voluntary sector and the faith communities. Government claims that sponsors will challenge traditional thinking on how schools are run and, hence, help to reverse cultures of low aspiration in areas of the country where school results are deemed to be unacceptable. The sponsor’s role is to set up an endowment fund to be used by a board of trustees to run the school, with particular emphasis on initiatives to stem the impact of deprivation on education in their local communities. Woods et al. (2007, p. 240) describe academies as ‘hybrid organisations’ in that they combine ‘private characteristics’, such as being ‘independently managed’, backing by independent sponsors and freedom to innovate, with ‘...public characteristics, such as dependence on government funding and expectations to contribute to social goals by tackling educational inequalities and contributing to the regeneration of communities’.

Between 2002 and 2005, over 50 academies had been opened or approved and current plans are to increase their number to 400. Academies are set up with the backing of the local education authority (LEA) in the area, and the LEA has a seat on each academy’s governing body. When academies are co-sponsored by their local authority, the LEA will have two seats on the governing body. Academies are not maintained by an LEA, but they collaborate closely with it, and with other

schools in the area. Research suggests that academies do not actually achieve better examination results than schools with comparable intakes of students (Gorard, 2005). The government has also pledged to support the expansion of faith school provision within the state sector. This now includes Muslim, Hindu and Sikh schools, as well as Christian and Jewish schools. Both academies and faith schools have been accused of covert social and academic selection of pupils.

From 1988 until 1994, all pupils in English secondary schools followed a 10-subject national curriculum divided into four ‘key stages’, ending with external assessment at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. From 2009, the testing of young people at 14 was to be dropped, following consistent and intense pressure on government to ease the assessment burden. From 1994 onwards, various interventions were made by government to provide more flexibility for schools to adapt what was seen as an overly prescriptive and unwieldy curriculum framework. In 2002, the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) went a considerable step further, and allowed schools to release some 14- to 16-year-olds from parts of the national curriculum so that they could attend vocational courses for up to 3 days a week at their local further education college. From their evaluation of the IFP, Higham and Yeomans (2007) concluded that government had been ‘pushing at an open door’ as far as schools were concerned because the majority of teachers believed that the 10-subject national curriculum had compelled large numbers of young people to take subjects that did not motivate or interest them. There are also Youth Apprenticeships for 14- to 16-year-olds, which involve work experience with local employers.

The ability to ‘choose’ which subjects to study is part of the government’s desire to develop a ‘personalised’ approach to education:

The central characteristic of such a new system will be personalisation – so that the system fits to the individual rather than the individual having to fit to the system. This is not a vague liberal notion about letting people have what they want. It is about having a system which will genuinely give high standards for all...and the corollary of this is that the system must be both freer and more diverse – with more flexibility to help meet individual needs; and more choices between courses and types of provider, so that there really are different and personalised opportunities available. (DfES, 2004, foreword)

Whilst what has been termed the ‘choice’ agenda is being implemented throughout the country’s public services, Avis (2004, p. 209) has warned, however, that the creation of multiple and differentiated pathways in education may serve to ‘reproduce the patterns of inequality and structural differentiation present in wider society’.

With regard to the themes explored in this book, the key assessment stage in England takes place at 16 when pupils sit external examinations in a range of subjects (sciences, humanities, modern languages and vocational subjects) to be awarded the GCSE. This assessment comes at the end of 2 years of study; hence young people have to choose their GCSE subjects at the end of their third year in secondary school. These choices are important because they ultimately affect the extent to which young people can then gain access to subjects at a more advanced level, including at university. GCSEs are graded from A* to G, but the benchmark for success is to attain at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. The attainment of five GCSEs at the higher levels, formally classified

as a Level 2 achievement, is regarded as the entry requirement for the more prestigious apprenticeships, for jobs with training, and as the platform for progression to the next level of academic qualifications, known as 'A Levels', which are required to gain entry to higher education. Thus, the English system is characterised by this seismic break at the age of 16. Those young people who do not achieve the magic five GCSEs at grades A* to C are regarded as failures, for the system has no way of recognising the attainment of lower-level GCSEs even though a young person may, for example, have passed several at grades D to G. Those who do climb over the GCSE threshold are then able, if they wish, to remain in full-time education, either at school or at a further education college catering for the 16–18 age group, to study for A Levels.

Hodgson and Spours (2008) have identified the following five characteristics of the English general education system:

- Qualifications-led and dominated by GCSEs and A Levels
- Selective at 16+
- 'Elective' with considerable learner choice in terms of individual qualifications post-16 and increasingly post-14
- Individual subject focused rather than programmatic
- Little curriculum breadth – particularly post-16

These characteristics have resulted in the system being criticised for forcing young people to take increasingly narrow groups of subjects and for favouring those who can most easily succeed. In order to counter such criticisms, since 2000, a major thrust of education policy in England has been to construct a 14–19 phase of education that will encourage young people to remain in full-time education or government-funded training and overcome the terminal status of the GCSE stage at the age of 16 (for detailed reviews, see Hodgson & Spours, 2003, 2008). The most recent initiative to emerge is the introduction of 14–19 Diplomas covering a range of vocational areas of study (e.g., information technology, engineering and creative and media) from September 2008. They will be delivered through partnerships between schools and colleges, and young people will be able to combine them with GCSE and A-level study. Decisions about the content of the diplomas have been led by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), which represent employers in 25 areas of the economy, and universities have been involved to some extent in relation to stipulating how much general education would be required for a diploma to be recognised for entry to a degree course.

The design of and inspiration for the new diplomas came from the Tomlinson Working Group on 14–19 Reform (led by Sir Mike Tomlinson) set up by government in 2003. The group recommended that GCSEs and A Levels be replaced by a new overarching diploma covering all 14–19 learning. Despite considerable enthusiasm for this model from significant numbers of teachers, teacher unions, parts of the academic community, some employer organisations and other interested parties, the idea was rejected by Tony Blair and his government in 2005. Government decided, however, that the concept of a diploma could be introduced as a way to create a more substantive vocational offering within schools and colleges for

full-time students. Despite the fact that colleges of further education had been running full-time vocational courses for young people aged 16 and over for many years, the new 14–19 Diplomas are being promoted as ‘the’ vocational program. The first students enrolled in September 2008, so it is too early to pronounce on the effectiveness of this new pathway, but there are considerable concerns that these new qualifications are being introduced too quickly without adequate pilots, that there is too much inconsistency across the subject lines, and that they are already overly academic in terms of their content and forms of assessment (see Stanton, 2008).

There has been considerable change to the governance and funding arrangements related to schools in England over the past 10 years or so. The ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda and the Children Act 2004 placed the responsibility on the city- and county-based local authorities that administer school-based education to establish new departments to bring together all services covering children and young people. This so-called inter-agency approach (involving schools, health services, the police and the voluntary sector) was enshrined in the government’s decision in July 2007, when Gordon Brown took over from Tony Blair as Prime Minister, to split the existing DfES into two new departments: the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). DCSF is responsible for children and young people (and hence their education and training) up to the age of 18, whilst DIUS looks after education and training beyond 18. This was seen as a particularly problematic split for further education colleges, which cater for students from the age of 14 (as part of a program that allows school pupils to spend part of the week attending courses in college) to adults at and beyond retirement age (see Huddleston & Unwin, 2007, for an overview of the colleges’ remit).

Pring (2008, p. 678) argues that the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda has had the result that:

Education is now officially seen as one aspect of ‘well-being’ (howsoever this is defined) and, reciprocally, ‘well-being’ is seen as a condition, generally speaking, for educational achievement.

This conflation of education with broader concerns for young people’s personal and social development is reflected in the legislation to increase the participation age to 18:

Young people who participate between the ages of 16 and 18 are less likely to experience teenage pregnancy, behave anti-socially, be involved in crime or go to prison. They are more likely to be healthy and to develop good social skills, which makes it easier for them to find work and succeed in life. (DCSF, 2007, p. 4)

Post-Compulsory Education and Training in England

At the age of 16, young people can:

- Remain in full-time education in school or college
- Study part-time at college
- Enter employment, full-time or part-time

- Enter government supported work-based learning – apprenticeship (available at Levels 2 and 3) or a pre-employment program
- Become classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

To encourage full-time participation, young people whose parents/guardians earn less than £30,000 a year can apply for the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) worth up to £30 per week.

The latest figures for England, as provided in Table 5.1, show that 71% of 17-year-olds are in full-time further education or government supported training (GST). The prevalence of GST is the highest in the North East of England (13%), and lowest in London (4%).²

As these national statistics show, there are regional variations, but further breakdowns at the level of wards within cities would show even starker contrasts from one area to another. For example, there are substantial differences in the levels of educational attainment in different London boroughs (Lupton & Sullivan, 2007). These gaps between rich and poor areas are apparent in all cities, to varying degrees. Nottingham is another city of stark contrasts between areas. In 2007, 64% of pupils in Nottingham North gained five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 49% in Nottingham South.³ Between 1991 and 2006, the proportion of school-leavers who continued in education rose from 61% to 78%. At the end of compulsory schooling in 2006, girls were more likely to continue in education (82%) than boys (74%), while boys were more likely than girls to be in employment or GST. Rates of unemployment or NEET were similar between the sexes (7% for females and 8% for males).⁴ The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who were classed as NEET was at a high during the mid-1980s, which was a time of high unemployment. However, levels have been fairly flat since the early 1990s. In addition to the classification as ‘NEET’, young people can be classed as ‘NET’ (Not in any Education or Training). In practice, this category provides an overestimate of the number of young people who are receiving no education or training at all, as government classifies anyone in a job that does not involve some form of government-supported or recognised form of training as NET. Recent qualitative case study research suggests that some young people in this category are receiving both on- and off-the-job training as part of their job (see Maguire et al., 2008). In addition, research shows that it is very misleading to treat both the NEET and NET categories as homogeneous, as they include young people who have a range of reasons and motives for not participating in officially recognised pathways.

²The 29% of 17-year-olds not participating in education and training may well be considered, in line with definitions in other parts of this book, as ‘dropouts’ in other countries, recognising though the difficulties that this concept presents in the English context, difficulties discussed in this chapter. The rates may be even higher than those suggested here because no account is taken of actual completion of education and training (Editors’ note).

³Source: DCSF http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/inyourarea/statics/pcons_lea_892_4.shtml

⁴Source: DCSF Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom, 2007, Table 3.10.

Table 5.1 Post-compulsory education and training rates of 17-year-olds 2005–06

	In further education			Government supported training (GST)	All in full-time education and GST
	At school	Full-time	Part-time		
North East	22	34	7	13	70
North West	21	40	5	11	71
Yorkshire and the Humber	24	32	6	10	66
East Midlands	30	29	6	9	68
West Midlands	26	35	6	9	69
Eastern	33	31	5	7	70
London	36	35	5	4	75
South East	32	34	5	7	72
South West	31	32	6	8	71
England	29	34	5	8	71

Source: DCSF Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom (2007), Table 2.2.

Within the 16–18 category, the risk of NEET increases with age. In 2006, 6.7% of 16-year-olds, 9.8% of 17-year-olds, and 14.7% of 18-year-olds were classified as NEET (source as above). Nevertheless, NEET status is often short term, and data from the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) suggest that the majority of 16-year-olds who were NEET in 2004 were no longer NEET by 2006. By age 18, 37% of those who had been NEET at 16 remained in this category. Only a minority of young people classified as NEET at any point in time are ‘long-term NEET’, and many will be NEET only for a brief period, or will ‘churn’ in and out of this status (Hayward et al., 2008).

Parents’ social class is strongly associated with the likelihood of being NEET at the age of 18. However, prior academic attainment is an even more powerful predictor of NEET status. Eighteen-year-olds who had attained fewer than five D-G grade GCSEs in Year 11 (age 15/16) were 10 times more likely to be NEET than those with eight or more A*–C grades.

Similarly, the most powerful predictor of academic attainment by 18 is earlier attainment in the final year of compulsory schooling. Of those with eight or more GCSE A*–C grades at 16, 84% gained Level 3 qualifications by 18 years of age, compared to just 3–4% of those with no A*–C passes. Qualifications in the UK are organised according to levels. Level 2 is regarded as the benchmark for employability and, hence, the level that should be achieved by the end of compulsory schooling. Level 3 qualifications include A Levels and intermediate vocational qualifications. Parents’ social class background is also linked to qualifications at the age of 18 years in a predictable way, with the offspring of parents from the professional classes and of graduates being the most likely to gain Level 3 qualifications, but intermediate and lower supervisory class individuals being more likely to gain vocational qualifications at both Level 2 and Level 3. Women were substantially more likely than men to achieve at Level 3.

Data from the Youth Cohort Study show that young people from Indian backgrounds had the highest rates of academic attainment at the age of 18 years, followed by whites, with black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi attainment being lower. To put this in context, Indians in England are relatively well-educated and disproportionately found among the professional classes compared to the white majority, while all other minority ethnic groups are relatively economically disadvantaged. Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents are more likely to be recent immigrants who are not fluent in English, and these communities have high rates of poverty. Nevertheless, it is striking that all of the major minority ethnic groups have higher rates of participation in further and higher education than the white majority. According to the Youth Cohort Study data cited above, 44% of white 18-year-olds were in full-time education in 2006, compared to 77% of blacks, 62% of Pakistani and Bangladeshis, and 84% of Indians.⁵

The fact that whites, and white males in particular, are relatively unlikely to persist in further and higher education has led to claims that white working-class males are 'the new underclass' (Paton, 2008). This adds a new dimension to the anti-feminist backlash of anxiety regarding girls' persistent trouncing of the boys in the battle of the GCSE grades. Now, to add insult to injury, not just females, but blacks too, are out-doing the white males (at least in terms of participation). Policy and media pronouncements on this new 'disadvantaged group' would never lead one to suspect that being a white male is still a major advantage in the English labour market and the wider society. Indeed, the heavy investment that ethnic minority youth make in education and training is driven at least partly by their relatively disadvantaged labour market positions, and the anticipation of labour market discrimination (Connor et al., 1996; Heath & McMahon, 1997; Heath & Smith, 2003). A lack of immediate job opportunities may also remove the incentive for ethnic minority youth to quit education (Leslie & Drinkwater, 1999; Rivkin, 1995). According to the Youth Cohort Study data cited above, 25% of white 18-year-olds in 2006 were in full-time jobs, compared to 9% of blacks and 9% of the Pakistani/Bangladeshi category. The figures for unemployment (i.e., NEET) were: whites 8%, blacks 9%, Pakistani/Bangladeshi 11%. Low-qualified women are also particularly disadvantaged in the labour market, and therefore have stronger incentives to invest in education and training than their male peers. The interaction between gender and ethnicity in determining educational participation is important; however, and, in contrast to other ethnic groups, there are more Pakistani and Bangladeshi men than women in higher education in Britain (Bhattacharyya et al., 2003; Dwyer et al., 2006).

The same source shows that 3% of 18-year-olds had gained vocational A-levels (AVCEs), and 7% had gained National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or equivalent. A quarter of the cohort had vocational qualifications at Level 2 or higher, compared to 57% with academic qualifications at this level.

⁵Source: The activities and experiences of 18-year-olds: England & Wales, 2006. Table B. <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000695/SFR47-2006.pdf>

Those young people who leave compulsory schooling and enter one of England's vocational education and training (VET) pathways find themselves within an expanding, unbounded territory encompassing schools, colleges, workplaces and voluntary organisations. Some of the territory's activity is publicly funded and some through private sources (such as employers paying for workforce development or students paying full costs for courses), both bolstered through a level of cross-subsidy, which is poorly understood. The territory is populated by a range of stakeholders, with varying degrees of power and influence, and its activities take place in a multitude of buildings including village halls and decaying warehouses, school and college classrooms, state-of-the-art laboratories and the production plants of multinational companies.

The majority of young people who enter the VET territory are in the 50% of the cohort that has failed to achieve the GCSE benchmark. As a result, they will be required to continue to try and improve their basic or 'functional' skills in 'communication', 'application of number' and information technology. These young people will also be restricted to the Level 2 apprenticeship programs and, hence, are less likely to have access to off-the-job learning. Furthermore, young people who fail to reach the GCSE benchmark, but want to remain in full-time education, will have to leave school and enter further education colleges. This means that colleges have a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds than any other type of educational establishment (Stanton, 2008; Fletcher & Perry, 2008). Colleges, however, receive less funding per student than schools, and hence, disadvantage would appear to beget disadvantage.

The complexity of the VET pathways brings young people into contact with a wide range of organisations in the public and private sector, the boundary between which is often blurred. For example, a young person might seek an apprenticeship in childcare. She might start by being referred by the careers advice service to a training provider who will register her and try to find an employer willing to recruit her on an apprenticeship basis. She might then return to the provider for off-the-job training or the provider might visit her in the workplace to carry out assessment towards a vocational qualification. This provider may be a private company, or a quasi-company which is part of the 'enterprise' section of a local further education college. Thus, negotiating a path between these different organisations quickly becomes part of the young person's post-school journey. The young person who remains in full-time education, however, has far less to negotiate and those who study for academic qualifications may never leave the comfort of the school or college. Complexity, it seems, is judged to be more suitable for those young people who are likely to have achieved less educationally (and hence, more likely to be from less advantaged backgrounds) up to the age of 16.

Evans (2002) uses the concept of 'Bounded Agency' to explain how young people try to exert control over their circumstances and decision-making, but find themselves restricted or impeded by structural barriers that are deep-rooted and very difficult to overcome. She stresses the need for agencies working with young people to 'emphasise brokerage and advocacy as a primary aim and function, to the extent that young adults perceive and experience this to be as real as the emphasis that is currently placed on their "deficits"' (ibid., p. 265).

Gender Segregation in Education, Training and Work

A particular concern regarding the ‘choice’ agenda is that it may exacerbate the influence of gender stereotypes on the types of qualifications that young people are able to achieve. Concerns about ‘boys’ underachievement’, driven by the gender gap in GCSE passes, have dominated the policy agenda to such a degree that it has become difficult to raise wider gender issues, such as women’s continued disadvantage in the labour market, and the fact that young women who leave school with low levels of qualifications are more disadvantaged in the labour market than comparable young men (Bynner et al., 1997; Howieson & Ianelli, 2008; Rake, 2000). Young women who are NEET also face an increased risk of early child-bearing and mental health problems (Bynner et al., 1997).

As the level of qualifications gained by the general population has expanded, it matters more than ever, not simply what level of qualifications an individual has, but what area this qualification is in. There is a clear link between gender segregation in qualifications and gender segregation in the labour market, yet schools and colleges have not addressed the way in which girls continue to be over-represented in those domains with the weakest labour market value. The tendency to see these gendered patterns as an unproblematic consequence of individual choices ignores the social pressures on young people to abide by gendered norms of behaviour. In addition, it is unrealistic to assume that young people possess (and are able to process) information regarding the long-term consequences of their teenage decisions for their adult labour-market positions (Manski, 1993).

While females have overtaken males in terms of overall academic attainment, traditional patterns of participation in particular fields of study have persisted. At A level, the most popular subjects for females (excluding general studies) are English, psychology, biology, art and design and mathematics. For males, they are mathematics, English, history, biology and physics. Figure 5.1 shows the number of A-level entries for these subjects according to sex. English, psychology and art and design are heavily female-dominated, while mathematics and physics are heavily male-dominated, despite the fact that girls and boys have similar attainments in mathematics at age 16.

Vocational qualifications are even more segregated by gender than academic qualifications. Females are concentrated in ‘health and social care’, and a full 40% of female qualifications in this category are accounted for by this one subject. The most popular subjects for males are Information Communications and Technology (ICT) and business.⁶

The biggest pull factor leading young people away from full-time education continues to be the labour market. It is known from research that the majority of 16- to 19-year-olds work part-time, and many have some work experience from the age of 14, so that ‘earning and learning’ has become the common experience for young

⁶Source: DCSF Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom, 2007, Table 3.5

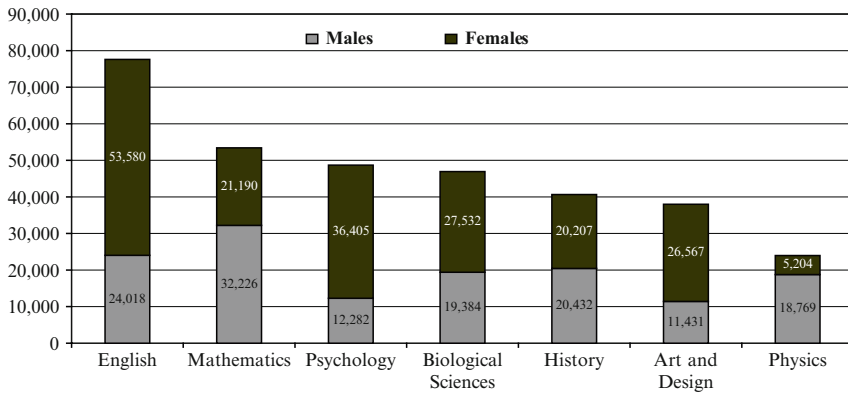


Fig. 5.1 A level subject entries by sex for 16- to 18-year-olds in England 2006–07⁷

people (Hodgson & Spours, 2001, p. 386). The massive growth of service industries has benefited from a willing army of young, part-time workers whose identity shifts, often on a daily basis, between student, employee and consumer. Employers can offer flexible hours, the possibility of working long shifts to earn extra money, and employment close to home. These employers will often demand little in the way of prior experience or qualifications, but require applicants to meet the emerging requirements of the ‘aesthetic labour market’ (see Nickson et al., 2003). For a teenager concerned to earn just enough money to cover their social life and mobile phone bills, such jobs are very attractive. That attraction may, in turn, lead to a decision to stay with a job that offers few long-term prospects but in which the young person feels safe. This may have particularly damaging consequences for young women as figures from the ‘Apprenticeships’ program indicate (see Fuller et al., 2005).

The government-funded ‘Apprenticeships’ program in England covers three work-based pathways (see Fuller & Unwin, 2008). ‘Young Apprenticeship’ is for 14- to 16-year-olds and involves work experience alongside full-time study in school and college. The two main pathways for 16- to 25-year-olds are ‘Apprenticeship’, which leads to Level 2 qualifications, and ‘Advanced Apprenticeship’, which leads to Level 3 qualifications. Apprenticeships are available in around 100 occupational areas, but, as is shown below, the majority of apprentices are found in 12 sectors. Apprentices usually spend 4 days a week in the workplace and 1 day in an off-the-job setting in a college, in a company-based workshop, or with another form of training provider. The majority have ‘employed’ status. The length of apprenticeships varies from around 1 to 3 years according to the requirements of the sector, and the content of the training program is determined by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Government funding covers the cost of training to meet the mandatory qualification requirements, and employers pay the apprentices’ wages.

⁷Source: DCSF: GCE/VCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2006/07, Tables 2, 2m, 2f. <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000755/>

Table 5.2 Sixteen to 18-year-olds, 'average in learning' 2006–07 (12 months) by gender and apprenticeship level

	Female	Male	Total
Advanced Apprenticeship L3	10,217	42,800	53,017
Apprenticeship L2	40,541	56,690	97,231
Total	50,758	99,490	150,248

Source: Learning and Skills Council, <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/partners/frameworks/apprenticeshipsdata/reports20062007>

Table 5.3 Aged 19+, 'average in learning' 2006–07 (12 months) by gender and apprenticeship level

	Female	Male	Total
Advanced Apprenticeship L3	20,585	25,558	46,143
Apprenticeship L2	22,138	25,315	47,453
Total	42,723	50,873	93,596

Source: Learning and Skills Council, <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/partners/frameworks/apprenticeshipsdata/reports20062007>

Given that employment structures in the UK are highly segregated by gender, it is perhaps no surprise that the Apprenticeships program mirrors such divisions, as Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show. The segregation of vocational training by sector has strong implications for the *level* of qualifications that can be attained.

Two important points about apprenticeship participation emerge from these statistics. First, the majority of participants in the program are male, with the male–female imbalance being the starkest in the Advanced Apprenticeship. Second, the majority of participants are in the younger, 16–18 age group, and most of them are in the Level 2 program.

Despite apprenticeships currently being available in over 100 sectors, over three quarters of apprentices are found in just 12 sectors. Nonetheless, the diversity of occupations and jobs covered in these sectors is indicative of the very different types of workplace settings in which young people on apprenticeships find themselves. One key difference is in the proportion of participants following L2 and L3 programs. In electrotechnical, the vast majority are following the Advanced Apprenticeship; whereas in retail, hairdressing and construction, over 8 out of 10 are following the L2 program. The 12 most populated apprenticeship sectors are as follows, in descending order:

- Construction
- Hairdressing
- Business administration
- Customer care

- Hospitality
- Childcare and early years
- Engineering
- Vehicle maintenance
- Retail
- Health and social care
- Electrotechnical
- Plumbing

The extent of the segregation is, however, of considerable concern, particularly because the structure of the program into Level 2 and Level 3 pathways exacerbates the impoverished position of young women. In their analysis of gender segregation in England and Wales, Fuller et al. (2005) showed that, although there are roughly the same number of female apprentices as male, the females are more likely to be found in Level 2 apprenticeships. This is because females dominate apprenticeships in the service industries (e.g., health and social care, retailing, hairdressing), which, in turn, offer far more Level 2 than Level 3 apprenticeships. The economic returns to Level 2 vocational qualifications are poor compared to Level 3 (Dearden et al., 2000; Jenkins et al., 2007) and female apprentices have fewer opportunities for progression than their male counterparts.

This troubled part of the VET territory is particularly affected by the refusal of successive governments to regulate employer behaviour. In addition, the very notion of an apprenticeship model of training will come under increasing pressure as the current global economic crisis continues to have an impact over the coming years. Despite the fact that many young people benefit from involvement in government-funded youth training programs (see Unwin & Wellington, 2001), this provision has been heavily criticised since the late 1970s, and the current ‘Apprenticeships’ program bears all the problematic hallmarks of its predecessors (see Fuller & Unwin, 2008).

Conclusion

This chapter has described the complex landscape of both compulsory and post-compulsory education and training in England. Whilst examinations at age 16 still mark a watershed in terms of the extent to which young people’s futures will be determined by their relative success or failure, the concept of ‘dropout’ from the system cannot be strictly applied.⁸ Rather, the majority of young people continue to participate in the system by joining one of the many pathways that open up after

⁸The notion of ‘not in education, employment or training (NEET)’, though, can be used to identify those within a cohort who are no longer in school and do not hold upper secondary or equivalent qualifications and can be considered ‘dropouts’ as defined in other countries. This could be applied at an age, such as 17-year-olds, as in Table 5.1 of this chapter (Editors’ note).

the compulsory phase of education has ended. Some young people switch between pathways, trying one and then another, and some who become classified as NEET or NET may reappear in an official pathway at a later stage.

The concept of 'graduation' to mark the end of compulsory schooling in England was first discussed by government in 1999 as a contribution to combating the dangers of social exclusion created by an education system that labeled 50% of 16-year-olds as failures. A report from the then Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) argued that:

Graduation would be a challenging but achievable goal requiring as a minimum the Level 2 standard of achievement in formal qualifications (academic, vocational or occupational), and also involving the key skills of communication, use of numeracy and a range of options for arts, sport and community activity. (SEU, 1999, p. 11)

When the concept was piloted in three areas of the country, young people, parents, employers and teachers were found to support the idea, but the disadvantages were felt to be too great. As Lindsay and Maguire (2002, p. 8) explain, the very fact that graduation would require young people to meet certain thresholds would still mean some, and probably the most disadvantaged, would remain excluded.

It is clear from the data and discussion presented here that the age-old fault lines of social class, gender and ethnicity still have a serious impact on the fortunes of individuals, and that failure to achieve early on in life can prove to be a profound impediment to later progression. Despite the considerable expansion of the numbers of young people entering higher education over the past 10 years, and the 'widening participation' agenda, the impact of social class on the chances of participation in higher education remains strong. In addition, only 78% of young people who start (towards a) full-time degree are now expected to gain a degree, and completion rates vary widely according to the prestige of the institution (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2008). Employment and wage rates on graduation also vary widely across institutions (Chevalier & Conlon, 2003).

In 2013, England will see whether the first 16-year-olds obliged to remain in some form of education or training until they are 18 have conformed with the government's wishes. In a highly critical review of the new legislation, Wolf (2008, p. 7) argues that it runs counter to our understanding about the relationship between motivation and learning. Furthermore, she states that it will have a negative impact on the youth labour market as many businesses that currently employ 16- and 17-year-olds will stop doing so because of the requirement to provide them with formal recognised training. This will, according to Wolf, have the self-defeating effect of harming the most disadvantaged and marginalised young people (*ibid.*). The counter arguments are that for too long, England has allowed employers to recruit young people without any requirement to provide them with the necessary vocational education and training to enable them to progress both within and beyond their current employment. This neglect is regarded as being harmful for the well-being of both the country's economy and for the individual.

Regardless of the effects of the new legislation, however, it is clear from this chapter that it is unlikely on its own to solve the deep-rooted inequalities in the

English system. Whilst much progress has been made over the past 20 or so years in terms of the numbers of young people acquiring qualifications at the end of their compulsory phase of schooling and in terms of the numbers who progress to further and higher education, it is still the case that social class and, to some extent, geography, remain tough barriers to overcome.

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Chapter 6

Participation in Post-Compulsory Learning in Scotland

David Raffe

Introduction

The Scottish education system has no generally recognised concept of school completion or graduation. After the age of 16, when education ceases to be compulsory, the level, duration, mode and content of learning vary widely, and there is no standard or benchmark by which to judge whether an individual has completed secondary education. The system's key characteristic is flexibility; post-compulsory education and training comprise a 'climbing frame' with multiple entry and exit points rather than pre-determined lines or programs leading to fixed standards to be achieved by all learners. This chapter therefore focuses on levels of participation in post-compulsory learning. It also refers more briefly to the attainment of those who participate, although unlike many other countries, 'participation' and 'attainment' are the subjects of separate discourses in Scotland.

The Scottish education system is generally perceived to perform well. Recent strategic audits have identified education as a source of Scottish comparative advantage (McConnell, 2006). However, this strong performance is blemished by low participation in post-compulsory learning, compounded by low attainment among many of those who participate, by a large number of teenagers not in education, employment or training (NEET), and by inequalities in participation and attainment. The United Kingdom as a whole has lower participation in post-16 education and training than most of its comparator countries, and participation is lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. According to one recent report, 63% of 15- to 19-year-olds in Scotland were in education and training in 2003, the lowest percentage of any country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Scottish Funding Council [SFC], 2008a).¹ Scotland has

¹An earlier report cited a figure of 'just under 70%' for the same year (Scottish Executive, 2006a). A more recent estimate, supplied by the Scottish Government, shows 72.4% of Scottish 15- to 19-year-olds in education in 2006 (this includes apprenticeships but excludes Skillseeker training programs). The comparable figure for the UK was 75.7% and the OECD average was 83.0%.

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one of the OECD's highest proportions of 15- to 19-year-olds who are NEET; it also has one of the highest proportions of 15- to 19-year-olds in employment without education, suggesting that the NEET problem is one of low participation in education rather than a shortage of employment (Scottish Executive, 2006a). Early in 2007, Scotland's First Minister Jack McConnell commissioned a report on extending compulsory education beyond the current minimum leaving age of 16; his government lost office after the 2007 election and the report was never published. Later in the same year, an OECD team reviewed the *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* (OECD, 2007). It concluded that Scottish schools had important strengths but faced two main challenges: an achievement gap between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and low and socially unequal participation and attainment in learning beyond compulsory schooling. The first challenge is shared with many other countries, which have similar levels of social inequality; the second challenge – of low post-compulsory participation and attainment – is faced by Scotland to a greater extent than most other European or OECD countries.

Low participation makes it harder to achieve national policy objectives such as raising skill levels and ensuring their wide distribution. It also matters for the young people themselves: early leavers face disadvantage in education and the labour market, especially females and the lowest qualified, whose risk of unemployment or unstable employment is greatest (Howieson, 2003; Hannan et al., 1998). Many become NEET, and some of these find it difficult to escape from their NEET status.

The social science literature offers at least three explanatory frameworks for low participation.

Cultural explanations focus on the cultures or sub-cultures of young people and of the education system. Such explanations attribute low participation in Scottish post-16 education to a 'British' youth sub-culture, which celebrates early transitions to adulthood (Jones & Wallace, 1992), and to the disengagement produced by the cultural distance between the school system and many young people. The OECD review of Scottish education blamed the academic ethos of schools for failing to engage and motivate weaker learners. Cultural explanations draw on the theories of sociologists such as Bernstein (1971) and Bourdieu (1997) who analyse the cultural foundations of curricula, pedagogies and school organisation in relation to those of young people and their class backgrounds. Cultural explanations figure prominently in policy debates, reflected in exhortations to raise aspirations, in calls for programs to be made more 'relevant' and in the belief that 'parity of esteem' is the answer to low participation in vocational learning.

Rational explanations argue that young people respond in a rational (or at least, 'situationally' or 'pragmatically' rational: Goldthorpe, 2000; Hodkinson et al., 1996) way to the opportunities, incentives, costs and constraints associated with participation in education. They attribute low participation in Scotland to educational pathways which offer poor prospects of success for low-attaining young people, to the weak links between education and employment, to the weak incentives of a polarised labour market with many low-skilled jobs which require few

qualifications, and to the lack of transparency of pathways and the destinations to which they lead. Rational explanations draw on the rational-action theories of writers such as Boudon (1974) and Goldthorpe (2000), and are used especially to predict ‘secondary effects’ of social class on choices at key decision points such as the end of compulsory schooling, as distinct from ‘primary effects’ on attainment. Rational explanations also feature in policy analyses and prescriptions, such as the ‘pathways engineering’ approach proposed by the OECD (1998).

Developmental explanations focus on aspects of young people’s psychological or social development, which affect their capacity or disposition to participate in education. Young people may drop out of learning because they lack self-esteem, self-efficacy or resilience, because they lack cognitive or social skills, or because of dependency on drugs or alcohol. Such ‘deficits’ are the product, in part, of the family and social environment; low educational participation in Scotland may reflect relatively high levels of poverty and deprivation, as well as parenting behaviours and social environments which result in developmental trajectories associated with dropout from education. Developmental explanations draw primarily on psychology and on theories of individual and social development, although they have recently received attention from economists and life-course researchers (Heckman & Masterov, 2004; Feinstein et al., 2008). Unlike cultural and rational explanations, they imply a ‘deficit’ model of dropout. They have been influential in recent policy debates, reflected in support for early interventions and in increased government concern with parenting skills and family influences on individual development.

These three explanations are not mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive (other explanatory frameworks, such as social capital, may also help to explain participation). They were developed primarily to explain social inequalities in educational participation and attainment, but they can equally be used to explain the overall level of participation and trends over time. Cultural and rational explanatory frameworks have been widely employed in macro-sociological research, so they may be more suitable for comparative analysis than ‘micro’ perspectives such as the developmental explanation described earlier. The three explanations are used in this chapter as a loose framework on which to base a review of post-compulsory participation in Scotland. The chapter is divided into seven sections. After a brief description of Scottish education in the following (second) section, the third section reviews the level, trend and distribution of post-compulsory participation. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections use the three explanatory frameworks to compare possible policy strategies and describe recent and current policy initiatives. The final section draws conclusions.

The Scottish Education System

Schooling in Scotland is compulsory from age 5 to 16. Pupils spend 7 years at primary school and a minimum of 4 years at secondary school. Except for private schools, which serve about 5% of the age group, schools are comprehensive and

co-educational, run by local authorities and linked with geographical catchment areas, although parents can choose schools in other catchments if places are available. The school system is uniform: Scotland has avoided the ‘school diversity’ agenda of England and some other countries. All schools are funded and administered on a similar basis, school standards are consistent, school social segregation is among the lowest in Europe and differential school effects are small.

School students progress with the same year group through the 11 years of compulsory schooling; grade repetition is virtually unknown. At the end of S4 (fourth year of secondary school), at age 15 or 16, pupils take Standard Grade (or equivalent) examinations. Standard Grades are single-subject, graded qualifications, typically attempted in eight subjects. They will be replaced in 2013–14 by re-designed single-subject qualifications following a public consultation in 2008 (Scottish Government, 2008a, b).

At present, Standard Grades mark the end of compulsory education, and they strongly influence subsequent destinations. It is not necessary to achieve a given level of performance in order to continue into post-compulsory education, but the grade achieved in a particular subject typically determines the level at which that subject can be studied in upper-secondary schooling, and young people with lower grades are relatively likely to enter college or training rather than stay on at school, or to leave learning altogether.

About a third of young people leave school at the end of compulsory education, at age 16. At least half of these 16-year-old leavers continue full-time learning either in colleges or in work-based national training programs. Colleges are all-purpose institutions offering a variety of vocational and general programs to students of all ages, including school leavers aged 16, 17 and 18. College programs are available at a range of levels up to and including Higher National (short-cycle higher education) qualifications. Most programs are designed for full-time study over 1 or 2 years. The main national training programs are Modern Apprenticeships, available to entrants of all ages, although 16- to 24-year-olds have priority, and Skillseekers, a program for 16- to 18-year-olds, mostly at a level below Modern Apprenticeships. A few early leavers enter part-time education or training outside of national training programs, usually provided or funded by their employer. All 16- and 17-year-olds not in education or training are entitled to work-based training under a Youth Guarantee introduced in 1988, when benefit entitlements were withdrawn from unemployed under-18-year-olds.

Formally, the different institutional pathways beyond 16 have equal legitimacy, and their diversity is celebrated as a strength of the system. In practice, they form a status hierarchy headed by schools. School staying-on rates continue to be used as key indicators of participation and, before 2007, separate government departments covered school and post-school education. Destination statistics are published for school-leaver groups, rather than for school-year groups who complete compulsory education at the same time. This makes it difficult to compare school and post-school options as equivalent destinations.

As noted earlier, there is no recognised concept of upper-secondary completion or graduation in Scottish education, and the level, duration, mode and content of

learning vary widely. One reason for this is the diversity of pathways; another reason is the diversity of programs within each pathway, and their open-ended character. The upper-secondary school curriculum is elective: students choose a mixture of single-subject courses at a variety of possible levels over 1 or 2 years. Each course is separately certificated. High-attaining students aiming for university typically take five 'Higher' courses in the first post-compulsory year, followed by a mixture of additional Highers, re-sits and/or 'Advanced Highers' in the second. For lower-attaining students, the volume and level of study is more variable; many take 'Intermediate' courses possibly combined with one or two Highers. About a third of students who stay on in post-compulsory schooling leave after 1 year, often to enter college or an apprenticeship. Most full-time college provision consists of set 1-year programs at a choice of levels with opportunities to progress between programs. Work-based provision is also organised around set programs, but these vary in duration and demand.

All post-compulsory courses and programs are unit-based and describable in terms of credit values and levels of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). It would be possible, therefore, to define benchmarks for graduation based on defined volumes and levels of study, and required subjects or competences. In practice, however, this is not the way the Scottish system works – or has worked hitherto. New Scottish Baccalaureates in languages and science are being introduced to encourage study of those subjects. They will be awarded for combinations of existing qualifications (two Advanced Highers and one Higher) in the relevant subject area together with an interdisciplinary project, and they will cover only part of a full-time program. They are neither graduation certificates nor baccalaureates as these terms are understood in other countries. Scotland's open or flexible system contrasts with the more structured pathways characteristic of most other European systems. Scottish schools may expect students to take particular subjects (usually English, sometimes mathematics), but otherwise students choose the courses that match their interests, ambitions and abilities, strongly influenced by the perceived requirements of 'end-users' such as universities and employers. However, this flexibility affects some students more than others: for students following the royal road to elite universities, the choices are relatively simple; for other students, and especially the least qualified who may need most support to navigate their pathways, the options are less clearly defined.

Nearly half of young people (47% in 2006) enter full-time higher education before the age of 21; about a third of these take sub-degree courses at college. The higher education (HE) system is stratified, not only between universities and colleges, but also according to universities' ability to select their students, with the lower-status 'recruiter' institutions typically showing greater flexibility in recruitment and in the requirements for entry. Admission to higher education is decentralised, and school qualifications do not confer an entitlement. A majority of young people who enter HE do so on the basis of Highers and other school qualifications, but a minority follow a college route into HE, often progressing from non-advanced vocational programs to sub-degree programs, and sometimes progressing from these to university degree courses using articulation or credit transfer arrangements based on the SCQF.

The Scottish labour market is closely integrated with the rest of the UK. It is weakly regulated and has weak occupational labour markets. Selection procedures are flexible; qualifications are important signals in the labour market but only in a small range of occupations do they provide a licence to practise.

The Level, Trend and Distribution of Post-Compulsory Participation

In the absence of a concept of secondary completion or graduation, Scottish research on participation or dropout in post-compulsory education has typically focused on participation in the spring after S4, the last compulsory school year. Much of this research has been based on the Scottish School Leavers Survey (SSLS), a series of surveys conducted from the early 1970s until 2005. From 1984 to 2005, the SSLS followed representative samples of year groups for 3 years (occasionally more) beyond compulsory schooling. Table 6.1 shows the ‘main activities’ of

Table 6.1 Main activity of four Scottish year groups at age 16–17 and at age 18–19 (%)

Completed S4 in:	1984	1990	1998	2002
Main activity at age 16–17	1985	1991	1999	2003
School	42	59	65	68
College	4	4	8	9
Training program	23	18	8	8
Job	18	13	11	8
Unemployed	11	6	7	4
Other	2	1	2	4
Total	101	101	101	101
Weighted n	(6,422)	(4,416)	(7,534)	(4,712)
Main activity at age 18/19	1987	1993	2001	2005
Full-time education	21	34	45	45
Training program	5	8	11	9
Job	53	40	33	35
Unemployed	15	11	8	7
Other	6	7	3	4
Total	100	100	100	100
Weighted n	(3,858)	(2,724)	(4,933)	(3,200)

Note: S4 is the last compulsory school year. Most members of each year group celebrated their 16th birthday between March 1 of the S4 year and the end of the following February.

Source: Scottish School Leavers Survey. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 are based on a data set constructed by Linda Croxford for the ESRC-funded Education and Youth Transitions project, and subsequently extended for Scotland for the Scottish Government-funded Scottish Trends project (see Croxford et al., 2007; Croxford, 2009).

four SSLS year groups at age 16–17 (in the spring after S4) and at age 18–19, 2 years later. Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, participation at age 16–17 in full-time education rose substantially; it rose even more, in proportionate terms, at age 18–19. Of those in the year group which completed S4 in 2002, more than three quarters were still in full-time education at age 16–17, and nearly half were in full-time education at age 18–19 (about three quarters of these were in higher education). The proportion in training programs at age 16–17 fell sharply over the period, while the proportion in these programs at age 18–19 increased slightly; this partly reflects a shift in their function from absorbing the consequences of mass school-leaver unemployment to developing skills for the economy.

Table 6.1 suggests that the growth in participation in school, college or other full-time education had slowed down by the early 2000s. The 2002 S4 cohort was the last to be surveyed by the SSLS. More recent trends are indicated by official statistics, which suggest that participation has stopped increasing during the current decade. Between 1999–2000 and 2006–07, the proportion staying on at school beyond the compulsory leaving age fell by a percentage point, from 68.4% to 67.4% (Scottish Government, 2008c). The participation rate of under-21-year-olds in higher education fell from a peak of 51.5% in 2000 and 2001 to 47.1% in 2006 (Scottish Government, 2007a). The number of 16- to 24-year-olds in national training programs has shown no clear trend since 1999; it stood at around 38,000 in 2007 (Scottish Government, 2007b). The one type of participation that has continued to rise is in full-time college programs (excluding higher education), which attracted 23% of school leavers (of all ages) in 2006, compared with 19% in 1999 (*ibid.*), but this has not been enough to increase total participation levels significantly.

Table 6.2 shows how participation in different forms of learning at age 16–17 among members of the 2002 S4 cohort varied according to gender and educational and family background. More young women than young men continued in full-time education, but more males entered work-based training. The strongest single predictor of participation was attainment at Standard Grade. A majority of the two highest attainment categories continued at school; those with lower qualifications were more likely to enter college or training, but they still had much lower participation rates overall. Social class and family structure were also associated with participation. And more than half of young people who truanted for days or weeks at a time during their last compulsory year did not continue formal learning thereafter. Table 6.2 shows simple bivariate associations, but more detailed studies confirm that gender, educational attainment and parental class are independently associated with participation (e.g., Paterson & Raffe, 1995; Howieson, 2003). They also show that these determinants have changed little over time, even when total participation rates were rising, although there has been some weakening of the correlation between S4 attainment and full-time participation, associated especially with a trend for less-qualified young people to enter college.

A substantial proportion of young people who continue in education or training beyond 16, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, either drop out of their post-16 courses or achieve relatively poor attainments. Less-qualified young people who continue at school beyond 16 have an uncertain chance of

Table 6.2 Main activity in spring 2003 (at age 16–17) of young people who completed S4 in 2002, by gender, educational and social background (%)

	School	College	Training	Other	Total (n)
Gender					
Male	65	8	11	16	100 (2,380)
Female	71	10	5	15	101 (2,332)
Standard Grade attainment					
5+ Credit awards	94	1	1	4	100 (1,845)
5+ General awards	60	13	10	16	99 (2,116)
5+ Foundation awards	26	20	19	35	100 (533)
Others	23	13	14	50	100 (171)
Parents' social class					
Prof and managerial	83	6	4	8	101 (1,830)
Intermediate	65	9	11	16	101 (1,378)
Working	55	15	10	21	101 (1,086)
Unclassified	50	13	10	27	100 (416)
Family structure					
Mother and father	73	8	8	12	101 (3,328)
Step parent(s)	59	9	10	21	99 (360)
Lone parent	56	14	7	23	100 (896)
Other	53	13	8	26	100 (103)
Truancy in S4					
Days/weeks at a time	20	15	13	53	101 (287)
Less frequent or never	71	9	7	13	100 (4,412)

substantially improving on their low attainment (Howieson & Iannelli, 2008). Recent reforms enhanced low-attainers' access to post-compulsory school courses, but had a less favourable impact on their subsequent progression (Raffe et al., 2007). Completion rates for college programs have risen in recent years and are currently about 70%; some students drop out and do not complete because they are offered a job (SFC, 2008b). Completion rates from training programs have also risen in recent years, but they are still relatively low. In 2005, only half of 16- to 24-year-olds leaving Modern Apprenticeships had completed their programs; reasons for non-completion included: company closure, finding another job, disciplinary reasons, loss of interest, or finding that the training was not what they were looking for (Cambridge Policy Consultants [CPC], 2006). Success or failure in post-compulsory learning is not random: social inequalities in participation and attainment increase between the ages of 16 and 18 (Raffe et al., 2006).

An estimated 53% of young people in the last SSLS cohort gained Higher pass(es) at school, which could represent a very crude indicator of school completion. The proportions completing college and training programs could be estimated by multiplying the percentages in these programs at age 16–17 (9% and 8%: see Table 6.1) by the respective completion rates reported above (70% and 50%). This yields a total completion rate of about 63% of the cohort (53% + [9% × 70%] + [8% × 50%]). This is the percentage of the cohort who 'complete' some form of

education and training. It is an underestimate, partly because the figures in Table 6.1 already exclude a substantial proportion of those who dropped out of college and training programs, and partly because it takes no account of part-time education and training, or of programs entered after the first post-compulsory year. Moreover, it fails to respect the logic of the system, which treats all post-compulsory learning as valid regardless of its level or duration.

The SSLS evidence on patterns of participation does not provide a clear basis for choosing among the three explanatory frameworks discussed earlier. This is hardly surprising, because each of these frameworks was developed to explain such patterns, and especially to explain social inequalities. Thus, the cultural theories framework argues that the cultural distance between the school system and young people varies with social background: the school system legitimates and validates the cultural capital of the dominant classes. It also argues that youth sub-cultures are socially variable, and cultural pressures for early leaving are strongest in the case of white, working-class males. Rationalist theories attribute inequalities in participation to the different goals, resources and opportunities of young people from different backgrounds. And developmental theories note that poverty and social deprivation, and related experiences such as dependence on social care, frequently give rise to developmental trajectories characterised by educational failure and dropout.

The growth in participation can similarly be attributed to either cultural or rational factors, although it is less likely to have a developmental explanation. Thus, it could reflect the growth of cultural capital among young people,² changes in youth sub-cultures and past educational reforms which reduced the cultural distance between schooling and young people. Rising levels of parental education explain some (but not all) of the rise in attainment and participation, and increasing proportions of SSLS sample members who stay on at school say that they do so partly because of an intrinsic interest in their subjects (Paterson & Raffe, 1995). However, SSLS sample members also give strongly instrumental explanations for their decisions. The growth in participation could also reflect the changing balance of opportunities and incentives created by rising compulsory-school attainments, the collapse of the teenage labour market, more flexible educational pathways, increased opportunities in higher education and a growth in occupations requiring higher-level qualifications. Such factors create the 'context' of education which, over several decades of SSLS research, has been shown to be a major determinant of the success or failure of educational reform (Raffe, 1984).

If empirical data fail to differentiate among the explanatory frameworks, this may be because, at least in part, they describe different aspects of the same processes. Sub-cultures may mediate the influence of opportunity structures and their situational logic on young people's choices, culturally conditioned behaviours may give rise to developmental problems, and rational action may be one element in

²However, more determinist interpretations of cultural theories suggest that the total stock of cultural capital is fixed. Goldthorpe (2000) makes this point to argue that cultural-capital theories cannot account for educational expansion.

a culturally shaped repertoire (Hatcher, 1998). The OECD review's analysis combines all three explanations. It attributes working-class disengagement and failure to the academic Scottish curriculum, to weak intrinsic and extrinsic incentives, and to low self-confidence and self-esteem, and it argues that these three processes reinforce each other.

Nevertheless, the three theoretical frameworks point towards different policy responses to the problem of low participation. The following sections describe current Scottish policies, grouped according to whether the underlying strategy most directly addresses cultural, rational or developmental determinants of low participation. These are described respectively as culturalist, rationalist and developmentalist strategies, although these terms are not used in official documents, and many current policies combine elements of different strategies.

Culturalist Strategies

Culturalist strategies aim to reduce the cultural distance between potential early leavers and the education system by changing the culture of the former or (more realistically) by changing the curriculum, pedagogy and culture of the latter. Young people may become disengaged well before the end of compulsory education: culturalist strategies therefore seek cultural change in compulsory schooling as well as in post-compulsory education and training. Most of these interventions have much broader objectives than raising participation.

An example is *A Curriculum for Excellence*, one of the flagship programs of the current government, which aims to transform the curriculum for 3- to 18-year-olds so that all young people become 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work' (Curriculum Review Group, 2004, p. 12). These 'four capacities' are to be developed through changes in pedagogy and school organisation, as well as in curricular content; the reform is premised on a concept of curriculum, which embraces interdisciplinary learning, the ethos and life of school as a community and opportunities for personal achievement, as well as curriculum areas and subjects (Scottish Government, 2008b). The reform is more advanced in primary than in secondary schools, and details of how it will work in the 'senior phase', which covers learning between the ages of 15 and 18 whether at school, college or elsewhere, are still being worked out. In 2008, the government announced a new entitlement: all young people are entitled to a senior phase of education in which they continue to develop the four capacities and which, among other things, 'prepares them well for achieving qualifications to the highest level of which they are capable' (ibid., p. 15). The model for planning this entitlement, under the title *16 + Learning Choices*, 'envisages all young people, well in advance of their school leaving date, being made an offer of an appropriate, attractive place in learning post-16' (ibid., p. 4).

The OECD (2007) review of Scottish schooling commended the vision of *A Curriculum for Excellence* and its potential to effect the cultural change, which it

judged necessary. However, it criticised its separation from other relevant curriculum initiatives, and especially from *Skills for Work* courses which, although formally subsumed within *A Curriculum for Excellence*, had in practice developed as a parallel but separate initiative. *Skills for Work* courses were introduced as pilots in 2005 and ‘rolled out’ nationally in 2007. They offer applied and experiential learning in particular occupational areas, mainly for 14- to 16-year-old school pupils, usually provided in partnership with a college (occasionally with an employer). Each course is similar in volume to a single Standard Grade subject. The courses appear to recruit middle- and lower-attaining students, although there are no reliable data on this. Evaluations show generally favourable reactions from learners and teachers, with positive effects on self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation and vocational skills and knowledge (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education, 2007; Spielhofer & Walker, 2008).

So far, there is no evidence of the impact of *Skills for Work* courses on post-compulsory participation. Of course, they were not designed primarily to increase post-16 participation – their formal objective is to develop general ‘employability skills’ – but they are part of a general move to broaden and diversify the curriculum, with the expectation that this will stimulate engagement and learning among a wider range of young people. *Skills for Work* courses also reflect a tendency in recent Scottish debates to see vocational learning as the solution to problems of engagement and participation. Policy-makers in Scotland, as in many other countries, see an expansion of vocational learning and an improvement in its status as a means to expand participation in post-compulsory learning as well as to achieve the desired curriculum diversity and cultural change. This approach receives *prima facie* support from the trend for countries where more upper-secondary students take vocational programs to have higher total participation or graduation rates (Leney, 2004; Lamb, 2008).

Apprenticeships are often seen as a way of attracting young people and raising participation. They offer applied and ‘relevant’ learning, in a cultural setting very different from school, through which young people acquire an occupational identity and adult status. Scottish Modern Apprenticeships are seen to be successful and improving (CPC, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2006b). However, their quality is uneven and they are subject to important supply constraints. The history of work-based training in Scotland since the 1980s reveals a tension between quality and quantity, and a related tension between the goals of social inclusion and of economic development (the same tensions are identified elsewhere in the UK: Fuller & Unwin, 2003). Apprenticeships tend to be successful under specific sectoral and labour-market conditions, and they cannot be expanded indefinitely to sectors or labour-market contexts where these conditions are not satisfied. The cognitive and behavioural demands of many apprenticeships make them less suitable for the lowest qualified school leavers, and their recruitment tends to be skewed in favour of white males. They are an important component of a diverse learning system but they cannot be used as the principal means of attracting and motivating young people who would otherwise drop out of learning.

Another way to boost vocational provision is through expanding full-time programs at college. However, as we have seen, Scottish colleges already provide a

range of vocational programs. Simply providing such programs is not sufficient to guarantee high participation. Moreover, evidence from other countries suggests that vocational programs may not be the most appropriate ways to engage the most disaffected young people (Steedman & Stoney, 2004). This is supported by the experience of *Skills for Work*: participation in these courses requires (for instance) a certain level of maturity, and colleges have resisted their use as ‘dumping grounds’ for problem students.

16+ Learning Choices proposes ‘a new focus ... on those young people for whom school is not the right option post-16’ (Scottish Government, 2008d, p. 2). It aims to include not only ‘vocational’ college and training programs, but also non-formal learning opportunities in community settings, including programs run by voluntary organisations, youth work and volunteering schemes. It argues that such opportunities, backed up by intensive advice and guidance, may be more appropriate for the most vulnerable young people at the greatest risk of dropping out. It proposes to place these options on an equal footing with formal learning opportunities, with the same level and consistency of financial and other support.

Rationalist Strategies

Rationalist strategies aim to change the balance of opportunities, incentives and costs in order to make participation a ‘rational’ choice for more young people.

One rationalist strategy focuses on the opportunities, incentives and costs which arise from the organisation of the education system itself. An example is ‘pathways engineering’, which tries to structure educational pathways to encourage participation (OECD, 1998). This typically involves making the system more flexible, designing post-compulsory programs on which low-attaining students have a higher probability of success, and increasing the range of destinations to which each pathway may lead. Measures of pathways engineering in Scotland have focused in particular on the qualifications system and the ways in which it structures access and progression. A series of reforms since the 1980s have created a more flexible, unified and seamless qualifications system, which embraces vocational and academic learning and facilitates access, transfer and progression. The SCQF is an outcome of these reforms (Raffe, 2007). They have created a more open system, but their impact on participation and progression, especially among young people, has been relatively modest. Young people with low prior attainments have continued to experience high failure rates on the new progression pathways, and the ‘intrinsic logic’ of a unified qualifications system has proved weaker than the ‘institutional logic’ in which it is embedded (Raffe et al., 2007). And improving pathways to educational qualifications may be an ineffective rationalist strategy if the labour market offers little incentive for young people to achieve these qualifications.

A second rationalist strategy focuses on opportunities, incentives and costs that arise from outside the education system, and especially from the labour market.

Like pathways engineering, this strategy often targets vocational programs. The evidence base for rates of return to Scottish programs is weak, but it is possible that the recent increases in college participation reflect positive labour-market returns (Gasteen et al., 2003). One way to increase labour-market returns to vocational programs is to enhance their quality and ensure that they meet current employment needs. Successive governments have sought to do this through a variety of measures, although ‘employer engagement’ remains one of the unsolved problems of Scottish (and British) education and training policy (Scottish Government, 2007c). *More Choices More Chances*, the report which outlined the Scottish government’s NEET strategy, requires local authorities to lead partnerships of providers, employers and other agencies to coordinate opportunities and support for at-risk school leavers in their areas (Scottish Executive, 2006a). A more radical way to increase the labour-market returns to learning is to increase the utilisation of, and demand for, the skills that are acquired. This is the current policy of the Scottish Government (2007c) but it has relatively few policy levers to give it effect.

Participation decisions may also be influenced by more immediate financial considerations. Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) of up to £30 per week are available to 16- to 19-year-olds from low-income families in full-time education. An evaluation of the first pilot EMAs estimated that they increased participation rates by 7 percentage points overall, and by 9 percentage points among young people from low-income families (Croxford et al., 2002). A subsequent evaluation suggested that increased participation was also reflected in increased attainment (Croxford et al., 2004). However, arrangements for financial support vary across different learning options, potentially influencing educational choices in favour of the options that pay best rather than those that best meet young people’s learning needs. Moreover, support tends to be less available and less predictable for participation in the non-formal learning opportunities which may be most appropriate for disengaged young people. The government recently consulted on ways to reduce these inconsistencies (Scottish Government, 2008d).

Information, advice and guidance services frequently form part of rationalist strategies on the basis that rational decision-making requires good information. The current all-age guidance service, Careers Scotland, was established in 2002, and in 2008 it was brought into a new organisation with wider skills-related responsibilities. Enhanced information, advice and guidance will form an element of *16+ Learning Choices*, possibly following a model of ‘activity agreements’ already piloted in England.

The SCQF provides a potential basis for introducing what Scotland has lacked since 1950 – a Graduation Certificate to mark the completion of upper secondary education. The OECD review recommended that a flexible Graduation Certificate be introduced at different levels to recognise learning at school, college and the workplace. Such a certificate would not automatically result in increased participation: its design would need to be sufficiently flexible to attract low-attaining young people and offer reasonable prospects of success, but not so flexible as to undermine the currency of the award and its value, compared with the existing qualifications. The government has formally rejected the OECD recommendation

(Scottish Government, 2008a), but some commentators, including the present writer, have suggested that the idea deserves further consideration.

Developmentalist Strategies

Developmentalist strategies focus on the most vulnerable young people and on those who drop out, or are at risk of dropping out, because of specific developmental and social problems. Young people who drop out, and especially those who become NEET, are disproportionately likely to have low self-esteem and self-efficacy, low social, personal and cognitive skills, family problems, and/or a history of offending, alcohol and drug use or teenage pregnancy (York Consulting, 2005). Not all these problems are strictly described as ‘developmental’, but they all invite responses which focus primarily on the individual and his or her problems, rather than on the education system and its cultures and opportunity structures.

Interventions in pursuit of this strategy are diverse, reflecting the diversity of individual young people and their needs. Many are local programs organised by voluntary organisations; relevant national programs are also diverse and flexible in their targeting, content and organisation. They tend to involve a variety of agencies, reflecting the variety of problems faced by the young people concerned (family, education, housing, employment, physical and mental health, addiction, and so on). Effective partnership working is an important (if, in practice, variable) component of developmentalist approaches. Another important component is a Key Worker who provides a single personal contact point for the young person concerned, and can help to coordinate the work of different agencies on their behalf. Many interventions focus on employability and employment as their main objectives rather than continued participation in education and training.

In 1999, a government-appointed committee reviewed the needs and provision of services for 16- to 24-year-olds with additional support needs (Scottish Executive, 1999). It identified gaps in the existing provision and inadequate coordination among the variety of agencies involved and made a number of recommendations, including the proposal for Key Workers. Careers Scotland played a leading role in taking these recommendations forward; a series of local Inclusiveness Projects were introduced, and subsequently absorbed into mainstream provision. Careers Scotland is also responsible for programs such as *Activate*, which aims to boost core skills and employability skills for at-risk young people in their final year of compulsory education. Other programs designed for young people in this group are local and organised by, or in partnership with, voluntary organisations. However, as a recent study to inform the curricular response to the NEET problem concluded, ‘curricular solutions cannot fully address social problems’ (Finlay et al., 2008, p. 9).

Get Ready for Work is a work-based program (previously part of Skillseekers), which offers varying forms and amounts of support for young people who require additional support to enter employment. It is intended that many of these young people should progress to mainstream work-based training programs, but evaluations

have criticised the small proportions of leavers who actually make this transition (Smart Consultancy and Eddy Adams Consultants, 2006).

Evaluations and reviews of ‘developmentalist’ initiatives confirm the value of the Key Worker approach and, related to this, the need to support clients through advocacy and the need for different support agencies to be coordinated. Other themes include the importance of a progression focus, the need to expect setbacks and to have a strategy for dealing with them, and the need to involve young people in the design of interventions (Eddy Adams Consultants and Smart Consultancy, 2005; SQW, 2005; Scottish Executive, 2005). The current *16 + Learning Choices* consultation proposes to make such opportunities available as part of a more coherent package focused on the delivery of an individual entitlement. It aims to put all options on an equal footing, with the same level and consistency of financial and other support. ‘[L]earning which might previously have been described as an “alternative” curriculum offer must be considered just as mainstream as Highers are for those young people who remain at school’ (Scottish Government, 2008d, p. 2). It also asks whether some particularly vulnerable young people might benefit from a ‘broker’ to negotiate on their behalf for opportunities which are not currently available (Scottish Government, 2008d).

Discussion

Many of the policy measures reviewed in this chapter operate at the system level: they aim to change the curriculum, provide new programs and qualifications or new mechanisms for coordinating the supply of learning opportunities. Some focus on the institutional level, at least in the sense of promoting particular types of institutional provision (through colleges, apprenticeships or the voluntary sector). Others focus on the individual, for example, by providing financial support, increased information, advice and guidance or key workers. The difference between these three levels does not correspond very closely to the distinction between culturalist, rationalist or developmentalist policy strategies. It is not possible, from this brief review, to conclude which of these strategies has been most effective. All three may be necessary components of a concerted effort to reduce dropout and raise participation in post-compulsory learning.

Different strategies may be more effective in different contexts and for different groups. It is probable that as participation has risen over time, a larger proportion of those who continue to drop out do so for reasons labelled in this chapter as ‘developmental’, suggesting that developmental strategies become more important. Nevertheless, studies of early leavers and NEET young people consistently draw attention to their heterogeneity (Finlay et al., 2008). *More Choices, More Chances* distinguished between the ‘hardest to help’ NEET young people and an intermediate group who were ‘quietly disaffected’, for whom less intensive interventions could make a ‘massive difference’ (Scottish Executive, 2006a). It is possible that this latter group would be more likely to respond to culturalist or rationalist strategies.

Moreover, an emphasis on all three strategies helps to challenge the individualistic focus of many policy documents, including *More Choices, More Chances*. Disengagement and dropout are not just individual problems; they also reflect broader social trends as well as problems in the school system and its relationship to the labour market and other social institutions, which are addressed by the culturalist and rationalist strategies.

Our framework also helps us to question another tendency in Scottish policy debates: the tendency to see vocational learning as a simple remedy for the problems associated with low participation. In the first place, this review has raised the question of supply and demand: Scotland already offers a diverse range of post-compulsory vocational opportunities, but this supply does not create its own demand. Conversely, the supply of some vocational opportunities, especially those based in the workplace, may be severely constrained. Second, vocational learning should not be used as shorthand for curricular diversity. The features that make many ‘vocational’ interventions effective have little to do with their vocational content. Third, genuinely vocational programs are unsuitable ways to engage young people who have important developmental issues. And fourth, if vocational programs expand faster than the labour market’s demand for their qualifications, the incentive to participate will diminish. Vocational learning has an important role both as a component of general education and as a principle for organising some learning pathways, but its potential contributions to the problems discussed above are both specific and limited.

I have suggested that developmental explanations for low participation may have become more important over time, as total dropout rates have fallen. Subject to this, 3 decades of SSLS-based research on the range of participation decisions – including decisions on the choice of program as well as whether to participate or not – point to the importance of rational factors in explaining broader patterns and trends in participation. If this analysis is still valid, an important reason for high dropout in Scottish education may be the polarised demand for skills from an ‘hourglass’ economy. Unlike successive UK governments, the Scottish government has accepted the argument that the solution to the skills problem lies as much with the demand for skills as with their supply, and has set the policy goal of increasing the utilisation of, and demand for, skills. It has few policy instruments for doing this, but even if it is only partly successful, this could be an important means by which participation in post-compulsory learning is raised.

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Chapter 7

Germany's Education System and the Problem of Dropouts: Institutional Segregation and Program Diversification

Andrea Reupold and Rudolf Tippelt

Introduction

In light of the large number of individuals deemed 'underprivileged' in the education system, it is especially important within the context of the ongoing qualifications debate to focus on the young people in Germany who do not possess a formal academic qualification. As a result of the differentiated system in the secondary phase of schooling in Germany, dropouts come from many pathways including the Secondary General School, the Intermediate Secondary School and the Grammar School, as well as from vocational training schools, Dual System apprenticeships and special-needs schools.

The Secondary General School (*Hauptschule*) represents the school type that is at the lowest academic level. It is compulsory until Grade 9 and in some federal states until Grade 10, by which time students are aged 15 or 16. This type of school provides a general education that is mainly seen as a basis for practical vocational training. The Intermediate Secondary School (*Realschule*) provides extended general education until Grade 10. With the Intermediate Certificate, students have access to all types of medium-level occupations, to the dual apprenticeship system and also have the option to transfer to a Grammar School or to specific subject-related grammar schools that provide access to universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). The Grammar School (*Gymnasium*) offers schooling from Grade 5 to Grade 12 or 13, and with the final exams (A-levels, or *Abitur*) students qualify for studies at all institutions of higher education. Normally, about two thirds of these school leavers transfer to universities, while others enter the Dual System.

This divided school system is seen as one of the main causes of social selection and inequality as it provides the grounds for the tracking or streaming of students (e.g., see the PISA¹-studies: PISA-Konsortium Deutschland, 2004). On the other

¹Programme for International Student Assessment.

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hand, this system, which attempts to qualify young people at the educational level that best suits their capabilities and interests, can result in comparatively high completion rates.

Youth without an educational or vocational qualification have greatly reduced options within the educational system and also in the job market (e.g., see Hillmert & Mayer, 2004; Friebe, 1999; Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung, 1995). To design policies that reduce dropout rates, it is essential to identify the influences and also those institutions and agencies that are accountable. In Germany, responsibility for these problems is scattered throughout the federal political and educational system, with the 16 states having responsibility for educational legislation and administration. In order to ensure agreements on educational matters of supra-regional importance, there is a national committee that fosters cooperation and coordination: the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Educational and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz*). Some of the common regulations concern compulsory full-time school attendance, which is 9 years in 12 federal states, and 10 years in four federal states (for a more thorough description of the system, see Reich et al., 2008).

Main Features of Secondary Education and Training Provision

In general, Germany's education and training system is relatively complex, even at the school level. After Pre-School (ages 5–6) and Primary education (ages 6–10), the early diversification of secondary school pathways starts when the pupils are aged 10, and is completed after an orientation stage of 2 years. During this orientation stage of Secondary Level I, students are selected for the different school types according to their performance as shown in their grades, their general capacity to perform as assessed by their teachers, and the students and their parents' inclinations.

As previously indicated, there are basically three different types of schools that offer secondary education in Germany: the Grammar School (*Gymnasium*), which prepares for a more academic track; the Intermediate Secondary School (*Realschule*), which mainly prepares for specialist technical training; and the Secondary General School (*Hauptschule*), which has a more vocational focus. Thus, as early as in the lower secondary level, students aged between 10 and 15 and their parents need to make decisions concerning different pathways within the educational system, based on the student's interests and aptitudes. When compared with other countries, this selection process is sometimes criticised as occurring too early.

The Secondary Level II stage starts when students are aged 15, and offers a wide range of options to qualify them for academia or the job market. The following sections present an overview of the broad variety of options that are available.

Secondary Level I

Attending Secondary General Schools mainly provides access to the dual apprenticeship system. The form of assessment is school-based and in some federal states

there are state-wide exams. The certificates that can be obtained after graduation are the Basic School Certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*) and the Qualified Main School Certificate (*Qualifizierender Hauptschulabschluss*).²

Intermediate Secondary Schools prepare for all vocational tracks – not just the Dual System but also for Technical Secondary Schools (*Fachoberschulen*) that provide access to a more academic track at universities of applied sciences. By graduating from Intermediate Secondary School, students obtain a Middle School Certificate. The form of assessment is the same as in Secondary General Schools: school-based and in some federal states, state-wide exams.

In Grammar Schools, students are prepared for the academic tracks but can also access all vocational tracks by graduating with their A-levels (*Abitur*). The form of assessment is again the same as in Secondary General Schools and Intermediate Secondary Schools.

Aside from these three secondary school types, there are two other sorts of school in which only very small numbers of students are enrolled: Comprehensive Schools that combine the above described three school types in one institution, and schools for children with special needs. Half of all young people who leave school without a Secondary General School leaving certificate come from Special Schools. Some 77% of all Special School students leave school without a basic certificate or a higher qualifying certificate. This group of school leavers represents about 4% of the 15- to 17-year-old population (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008, p. 89).

Decisions about where to study made at this Secondary Level I stage do not limit students to a certain track at Secondary Level II, but changing track takes more effort than following one pathway through the two stages. Often, therefore, the choices at Level I predispose decisions on a pathway in Level II.

Data from the working group on educational reporting (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008) show changes in the decade from 1996 to 2006 in the number of graduates from each type of school and the proportion of the relevant age-group that they represent. In absolute terms, graduates from the Secondary Intermediate School (*Realschule*) make up the largest group, and also the group that has shown most growth over the period 1996–2006 – from 46.4% of 16- to 18-year-olds to 49.6%. By contrast, the number of graduates from the Secondary General School (*Hauptschule*) fell during the decade, and they also represent a declining proportion of the age-group 15–17 years (30.6% down to 28.5%). The biggest change in proportional terms occurred in the Technical Secondary Schools – the smallest sector – whose graduates represented 8.5% of 18- to 21-year-olds in 1996, rising to 13.6% in 2006. Graduates with A-levels (*Hochschulreife*) represented 28.2% of 18- to 21-year-olds in 1996, falling to 25.6% in 2001, before rising to 29.9% in 2006 (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008, pp. 87–88, p. 269).

²The difference between the two certificates is that the Qualified Main School Certificate involves a special exam that can also be taken by students from any of the other school types and that qualifies for the 2-year full-time vocational schools, commercial schools and more complex vocational training. The certificate improves the opportunities of the graduate to get a training contract or – with a good grading – to continue in their schooling and access an Intermediate Secondary School.

Secondary Level II

Secondary Level II education in Germany is basically separated into two main tracks: vocational education and general education. General education concludes with an A-level certificate at Grammar Schools for university access, whereas vocational education includes the Dual System, full-time intermediate technical schools (*Berufsfachschulen*) and higher technical schools (*Fachoberschulen*).

In terms of numbers of students, the Dual System is the most significant pathway in Germany: 60% of young people take part in vocational training within this system, which had over 1.6 million trainees in 2007, and more than 600,000 new training contracts³ per year. There are more than 300 nationally recognised training occupations available through the system. Even with over 150,000 vocational experts in the examination boards of the Chambers of Commerce and Industries working on an honorary basis, the average cost per trainee within the Dual System stands at €18,000 per year. The overall cost to the German economy for this vocational training is €30 billion per year.

The Dual System is open to all Secondary Level I graduates, and students participate in on-the-job training as well as vocational training over a period of 2 to 3.5 years (Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006; Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008). Training regulations focus on the duration of training, as well as the content in terms of knowledge and skills required for designated occupations, and are developed by the federal government, trade unions and the federal states.

Intermediate vocational schools (*Berufsfachschulen*) provide general and vocational training and differ in their definitions of entrance levels as well as in the duration of their programs (from 1 to 3 years). Some call for students to have an Intermediate Certificate, but others are also open to Secondary General School graduates.

Technical Secondary Schools (*Fachoberschulen*) offer specialised education for various areas and provide students with a certificate that allows access to higher education (*Fachhochschulen*).

There have been changes in the backgrounds of trainees entering the Dual System, based on their prior school certificates. In a longitudinal comparison, data from the Federal Statistical Office show that in 1970, 80% of trainees had completed lower secondary schooling (Secondary General School, *Hauptschule*), 19% had graduated from Intermediate Secondary Schools (*Realschulen*), and only 1% had A-levels (*Abitur*). By 2004, these percentages had shifted markedly: a much smaller 37% of the trainees had graduated from lower secondary schools, while

³A training contract is arranged between a (private) training organisation and the trainee. The contract runs for the official training period and guarantees a place for training, adequate payment during the training and the educational standards defined by the state. In the context of the Dual System the student attends a vocational school 1 or 2 days a week on average. Most training takes place in the enterprise under the supervision of vocational trainers.

46% were from Intermediate Secondary Schools and 17% from Grammar Schools with A-levels (*Abitur*). In other words, students holding university entrance qualifications have increasingly taken up options that were traditionally intended for those who graduated from lower secondary schools (Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006; Tippelt & van Cleve, 1996). Thus, as well as a general shortage of trainee positions in the Dual System due to the economic situation, there is increasing competition among graduates from the different school types who are all trying to get one of the limited number of training positions. Demand and supply of training positions should, in theory, be balanced, but in reality, because of the decreasing number of training positions and the attractiveness of the Dual System in Germany, the demand for places is greater than the supply.

Having described the German educational system and its Secondary Level II pathways, the next section provides an overview of the possible stages at which dropout can occur: this can be from each of the different school types and training programs. Dropout numbers and rates will be given where they are available.

Rates of School Graduation and Dropout

Dropout from Secondary Level II in Germany occurs within both the general school system and in vocational education. Moreover, Germany's school organisation has a very specific feature that contributes to delayed school careers: *grade-repeating* (or *retake*). It is possible for students to repeat a year at either the same type of school they attended, or to change school type 'downwards', for example from Grammar School to Intermediate Secondary School, and repeat the year there. The assumption in the latter case would be that Grammar School was not the appropriate school for that student, and the student would be more successful at an Intermediate Secondary School. These early problems in a student's educational career are sometimes first indicators for the identification of young adults at risk of dropping out. In this section, the main focus is on dropout rates, but in order to provide a more comprehensive picture, some numbers on grade-repeating are also presented.

Grade Repeating and School Dropouts

In Germany, three in every hundred pupils have their school careers delayed through grade-repeating. In absolute numbers, for the year 2006–07, 234,000 students (or about 2.7% of the total school population) retook a grade between Primary and Secondary Level II (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008, p. 258). By looking at the changes in the numbers of grade repeaters and comparing the numbers from 1995–96 with those of 2006–07, a differentiated picture can be drawn.

With regard to type of school, the educational report of 2008 (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008) points out that Intermediate Secondary Schools have the highest rates of grade repeating (around 5%, compared with 4% for Secondary General Schools and 2% for Grammar Schools). But compared with 1995–96, the rates for Intermediate Secondary Schools have tended to decrease. Grammar Schools have relatively low rates (2.9% in 1995–96, 3.2% in 2006–07). This might be due to the fact that Grammar Schools lose students to other school types, but have to take in students from these other schools only to a very limited degree. This would be consistent with the observation of rising rates in Secondary General Schools (from 3.4% in 1995–96 to 4.1% in 2006–07).

Regarding the gender-specific data, it is a general trend across all school types and all years that young male students tend to repeat grades more often than female students. Moreover, young students from migrant backgrounds are more likely to repeat than German students. In the national educational report that was published in 2006, it was shown that this trend starts in primary education and only starts to weaken in the Secondary I Level.

Repeating classes as well as dropping out of Secondary II general schooling happens in all three different school types. Depending on the school type, dropping out of school – in contrast to repeating classes – means leaving school without any official qualification or certificate. The only exceptions are students dropping out from Grammar School after Grade 10. In this case – when they have finished Grade 10 successfully – they automatically receive the Secondary Intermediate School certificate. In every other dropout scenario, students have no school certificate unless they take extra courses and/or exams.

The numbers shown in Fig. 7.1 refer to school leavers from general education aged 15–17 years without a basic school certificate. Here, the overall national rate was at

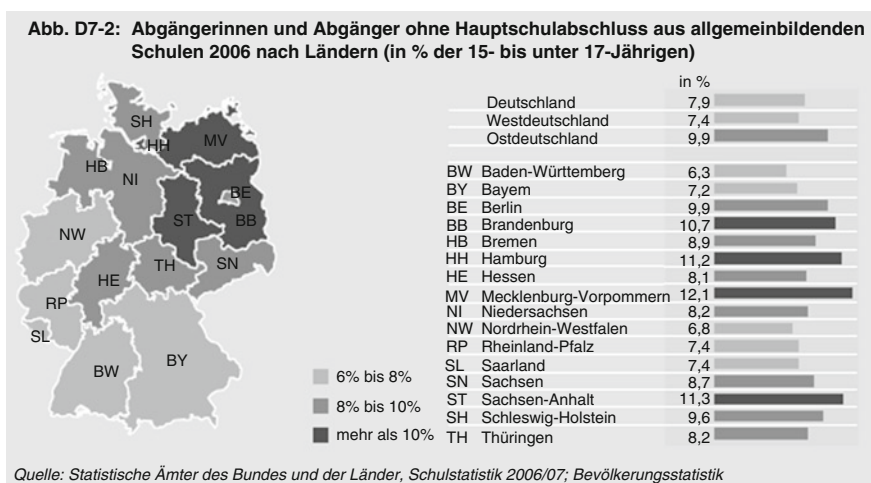


Fig. 7.1 School-leavers without basic school certificate from general schools (% of all 15- to 17-year-olds) (Source: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008, p. 87)

7.9% ($n = 76,000$) in 2006, while the rates for federal states differ considerably. What this chart reveals is that in the northern and eastern parts of Germany, dropout rates are generally higher than in the western and southern parts. On average, West Germany's dropout rate lies at 7.4% and East Germany's at 9.9%. The highest rate (12.1%) was measured in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MV) and the lowest in Baden-Württemberg (6.3%). Overall, 2.4% of all young adults in Germany aged 18–24 years have not graduated from the Secondary I Level (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008).

Up to a point, dropping out is compensated for by access to the Dual System for some young people without a school leaving certificate. Longitudinal studies show that 38% of this group find a position within the Dual System within 30 months, while others enrol in full-time vocational school or in one of the diverse set of programs known collectively as the 'transition system' (*Übergangssystem*).⁴

While there are no cohort-equivalent graduation or dropout rates for Germany that would allow a follow-up of the school careers of cohorts of young people, numbers for 2000 and 2004 clearly show a tendency for students who have no school graduation certificate to take up offers in the 'transition system' that prepares them to enter the Dual System. In 2004, of all commencing students in vocational training who did not hold a Secondary General School leaving certificate, 84.0% attended courses in the transition system (83.9% in 2000). In 2000, merely 15.8% (and 15.5% in 2004) of this 'unqualified' group of students successfully entered the Dual System directly, and only a very small number (0.3% in 2000 and 0.5% in 2004) entered the full-time vocational schooling system (Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006, pp. 82–83).

In contrast, among those students who in 2004 entered vocational training holding a Secondary General School certificate, 40.2% started directly in the Dual System (47.3% in 2000); and of those with a Secondary Intermediate Secondary certificate, 48.5% did so (54.1% in 2000).

In terms of transition to vocational training, the most successful students are those with the highest school certificate: A-levels (*Abitur*). The numbers here are intriguing. In 2000, 69.7% of *Abitur* students who entered vocational training did so in the Dual System, with a further 24.8% in full-time Technical High Schools. Only 5.4% started vocational training in the transition system. In 2004, the pattern was very similar: 68.2% entered the Dual System, 28.9% full-time vocational schooling, and only 2.9% began in the transition system.

A longitudinal study conducted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) on the pathways of young adults whose highest schooling is that of a Secondary General certificate focused on three test intervals: 6, 18 and 30 months after leaving the general school system. The results show that after 6 months,

⁴The transition system is a third form of vocational education besides the Dual System and vocational schools that was developed during the 1990s. It consists of a variety of short-term educational measures that are intended to support the transition from the general educational school to award-bearing vocational education. The transition system is at the moment in terms of numbers of students nearly as big as the Dual System. Especially in Eastern Germany, the transition system plays an important role in the process of vocational integration.

27.5% were in enterprise-based vocational training, 15.7% in non-enterprise-based⁵ vocational training, 38.2% in the transition system, and only 18.7% were not in any kind of training.

After 30 months, three main groups could be identified. The first group consisted of those young adults who started training in either enterprise-based or non-enterprise-based training (around 43%) during the first 6 months after leaving school. The trajectory of this group was very stable as only very few dropped out. By 18 months, another 14% had joined this group (i.e., they had commenced enterprise-based or non-enterprise based training), and by 30 months, a further 3% had joined it. These later entries mainly came from the transition system and increased the total number in enterprise-based or non-enterprise-based training to 60% (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008).

The second group of young adults entered the transition system (38.2%) and can be characterised as those who only rarely succeeded in finding a training position after 18 months (only 33% of this group had a training position). Even after 18 months, more than half of this group were still in the transition system. At the 30th month, a certain percentage had succeeded in entering a fully qualifying training position, so that about half of this group made the transition into the vocational training system. In general, the transition paths of this group of young adults were more of an odyssey than a systematic model of successful educational continuity (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008).

The third group (19%) consisted of those who did not attend school in any way and who did not find a job or a training position. Only a minority of this group (33%) were able to find a fully qualifying position, leading to the level of a skilled worker, within the 30 months.

These numbers show that the initial rate of students who are identified as drop-outs (those who have left school and do not have any kind of school-leaving certificate) might even be higher if those who have graduated, but are not successfully integrated into vocational education or the job market, are taken into account.

Training Dropouts

When students enter the Dual System they are, on the one hand, still students during their vocational schooling phases, but on the other hand they are educated and socialised as *employees* in their on-the-job-training phases, and here they sign a contract with their employer. Students in the Dual System are meant to attend vocational school and for the whole period of training remain at the company that offered the contract to them. If students break-off the training and the contract, or if they do not attend vocational school, or if they do not successfully pass the exams at the end of their training phase, they are not granted a certificate and are regarded as dropouts in the Dual System.

⁵Enterprise-based training is delivered (partly) within a firm, while non-enterprise-based training is delivered in a school setting.

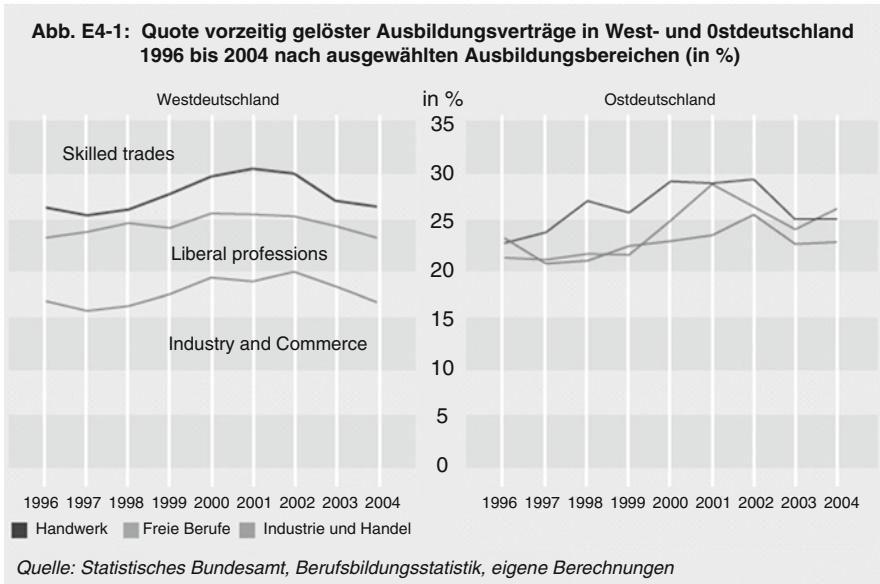


Fig. 7.2 Changes in training dropout rates, 1996–2004, West and East Germany (%) (Source: Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006, p. 93)

Dropouts from the Dual System pose a big challenge for vocational education in companies and are a high financial risk for them. Interestingly, dropout numbers have been rising dramatically in the last 40 years: rates were at 5% for longer-lasting contracts and at about 15% for recently signed contracts before the 1980s. At the end of the 1980s, these numbers almost doubled: in 2000 the rates were at 25.1% for the recently signed contracts.

Figure 7.2 illustrates the rates in more recent years (1996–2004) for three different occupational areas for both West and East Germany.

The overall national rate for these prematurely dissolved contracts is at about 26% for Germany, and is thus regarded as very high. In order to reduce this figure, there are a number of programs and projects that, for example, focus on better matching processes or early counselling models. Later in this chapter, there will be further discussion of the reasons for dropout and the measures to reduce it.

In general, the last two educational reports on Germany (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006, 2008) have highlighted a trend in which school qualifications have become partly disconnected from the types of school that normally award them. In the German context, this is referred to as ‘permeability’ in that a qualification increasingly penetrates different types of schools rather than being uniquely available from one of them. Increased permeability is evident, for example, in the fact that a Secondary General School certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*) can be acquired at a Secondary Intermediate school (*Realschule*) and that the certificate normally awarded by this school can also be gained elsewhere through additional courses and/or examinations. A higher level of school graduation can also be obtained belatedly through job-related education. The 10-year period from

1996 to 2006 shows the extent of the trend to obtain school certificates outside the normal institutional route: (1) rates for basic school certificates grew from 12.1% to 13.5%; (2) rates for middle school certificates increased from 13.5% to 17% and (3) for A-levels the rates rose from 11% to 15% (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008).

Dropouts – Differentiated According to School Type, Gender, Nationality and Socioeconomic Status

If the group of young adults without any school certificate in 2004 is examined more closely, it becomes clear that half of the group consists of former students of Special Needs Schools and 35% come from Secondary General Schools. Although the numbers do vary, these are the two major groups that form the largest proportion of the dropouts in all compared years. In general, dropouts have fewer chances of getting a training position within the Dual System: 13 months after dropping out, only half of this group succeeded in signing a contract with a training company. After 2.5 years, only 69% of them had achieved that goal.

More young men than young women are likely to drop out of school. In 2004, 9.5% of German males aged 15 to 17 did not have a school certificate, compared with 5.6% of females. Young people from migrant backgrounds were also much less likely than Germans to have completed a school certificate, with the same difference by gender: 19.7% of males and 12.9% of females were in this category (Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006, p. 254).

In a more detailed analysis of these numbers, and controlling for the socioeconomic status of young adults, the relative likelihood of obtaining A-levels is almost the same for students from Germany and for students with a migrant background from other European Union countries, the United States, East Asia, the former Soviet Union, Italy, Turkey, Morocco, and East and Middle Europe. For students who originally come from Greece, Spain, Portugal, Vietnam and other South Asian countries, there is even a positive effect of nationality on the chance of attaining A-levels. Without controlling for socioeconomic status, these chances differ a great deal: for example, students from Italian or Turkish backgrounds have one half to one third the likelihood of obtaining A-levels, compared with Germans (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008).

After further differentiating socioeconomic status, the educational levels of the parents are found to be the most important influences on the level of achievement in school. If the first family attachment figure (normally the father) has a university-level degree rather than being a dropout with no educational certificates, the likelihood for the young adult to also achieve A-levels is three times as high. If the second parent (normally the mother) has A-levels as well, chances are four times as high, compared to having a second parent without any schooling certificates. Additionally, young adults obtain A-levels less often when their parents have a

lower family income, even if the parents may have equally high educational attainments and vocational positions compared to the latter group.

Explanations for Dropouts in Germany

The reasons for dropping out can be seen as individual (the motivational and cognitive attributes of the young person) as well as related to external factors concerning the school and vocational training system. More intensive research in this field is necessary, but it can be said that the reasons for dropout are multifaceted and originate basically in four areas: family background (e.g., socioeconomic status), the schooling system (e.g., lack of permeability), organisational issues (e.g., the quality of the curriculum), and issues concerning school effectiveness (Ditton, 2007; for an overview on school effectiveness criteria, see Seidel, 2008). Krekel and Ulrich (2009) point to four individual determining aspects associated with not being able to find a trainee position in the Dual System: (1) achievement, (2) family background, (3) migration background and (4) gender.

In qualitative studies on dropout in the training and vocational system (Weiss, 2002), the main reasons that have been found include:

- A lack of interest in the occupation
- A lack of achievement, mainly concerning attainment at vocational schooling
- Trainee deviance, mainly absence without permission
- Conflicts in the training company

Additional reasons relate to health or family issues, as well as lack of training quality. However, these reasons given in case studies cannot explain the continuing rise of dropouts in the Dual System. Since there is no evidence basis for a decline in the quality of instruction, several reasons can be found when looking at the surrounding conditions.

One of these concerns the ratio of training offers from companies to school leavers seeking an apprenticeship. Assuming that a discontented trainee would only dissolve his contract with one company when he or she can be sure of already having a new contract with another company, the risk of high dropout rates is greater in years of trainee position over-supply. This hypothesis sounds convincing, and there is a certain correlation; however, it does not hold for the continuing rise in dropout rates ever since the 1970s (Weiss, 2002).

A second important factor is the preparatory education of the trainees. The number of students without any basic certificate in the Dual System has hardly changed at all, but the number of students with basic certificates fell considerably (from 47.3% in 2000 to 40.2% in 2004). The relative numbers of students with A-levels more than doubled since 1979 (Weiss, 2002). As Weiss noted in 1982, it is mainly graduates from Grammar Schools who tend to dissolve their trainee contracts. So the numbers of dropouts in the Dual System might have risen because the students entering it have a higher formal school education. But again, this can only be a

partial reason because this group represents a relatively small number (15% in 1999) in relation to all trainees in the Dual System.

A further option to explain the rising dropout rate is a change in student value systems and attitudes to work. Since training for a certain occupation does not guarantee a lifelong position in a company anymore, and staying with one company is no longer necessarily regarded as a positive sign, students do not accept a vocation and its regulations as a given order that needs to be rigidly followed. Rather, they see a vocation as a discretionary goal that is chosen by them, and leaving one track in favour of another is just part of a personal search process for the right job (Fischer, 2002, p. 17).

Prevention and Reduction of Dropout Numbers in Germany

The educational report in 2008 (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2008) states that in the years to come, a meaningful reduction in the number of students who drop out of school without any certificate is a core challenge for the quality of the German educational system. Measures that help to reduce this number are seen as an urgent matter also by the ministries of the federal states, but such acknowledgement has not yet been followed by research initiatives. As Stamm (2006) points out, there are no national programs for dropouts, and theoretical discussion is only in its early phase. However, some first conceptual frameworks for action are being developed and implemented at different provider levels (school/training) and at different policy levels (individual/organisational/systemic).

Reduction of School Dropouts

Many programs and projects have been initiated in Germany in order to prevent school dropout. They mainly focus on individual support, increased school quality, improved teacher skills and counselling services at schools, and the development and implementation of educational standards. The choice and implementation of programs varies according to the specific needs and priorities of the federal states.

The integration of the educationally disadvantaged through educational counselling, learning centres and new learning cultures has set a major goal involving the expansion of continuing education through such programs as 'Learning Regions', creating networks and synergies between different institutions and agencies, with finance from the European Union and German Ministry for Education and Research (Tippelt et al., 2008).

Reduction of Training Dropouts

To reduce the rate of training dropout in Germany requires addressing issues in each of the three systems involved: (1) the Dual System, (2) the vocational schooling system, and (3) the vocational transition system.

Since the reasons for dropout are multifaceted, preventative policies focus on a variety of aspects, for example, strengthening the Dual System; promoting better cooperation between the educational system and the labour market; providing module-based curricula; enhancing the quality of instructors; intensifying access tests, educational counselling and matching services; as well as concentrating on problem-based, project-oriented teaching and learning methods.

Employers and training companies focus on preventive measures that create a positive learning and working culture that supports the trainees' motivation and their openness to new learning experiences. A culture of trust that encourages but also challenges young adults can help to reduce the risk of dropout. Moreover, additional qualifications and coaching or mentoring offered to the trainees, further education for the companies' vocational trainers, and a close collaboration with the vocational school system are useful in reducing dropout (Dobischat & Düsseldorf, 2009, p. 383f).

Alternative Pathways

School graduation and a leaving certificate are the minimum requirements for a successful transition into the training system and employment market. But as shown in Fig. 7.1, the proportion of young adults who leave school without a minimum certificate is, on average, about 8%. Though the assumption that successful school graduation is an important requirement in Germany for integrating young adults into the labour market is widely shared, the effects of not successfully graduating are rarely researched. Gaupp et al. (2008) summarise the results of the most relevant studies done in Germany in this field (Braun et al., 2009; Solga, 2004, 2005; Prein, 2006; Lex, 1997; Dietz et al., 1997) as follows:

1. Young adults without Secondary General graduation have lower options to immediately make the transition into the vocational system.
2. They rarely take the option of going back to school, though this would enhance their chances of finding a position in the vocational system.
3. They are often dependent on support programs and measures.
4. They have a high risk of being 'decoupled' from the regular vocational training system by attending a series of supportive measures and phases of unemployment.

The results also show that a segment of these young adults still find training positions and other vocational education opportunities. How this kind of resilience is gained or how it works is not yet sufficiently researched, but should be a subject of future research.

Aside from entering the labour market or taking up vocational education opportunities, there are also alternative pathways for students in Germany to gain a school certificate. The programs that are highest in numbers are firstly the option

to attend special courses at Adult Education Centres (*Volkshochschulen*) in order to complete the Secondary General certificate. Secondly, there are programs called *Praxisklassen* for young students at Secondary General Schools who have exceptional learning and achievement problems. This dropout prevention model focuses on special support in order to contribute to the student's positive learning and working attitudes. In close cooperation with companies, youth welfare services and vocational counselling institutes, internships are organised so that a smooth transition into working life is achieved. As part of these reform initiatives, those involved in vocational training, social work and school psychology are working together intensively to build a network of organisations to address the dropout situation (Tippelt et al., 2008).

Policies on Three Different Levels Aiming at Prevention of Dropout

Germany's education policies can be summarised as being implemented on three different levels: micro (individual), meso (organisational) and macro (system). All countries have their own distinctive approaches to the issue of preventing dropout. In Germany, policies to address the problem can be seen within this framework (see also Krekel & Ulrich, 2009):

Individual strategies focus on individual factors, such as providing potential dropouts with developmental support strategies. There are a multitude of different smaller and larger programs that are directed at the most vulnerable young adults, and these vary according to the particular conditions in each federal state. An overall view as to what these programs aim at, or should focus on in the future, is given below:

- To enable students to better understand their own achievement and learning situation, they should be given continuous feedback on school and learning performance (not only grades). This also helps them to take responsibility for their own learning biography and options in life.
- To facilitate successful implementation of the above, teacher education must be intensified so that teachers are skilled at dealing with the challenges at hand.
- Further professional development for teachers, as well as training for other educators, is needed here.

Organisational strategies take into account the responsibilities of schools, training organisations and relevant personnel. Some key principles are given below:

- In school and training environments, over-straining and under-challenging of students has to be avoided, and the didactics as well as the learning culture in schools need to be modified.

- Pedagogical approaches in schools are often generalised and groups of students are targeted rather than individuals. To individualise the pedagogical approach is thus a core strategy to better identify students at risk of dropping out, and to help to prevent it.
- In line with this argument is the challenge of developing educational options and support programs for weak learners who will most likely have low school achievement, and who are thus a group at risk of dropout.
- In order to provide this support, individualisation, etc., vocational counselling, school psychology and social work in schools need to be integrated systematically.
- Since social cohesion at school encourages students to remain at school, participation in extra-curricula activities (sport, cultural activities, youth welfare service, youth social work) should be fostered.

Systemic strategies concentrate on institutional factors, such as change in school, learning and teaching culture, and take into account historical as well as regional and political conditions. Here, reduction of the discrepancy between the number of available and required trainee positions, as well as the qualitative differences between them, is at the centre of attention (Krekel & Ulrich, 2009). Key approaches in this area are given below:

- Curricular educational standards need to be revised and a multi-stakeholder approach needs to be applied, so that the stakeholders' interests are included and transitional phases are easier for the individual students.
- The system needs to be more permeable or seamless, to allow for different educational alternatives even if one pathway has been chosen at a certain time during the educational biography of a person. This way, more options to 'correct' or adjust school, vocational and academic careers can be created, as well as second chances for dropouts.

While giving a perspective on future developments, Krekel & Ulrich (2009) report on reverse tendencies: the critical economic situation that will negatively influence the number of offered trainee positions and demographic developments that will reduce the number of trainees in the medium term.

In Germany, there is a pressing need for a positive image of a new learning culture, which is supportive and sensitive to the needs of youngsters who require extra help and support to succeed.

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Chapter 8

School Dropout in Secondary Education: The Case of Poland

Piotr Mikiewicz

Introduction

It is generally assumed that school dropout is not much of a problem in Poland. According to Eurostat (2008), the rate of early school leaving is only 5.5%, which means that only a small proportion of young people aged 18–24 have not obtained an upper secondary qualification. Rapid and wide expansion of education at the secondary and tertiary levels suggests that the quality of Polish education is high and so too is its effectiveness. This chapter presents a contrary point of view. The author will try to show the impact of educational change in contemporary Polish education, particularly in terms of social inequalities. The processes of change have led to an illusion of democratic and effective schooling but, as will be argued, the mechanical involvement of larger and larger numbers of students in education is not sufficient to overcome social inequalities or to open up opportunities to all. As will be shown, dropout (or potential dropout) is not as low as might be expected and differs according to the type of secondary education.

The first part of this chapter presents a general overview of changes in the contemporary education system in Poland and its general structure. The second part presents estimates of dropout rates in secondary schooling. Finally, some institutional strategies to assist students at risk of dropping out are discussed.

Changes in Poland's Contemporary Educational System

In Poland, one can observe the same processes of educational expansion as in all industrialised countries, however, these processes started much later than in the West. As was the case with industrialisation, educational expansion started in Poland after World War II. After a period spent dealing with the challenge of

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illiteracy, the number of years of schooling rose and the proportion of young people in secondary and tertiary education expanded. In the school year 1960–61, 65% of young people aged 15–18 studied in secondary schools, in the school year 1970–71 the figure had risen to 74%, in 1979–80 it reached 81% and by 1986–87 it was 84%. Participation in tertiary education lagged behind: in the school year 1980–81 the gross participation rate at the tertiary level (age 19–24, not compulsory) was 11.5% and 10 years later it was not much higher – 12.9% (Statistical Yearbook of Poland, 1970, 1980, 1991).

Until the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989, the Polish education system was mainly concerned with training a low qualifications workforce. Hence, until 1989, basic vocational education was the major element of secondary education. In that year, there were 1,177 general upper secondary schools (*lyceums*) in Poland, which recruited 21% of the graduates from primary schools, and 3,404 basic vocational schools (BVS) attended by 50% of all 15-year-olds (Statistical Yearbook of Poland, 1991). The education system was of course associated with an economic model based on heavy industry and the political circumstances of the former socialist regime, which emphasised the labour force as ‘the leading class of the nation’.

In the social history of Poland, 1989 was without a doubt a ground-breaking year. The term ‘social transformation’ is used as a description of the processes that took place in Poland after 1989, to explain the dynamics of change observed in the country. Next to the spheres of politics and the economy, the field of education is the one in which changes are most visible. As with all other spheres of social life, education was involved in change from the time of the social transformation. The educational system, freed from political restrictions and allowed to operate under a free market economy has, over the past 20 years, been transformed.

It is hard to identify any individual factor responsible for changes in the education system. Nevertheless, one of the most prominent is the economy (Niezgoda, 1993). The change from ‘central planning’ to a ‘free market system’ forced the (r)evolution of the structure of the economy. From the beginning of the 1990s, one can observe a slow but evident shift from mass production in industry to a more service-oriented market (typical of the more highly developed countries of Western Europe). This change of logic in the economy and the implementation of new technologies caused the emergence of a previously unknown phenomenon – mass unemployment. This unemployment was structural in character, mainly affecting individuals with insufficient skills for the new market. The first wave of unemployment affected low-skilled workers, who had obtained only basic vocational education. Highly qualified people, with high educational achievement, tended to find jobs in the new occupational structure. It was a clear signal to society that education matters. Young Poles who entered the school system in the 1990s heard the message clearly. Through their ‘push on education’, they produced a change in the structure and functions of the school system. As Kwieciński (2002, p. 10) pointed out, ‘people in new governmental and economical circumstances through their decisions produced the structural changes in secondary education’.

As an effect of that ‘push’ dynamic, it is possible to observe changes in the structure of secondary education (without formal change to the system, however).

In the school year 1994–95, only 36% of primary school graduates entered basic vocational schools. By contrast, 31% entered general education schools (GES), providing students with general education and leading directly to higher education – this was 10% more than 5 years earlier. In the school year 1999–2000, there were 2,156 general education schools (*lyceums*), and the number of basic vocational schools decreased to 2,408. In the same year, 38% of 15-year-olds started their education in lyceums, while 26% started in basic vocational schools (Education in the school year 2001/2002; Statistical Yearbook of Poland, 2000).

In 1999, the educational reform act emphasised general academic education, and vocational training was marginalised even more. Two years later, in the school year 2001–02, the number of students attending basic vocational school decreased to 2,372 and covered only 22% of primary education graduates. After several years of implementation of the reform, basic vocational schools now serve only 16% of graduates.

The dynamics of change at the tertiary education level have been equally deep. In the time of the socialist regime in Poland, expansion of this sector was restricted. In 1960, 50 higher education institutions had been established. By the school year 1989–90, this had increased to 98. After 1990, the possibility of private education emerged, which caused an avalanche of growth of new higher education institutions. In 1991, there were 112 higher education institutions in Poland, in the school year 1995–96 there were 179 and by 2000 this had risen to 283. After 2000, growth was even stronger, with an increase of almost 30 such institutions each year. In the school year 2000–01, there were 310, in the next year 344 and now there are 455 institutions (public and private) serving the rapidly growing number of students. In the 1990s, the number of students at tertiary level grew by a factor of almost four. In 1989, there were 374,200 tertiary students, and in 1999, this had risen to 1,425,800. Now in Poland, higher education institutions offer their services to 1,937,400 students (Winclawski, 2003; Wasielewski, 2003; Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland, 2008).

The Contemporary Educational System in Poland

In 1999, the reform of the education system was implemented. This has resulted in deep structural and curricular change, aimed at linking education more closely with changes in the market and in general social life. New schools should teach how to flexibly adapt to a changing world. The best tool to achieve this is (it is argued) general and academic education. But vocational education has been marginalised. Let us have a closer look at the new educational structure.

Children can enter the educational system at the age of 3 by attendance at nursery schools, which serve children aged 3–5 or 3–6. At 6 years of age, children attend compulsory pre-school preparatory classes: so-called ‘Class 0’. Education in nursery schools is usually fee-paying. Currently only 50% of children aged 3–5 are enrolled in this level of education.

Regular education starts at the age of 7, when children are enrolled in primary schools. Primary schooling lasts for 6 years and is divided into two phases. First, Grades 1–3 (ages 7–9) comprise the so-called early-school education. After this preparatory time, equipped with basic competences, children start education in the regular class-lesson system, Grades 4–6 (ages 10–12). Education in primary school ends with an external examination of the pupils' skills. This examination has no selective function and is designed to measure the level of skills, which constitute the starting point of work for teachers at the next stage of education in the *gymnasium*.

After primary education, children are enrolled in lower secondary school, which is still compulsory: the *gymnasium*. Education here lasts for 3 years, Grades 7–9 (ages 12–15). The aim of the *gymnasium* is to prepare students for education at the upper secondary level. *Gymnasium* concludes with another external exam assessing levels of achievement. The external exam after *gymnasium* is important because the score obtained is the basis for enrolment in one of the tracks and different types of schools in upper secondary education. Secondary schools establish cut-off scores, and based on these scores, selection of pupils to a given type of secondary school takes place. Following the reform of 1999, education at the upper secondary level is offered in the following educational pathways (provided in separate schools):

General upper secondary schools (GES): 3-year schools providing general education for those preparing to take up university studies. Education at these schools concludes with an externally assessed examination – the *Matura* ('A level' examination).

Specialised upper secondary schools (SSS): 3-year schools providing specialist professional education, preparing students to take up university studies, but also allowing students to obtain professional qualifications. Students in specialised upper secondary schools can choose from 15 specialisations: chemical tests of the environment, business and administration, electronics, electrotechnology, fashion design, shaping the environment, forestry and wood technology, mechanical techniques of production, mechatronics, agricultural and food processing, art and usable metal craft, social, transport and dispatching, services and economics, and information management. Over half the students in specialised secondary schools choose two specialisations: business and administration and information management. Education in specialised secondary schools concludes with an externally assessed examination – the *Matura* ('A level' examination).

Technical schools (TS): 4-year secondary schools providing the possibility of sitting the *Matura* and going to university, but also allowing students to obtain a vocational technician diploma in a narrow range of technical professions. Students in technical secondary schools and complementary technical secondary schools can choose, among others, from professions that belong to the following groups: technicians, mid-level personnel in the fields of biological sciences and health safety, salaried personnel in the remaining specialisations, money management, customer service and others (including personal services and security). Education in technical schools concludes with externally assessed examinations – the *Matura* ('A level' examination) and an examination of vocational competencies.

Basic vocational schools (BVS): 2- or 3-year vocational schools, narrow-range, aimed at delivering concrete vocational competencies, they provide the possibility of further education in *complementary general* or *technical upper secondary schools*, which then enable students to continue learning at universities. Basic vocational schools provide education for occupations that belong to the following groups: farmers, miners and builders; metal processing workers and mechanics (the most popular among men and women); makers of haberdashery, printing workers and related; other industrial workers and craftsmen; operators and fitters of mining and processing machines; drivers and vehicle operators; and a few other occupations such as personal services and security workers, models, shop assistants and demonstrators.

In general, as shown above, vocational secondary education contains three tracks: (1) specialised secondary schools, (2) technical schools and (3) basic vocational schools, although only the latter two provide students with a vocational certificate. Education in specialised secondary schools concludes with the same credentials as in general upper secondary schools: the school leaving certificate and the *Matura* diploma. Students in technical schools can additionally gain a vocational diploma. Graduates from these three tracks (specialised secondary schools, general education schools and technical schools) have open access to education at tertiary level. By contrast, graduates from basic vocational schools gain a school leaving certificate and a vocational diploma, which do not give access to tertiary education.

At present only basic vocational schools provide a direct vocational track. Vocational certificates (and competencies) earned in technical schools have little relevance in the labour market. These schools are more an academic track (leading to tertiary education) for lower achievers in the *gymnasium*.

Vocational training in basic vocational schools can be provided in two ways. The first way is school-based vocational training, at workshops located in school. The second mode is similar to the German dual model, as students can have the status of a young worker and have vocational training in the workplace. This means that the students spend part of the week (2 days) at school, while the rest is devoted to work. This kind of vocational training is based on a bilateral agreement between student and employer. Students receive a salary no less than 4% of the average salary in the country in the first year of schooling, 5% in the second and 6% in the third year. According to official data, in the school year 2007–08 almost half (47.6%) of basic vocational school students took part in the second mode of vocational training.

The biggest segment of post-lower secondary schooling in Poland is, at present, general upper secondary school, with 44% of lower secondary graduates; followed by technical upper secondary school (33.4%), basic vocational school (14.5%) and specialised secondary school (6.8%).¹ Specialised secondary schools are not very popular, despite the fact that their aim is to provide a middle way between technical

¹Source: Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland, 2008

secondary school and traditional secondary school. It is clear that young people prefer an educational pathway leading to a *Matura* examination and opening the door to universities.

Girls more often than boys choose general upper secondary schools, but more rarely technical upper secondary schools and basic vocational schools. However, there has been an increase in the number of boys in upper secondary schools (from 19.1% in 1995–96 to 39% in 2005–06). Therefore, while in the school year 1995–96 there were 213 females for every 100 males in general upper secondary school, in the school year 2005–06 there were 151 females for every 100 males. According to official statistics for the school year 2007–08, the gender division in upper secondary education was as follows:

- Basic vocational school: 29% female and 71% male
- General upper secondary school: 61% female and 39% male
- Specialised secondary school: 59.9% female and 40.1% male
- Technical upper secondary school: 38.9% female and 61.1% male²

Selection Processes in Secondary Schooling

The changes described above have led to the situation in which 85% of graduates of compulsory education enter educational pathways leading to *Matura* and are (at least potentially) able to start education at the tertiary level. Academically oriented secondary education is dominant and it is possible to see a change in the role of education within society. In older cohorts, vocational education is the most common background, but the younger cohorts are more and more academically educated. What is relevant is that changes in the distribution of educational enrolments in secondary education were pushed by the aspirations of young people, and free-market education has responded to this need. Secondary education seems to be universal and the obvious minimum level of education, replacing primary education, which was the threshold in the past.

In general, in Poland today, there is much more emphasis on academically oriented education than vocational schooling. This is a change in perception, since at the beginning of the 1990s while general education and university entrance were perceived as something better and an asset, vocational education was not treated as something worse or worthless. It was simply enough to obtain a basic vocational education to get a good job. It was possible to observe positive selection into the best educational pathways, that is, the track *primary school, lyceum, and university*, which used to be called the ‘royal path of education’ leading to the best occupational and social positions (Kozakiewicz, 1973). Until the beginning of the 1990s, the main mechanism of selection was inclusion of the best skilled pupils into general education secondary schools. Much research showed that this

²Source: Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland, 2008

educational pathway involved mainly children from families of higher socioeconomic status (Kwieciński, 1995). This mechanism changed in the mid-1990s, when the inclusion of the best turned into *exclusion* of the *worst* (educationally) into basic vocational schools. Currently, students of basic vocational schools are excluded from the academic or main education pathway in what could be described as the beginning of a process of social exclusion – because children identified as not being fit for general education school are disproportionately from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (Kwieciński, 1995). This is a very homogenous group, both with respect to their school competence and social background (Kwieciński, 2002; Domalewski & Mikiewicz, 2004).

Selection and enrolment into different educational strands in upper secondary schooling in Poland are based on two forms of pupil evaluation: external examination after lower secondary school (*gymnasium*), and grades obtained during the *gymnasium* years. Each school at the secondary level estimates an entry score. This leads to educational differentiation within secondary education based on a dual process. First, particular tracks (perceived differently in terms of prestige, with general education considered by the public as superior to vocational) have different degrees of openness to students based on their educational achievements at the lower secondary level. Specialised secondary schools and technical schools are attended by young people of average and below average educational competence according to their performance in the external examination after *gymnasium*. Basic vocational schools attract students with the lowest school achievement. General education schools are more differentiated, but as can be clearly seen, they attract the strongest lower secondary school graduates (Domalewski & Mikiewicz, 2004).

The second level of differentiation within secondary schooling is that between particular schools, especially within the general education school track. As it is the largest segment of upper secondary education, it is not surprising that general education schools vary greatly from each other. Some of them are attended by young people with outstanding educational achievements (in terms of grades and scores achieved in the external examination), others by pupils with above average achievements; and there are also schools that group together pupils with average and below average competence, so in fact these schools do not differ in this respect from technical and specialised secondary schools. It has turned out that a rise in the number of general education school pupils has resulted in lowering the threshold for access to this type of education. Practically everybody who has achieved average school results has the opportunity to enter general education school. But this does not mean that the competence of pupils attending different schools is equivalent. According to data gathered in research from 2003 (Domalewski & Mikiewicz, 2004), it was possible to discern five categories of secondary schools, based on the achievement profile of students:

Schools of category A grouping together young people with outstanding achievements (lyceums)

Schools of category B grouping together young people with above average achievements (lyceums)

Schools of category C grouping together young people with average achievements (basic vocational, specialised secondary schools and also lyceums)

Schools of category D grouping together young people with below average achievements (basic vocational, specialised secondary schools and also lyceums)

Schools of category E grouping together young people with the lowest achievements (basic vocational schools)

As recently as the mid-1990s, pupils with average and below average school achievement, who now attend general secondary schools, would not have had a chance of entering an academic track owing to their lower level academic skills. The educational potential of these young people is much lower compared to the potential of their peers attending those general secondary schools which group together pupils with above average and outstanding school achievements. This means that it is impossible to implement curricula at a similar level in all general education schools, despite the fact that the schools are formally obliged to follow the same program of education. The equalisation of opportunities provided by placing a pupil in a school that formally provides the same education as a traditional general education school, but where all youngsters attending the school are below average in their assessed academic skills, can be seen as a fiction and a sort of deception.

Secondary schools differ not only in regard to the school competence of their pupils, but also in regard to their social background (socioeconomic status), as shown in Table 8.1. This, of course, is rooted in the correlation between school attainment and the status of the family of origin (Domalewski & Mikiewicz, 2004). Therefore, different school environments which are formed as a result of different levels of their pupils' competence, also constitute separate social environments.

Table 8.1 Social composition of particular types and categories of school (%)

Social status	School profile				Total
	GES	SSS	TS	BVS	
Low	8.7	16.3	22.0	38.2	15.8
Lower middle	15.0	21.3	28.2	30.9	20.5
Middle	47.0	51.5	43.2	28.3	44.3
Higher middle	14.0	8.4	4.7	2.1	9.9
High	15.3	2.5	1.9	0.5	9.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Social status	School category					Total
	Cat. A	Cat. B	Cat. C	Cat. D	Cat. E	
Low	1.4	6.5	14.7	22.4	38.2	15.8
Lower middle	7.2	13.3	22.1	26.5	30.9	20.5
Middle	33.7	49.0	51.2	44.0	28.3	44.3
Higher middle	23.1	16.4	7.2	5.1	2.2	9.9
High	34.6	14.7	4.7	1.9	0.5	9.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Domalewski & Mikiewicz (2004).

Consequently, school selection continues to be social in character – it channels young people with different backgrounds into separate educational paths. Despite the fact that young people from families with lower social status now have easier access to schools qualifying for university entry, most of them attend technical schools, specialised secondary schools and those general education schools that group together pupils representing average and below average school competence (school categories C and D).

In brief, the Polish secondary education structure is divided into three social worlds: (1) the world of basic vocational schools, dominated by young people from families of low social positions; (2) the world of schools qualifying graduates for university entry (lyceums, specialised secondary schools, technical schools), which are more varied socially and are dominated by pupils from families of medium social status, with a considerably strong presence of young people from low-status families; and (3) the world of schools forming socially elitist environments, dominated by pupils from high-status families.

Students' Educational Aspirations

Coming back to the issue of school dropout in secondary education, a focus on the educational aspirations of young people would be helpful in better understanding the issue. Research done in 2003 provides an interesting overview. In that research, 16-year-olds in different schools were asked about their educational aspirations (see Domalewski & Mikiewicz, 2004; also Table 8.2). Although it is still quite early in terms of their schooling, educational aspirations of 16-year-olds can be treated as a predictor of their future decisions. More importantly, in the context of school dropout, educational aspirations can explain different levels of commitment to school. Students planning long educational pathways will probably be more committed.

Table 8.2 shows that there are differences in the educational aspirations between students from different types of secondary schools – for example, general education school students have aspirations that are different from the aspirations of students from other school types, especially those from basic vocational school. Also, importantly, most of the students in the first year of basic vocational school planned for a higher level of education than they were actually obtaining, with most of them wanting to continue education in complementary general education schools or technical schools. Still, they had much lower aspirations than their peers from the general education schools, most of whom wanted to obtain at least a masters degree. It can be clearly observed that different types of schools gather pupils with different levels of aspirations. General education schools are places for ambitious pupils, basic vocational schools are for those with lower level aspirations, whilst technical schools and specialised secondary schools are places in the structure where young people aspire to middle-level educational positions. These groupings are an effect of selection processes at the entrance to secondary school: as stated previously, institutions select candidates according to their achievements at the *gymnasium* level.

Table 8.2 Educational aspirations according to school type and category

Educational aspirations	Type and category of school										Total	
	GES Cat. A	GES Cat. B	GES Cat. C	SSS Cat. C	TS Cat. C	GES Cat. D	SSS Cat. D	TS Cat. D	BVS	Total		
Basic vocational	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	7.2	0.8
Upper secondary	0.5	1.8	10.4	31.4	23.7	20.7	39.7	53.3	75.8	24.5		
Bachelors degree	2.7	7.8	14.3	14.0	22.8	14.9	19.2	19.6	8.0	12.8		
Masters degree	56.2	62.0	59.4	30.6	41.8	50.8	24.7	19.4	4.1	43.2		
Masters degree plus (doctoral degree and others)	40.6	28.4	15.9	24.0	11.7	13.6	16.4	7.7	4.8	18.7		
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Domalewski & Mikiewicz (2004).

Educational aspirations are clearly linked to the level of students' skills. In addition, schools enrolling better students (in terms of educational achievements) deal with much more committed individuals.

But the situation is even more complicated. As described above, it is possible to observe a division not only by the different types of schools, but also by different categories of schools within the same type. In lyceums of category D (gathering pupils with relatively low level school competencies), over 20% of students planned to obtain only a secondary education, whilst 50% planned to get a masters degree in the future. At the same time, students in schools of category A were much more ambitious – 56% planned to get a masters degree, and almost the same proportion were ready to strive for something more (such as a doctoral degree). This is the case for students aged 16! If education is treated as a road to adulthood and a social position in the future, it is evident that from quite early on, young people are aware of the pathways to which they are predestined.

(Potential) School Dropout in Upper Secondary Education

The issue of school dropout is associated with the processes of selection within education. The structure of the educational system (organisationally and socially) as presented above is the background to these processes. Selection in the Polish educational system is both internal and external in character. Generally speaking, there are two major forms of selection:

1. *End-of-school selection*, which involves the mechanisms of qualification and enrolment into separate tracks and certain schools, made on the basis of two elements: the outcomes of the external examination after *gymnasium*, and grades achieved at the end of lower secondary school
2. *Within-school selection* (the 'educational sieve'), whereby the school evaluates the pupil and decides his/her fate – promotion or not at the end of each year of study with selection occurring in three ways: promotion to the next stage, grade repeating or early school leaving (dropout).

As there is no official body in Poland that gathers information about leaving school before the expected time, acquiring accurate estimates of the dropout rate poses major difficulty. It is necessary to use approximate indicators dealing with information of different sorts. School participation can be measured as the proportion of school students in an age cohort compared with the population of that age cohort (*school participation rate*). In the Polish context, this would be the proportion of school students aged 16–18 compared with the population of 16- to 18-year-olds, which was 90.3% in the school year 2006–07, and 89.3% in the year 2007–08 (Education in the school year 2006/2007, 2007/2008). School dropout is the proportion of the age group that is not in school. This means that about 10% of those aged 16–18 are out of school, equating to about 167,000 people.

That indicator refers to how many young people are not in the education system, but another definition of dropouts estimates the number who started their education in a school and leave before the end of the planned or regular period of schooling (Kwieciński, 1972; Fatyga et al., 2001). In the Polish literature, the following types of school dropouts have been identified:

- **Natural school dropouts:** those who fall victim to natural causes such as death, accidents, suicide, etc.
- **Apparent school dropouts:** students who move to another city, country or type of school
- **Actual school dropouts:** students who enter the system and do not finish school
- **Potential school dropouts:** pupils who are in the system, but are more or less likely to exit school before the planned time (e.g., due to repetition and other forms of selection within the system) (Fatyga et al., 2001; Putkiewicz & Zahorska, 2001)

Calculation of the dropout rate is very complicated, if possible at all. Even if there was access to data about students who leave particular schools, it is still not known if they are in the group of apparent school dropouts who move to another school or city. The best (i.e., least problematic) ways of measuring the dropout rate could be through the ‘*non-graduation in time*’ rate – the proportion of non-graduated students in the ‘normal period’, and the *repetition rate* – the proportion of non-promoted students (i.e., the number of students who do not graduate to the next year of schooling).

Both of the above are indicators of potential dropout, as students who do not succeed in education are probably more likely to drop out of the system, although this is not necessarily the case. How do these two indicators look in the Polish secondary education system?

Table 8.3 shows that the overall ‘non-graduation in time’ rate is about 16.5%, but it differs among tracks. The lowest rate is for general education schools, giving the impression that it is quite ‘easy’ to finish this sort of education within the expected

Table 8.3 Proportion of potential school dropouts^a

School type	Class I School year 2003–04	Graduates 2005–06 (and 2006–07 for TS)	Number of students who did not finish education in time	Proportion of non-graduates in time (%)
BVS ³	102,157	75,675	26,482	25.9
GES	252,849	235,987	16,862	6.7
SSS	87,275	68,955	18,320	21.0
TS	140,631	106,395	34,236	24.3
Total	582,912	487,012	95,900	16.5

^aThose students who didn’t complete school in the ‘normal’ period of time
Source: Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland (2004, 2008).

³Without division into 2- and 3-year schools (most BVS are 3-year schools)

time (surprisingly, given that it is officially the most demanding pathway leading directly to further education at the tertiary level, and is the largest part of the structure). Partly, the low rate can be explained by the fact that such schools are attended by relatively 'good' students in terms of their educational performance (although not only the best students, as shown in previous sections). Other tracks are not so 'easy' – one fifth of the specialised secondary schools 'starters' do not finish in time, and for technical schools and basic vocational schools the figure is one quarter. A similar picture is seen when looking at repetition rates for each track (see Table 8.4).

The rates given in each column of Table 8.4 show the proportion of students not promoted at each stage of upper secondary schooling. The non-promotion rate decreases at the higher year-levels in each type of school. General selection (the *sieve effect*) takes place heavily at the beginning and at the end of the first year of schooling. It seems that a high proportion of students fail promotion in the first year of each school type, possibly because they are not as committed to school requirements and expectations – they do not know how to 'play' the school game, adequately recognise the field (in the Bourdieu sense) and follow the rules and regulations. It is also clear that in 3-year basic vocational schools, a high level of non-promotion also takes place at the end of the second year. Again it is possible to observe much lower rates of non-promotion in general education schools than in other tracks.

Table 8.4 Rates of non-promotion, by type of school: Lower Silesia, Poland, 2006–07

Type of upper secondary school	School year				
(a) General education schools	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	
Number of students	17,203	16,867	17,050	51,120	
Number of students not promoted	678	575	233	1,486	
Percentage not promoted (%)	3.94	3.41	1.37	2.91	
(b) Basic vocational schools – 2 years	Year 1	Year 2			Total
Number of students	2,142	1,801			3,943
Number of students not promoted	296	101			397
Percentage not promoted (%)	13.82	5.61			10.07
(c) Basic vocational schools – 3 years	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	
Number of students	3,694	3,086	3,242	10,022	
Number of students not promoted	557	346	189	1,092	
Percentage not promoted (%)	15.08	11.21	5.83	10.90	
(d) Specialised secondary schools	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	
Number of students	5,699	6,800	6,824	19,323	
Number of students not promoted	833	623	207	1,663	
Percentage not promoted (%)	14.62	9.16	3.03	8.61	
(e) Technical schools	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Number of students	8,116	6,479	5,775	5,208	25,578
Number of students not promoted	929	520	271	79	1,799
Percentage not promoted (%)	11.45	8.03	4.69	1.52	7.03

Source: Education in Lower Silesia in the school year 2006/2007.

This picture is not complete, as it is not possible to estimate the graduation rates and non-promotion rates for different school categories according to the educational potential of students gathered there after initial school selection (school categories A–E). As these are separate pathways indicated in field research but not in official structures, there is no chance of obtaining official statistics in that respect. However, if it is remembered that in terms of their students' educational skills and social backgrounds, lyceums of categories C and D are similar to technical schools and specialised secondary schools, it can be expected that such schools will also be similar in terms of 'non-graduation in time' and non-promotion rates.

The above analyses allow us to draw a sketch of diversified secondary schooling. It is a world divided in two. The first is the world of general education school (*lyceums*), which enrol students selected for their academic talent based on test scores and academic achievement, students recognised and rewarded for possessing the highest educational aspirations. These student characteristics probably account for the very low 'non-graduation in time' rates and non-promotion or repetition rates recorded by general education schools. The second is the world consisting of technical schools, specialised schools and basic vocational schools: this tends to be the world of students more or less excluded from mainstream secondary education (*lyceums*). Schools in this world are relegated, enrolling students with much lower educational competence and aspirations, a relegation that pools students identified through their weak exam results and poor academic progress as not worthy of a *lyceum* education. Pupils located in this 'school world' can be viewed as students at risk of dropout.

Mechanisms of Assistance for Students at Risk

Although school dropout is not perceived by policy-makers as a major issue for educational policy, there are some institutional mechanisms to assist students at risk. The main ones are special job-training schools, which are school-based preparatory units for the least skilled students. In the school year of 2007–08, this form of education enrolled 7,200 students. Students who are not able to meet secondary school expectations are trained in simple-skilled occupations and are able to enter the labour market.

Youth Work Services (YWS) has a similar role. YWS is a state organisational unit of the public finances sector and is supervised by the Ministry of Labour. It cooperates with units of territorial self-government in educating, training and employing youth. These tasks are performed by 16 regional offices, 10 inter-regional centres of education and approximately 400 organisational units all over the country. YWS concentrates in particular on education and rehabilitation, as well as on providing help to youth at risk of unemployment, socially maladjusted youth, and youth requiring special care and influence.

Mention should also be made of the state education centres that provide psychological and pedagogical counselling services. Their main task is to support the

psycho-physical development and effectiveness of the learning of children and youth and to provide psychological, pedagogical and speech-therapy assistance to all needy people. Assistance is available to children and youth at different ages, including youth under 19 who are not studying or working. The institutions support schools in the following areas: overall development of children and youth; learning effectiveness; acquiring and developing social communication skills including negotiating skills for solving conflicts and problems; preventing addictions and other problems affecting children and youth; providing psychological and pedagogical help to children and youth from at-risk groups; providing therapy for development disorders and dysfunctions; helping children choose the direction of their education, their profession and how to plan a career; helping parents and teachers in diagnosing and developing the potential and strengths of students; and supporting the educational functions of schools.

The aim of the counselling services is to support children and youth development and the effectiveness of learning, as well as providing parents or guardians, teachers and pedagogues with psychological, pedagogical and speech-therapy help. Psychological and pedagogical counselling services are generally accessible. In the school year 2004–05, there were 557 state psychological and pedagogical counselling services operating.

The third institutional device worth noting is Institutions of Professional Training (IPT), a non-government educational organisation that has 24 branches all over Poland, some of which have over a 100-year history. Together they create one of the most widespread, versatile and ubiquitous networks of non-state educational centres in the country. They consist of education centres for youth and adults at the upper secondary level, offering courses, seminars and workshops to improve professional skills as well as workshops for practical acquisition of specific vocational skills. These IPT centres offer education within the scope of job training, teaching job skills and offering qualifications, training and improvement of already-held qualifications (for more, see Kurantowicz et al., 2008).

This short list indicates that, in Poland, policies to address the issue of dropouts are based on strategies targeting individuals – these strategies include various means to help students at risk. It seems that dropout is not considered to be a very important issue for social policy. This is partly explained by officially low dropout rates, even from secondary education. In this context, early school leaving is viewed as an individual problem and should be solved at the individual or familial level. The state and social policy systems provide some tools to assist in this individual struggle.

Polish educational policy can be summarised by the motto *keep them at school as long as possible*. However, from another perspective, it can be argued that this small ‘educational miracle’ (the rapid expansion of secondary and higher education) is just an illusion, the result of lowering the expectation bar on the higher levels of education – for instance by establishing a minimum score of only 30% to pass the *Matura* exam. This conceals problems that could arise if the demands of the system were set higher. Dropout is one such concealed issue.

Conclusions

Despite the rise of educational aspirations in society as a whole, there are ‘traditional’ social divisions in educational outcomes within each cohort of young people in Poland’s current educational system. These divisions start at home, in the family, when young people are equipped with basic competences (*habitus*), and later are enacted in the school world, leading to differential educational achievement. Rapid and deep changes in the post-Soviet country that is contemporary Poland might suggest that the vicious circle of social reproduction through education has been broken. A closer examination shows that this is an illusion.

There are separate tracks of schooling within the structure of secondary education, with the different paths the product of four factors: the type of education, the educational competence of pupils, the social composition of the school and educational aspirations of pupils gathered in a given school. Secondary education is a platform for the ‘splitting of the social worlds’: particular attitudes towards school are fostered and the differences between schools evident at the start of secondary education become much more pronounced. In the elitist general education schools (schools of category A), a culture of conformity is created and a mode of cooperation between teachers and pupils can be established. At the opposite end of the secondary school structure, in basic vocational schools (and in vocational education as a whole), a culture of resistance makes cooperation harder (sometimes impossible) and the struggle with school work leads to further educational and social marginalisation of pupils channelled into that track (see Mikiewicz, 2005). Dropout is much more likely in the latter educational and social reality.

In the case of Poland, dropout seems relatively unimportant, or less obvious. The rise of educational aspirations and a kind of scholastic culture creates the space for long-term education and the illusion of democratic schooling. Compared to other Western countries, the Polish education system looks more successful and seems to meet European benchmarks and expectations. Much more relevant issues now are the internal differentiation of secondary and tertiary education and the overall consequences of such differentiation. The school selection which occurs at the first selection threshold, marks the beginning of the channelling of pupils’ biographies. The result of this channelling appears as early as the moment of selecting the type of university or college education. As mass secondary education is becoming increasingly varied internally, tertiary education is also becoming subject to differentiation.

Considering the nature of young people’s educational aspirations, one can expect deep changes in the structure of the nation’s education. The young are well aware of the requirements of the contemporary labour market and want to gain qualifications which their parents do not have. This generation will definitely achieve a higher level of formal education than their parents did. Education in the changed school system, adjusted to new economic conditions, has a different character: one of its basic features is the duration of schooling – for young Poles, education certainly will last longer than it did for their parents. Thus, a shift to a higher level of education – to at least secondary level – is clearly evident.

A separate issue is the question of distances between social classes. Looking at the differences in educational aspirations of young people depending on the status of their family of origin, it is apparent that despite relatively high hopes for the future in all social groups, these ambitions have different ceilings for different social groups. The young people from families in which parents have university-level education are relatively more ambitious than those from low-status families. The popularisation of education at the secondary and tertiary levels does not mean that class differences are reduced. Instead, university degrees are devalued and the whole population moves one step upwards in the education hierarchy. Consequently, there is now a situation where a university degree is not a guarantee of employment nor of prestige, yet individuals without such a degree are excluded from the mainstream of social life (Beck, 2003). It can be said that to have a good education is not a 'big deal', but *not* to have one is a disaster. That is why the issue of dropout, or potential dropout, within secondary education has become so important.

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Chapter 9

School Dropout and Completion in Switzerland

Elisabetta Pagnossin

Introduction

Today, the Swiss education and training system is in the process of fundamental changes aimed at harmonising and rationalising some essential structural elements at the different educational levels. The complexity of the Swiss education system comes from the historical and cultural characteristics of the country. By way of introduction, a short description of its key features will permit a better understanding of the main tendencies of the current reforms and of the aims pursued at the political level.

At the end of compulsory education, at age 15, the majority (more than 70%) of Swiss young people opt for vocational training. However, progressively, and for many reasons, young people are now less keen to pursue this kind of education immediately after compulsory schooling. There is a tendency for an increasing proportion of young people to spend 1 or 2 years attending a ‘transitional program’ before going on to post-compulsory schools. Most of those who have attended one of these programs re-enter the official educational system and obtain a diploma of post-compulsory education some years later; only very few do not and therefore leave the school system without a qualification. The integration into the labour market of those without a qualification is highly compromised; therefore, their risk of unemployment and need for social assistance are quite high.

All these elements will be discussed in detail in the different sections of this chapter.

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The Contextual Framework: The Swiss Education System

The Swiss education system¹ (shown diagrammatically in Fig. 9.1) is characterised by federalism and decentralisation based on the principle of subsidiarity.²

The sharing of responsibilities in education between the federal and canton levels is quite complex, and varies depending on the educational level and on the political institution(s) concerned. In fact, in the context of what is called ‘cooperative

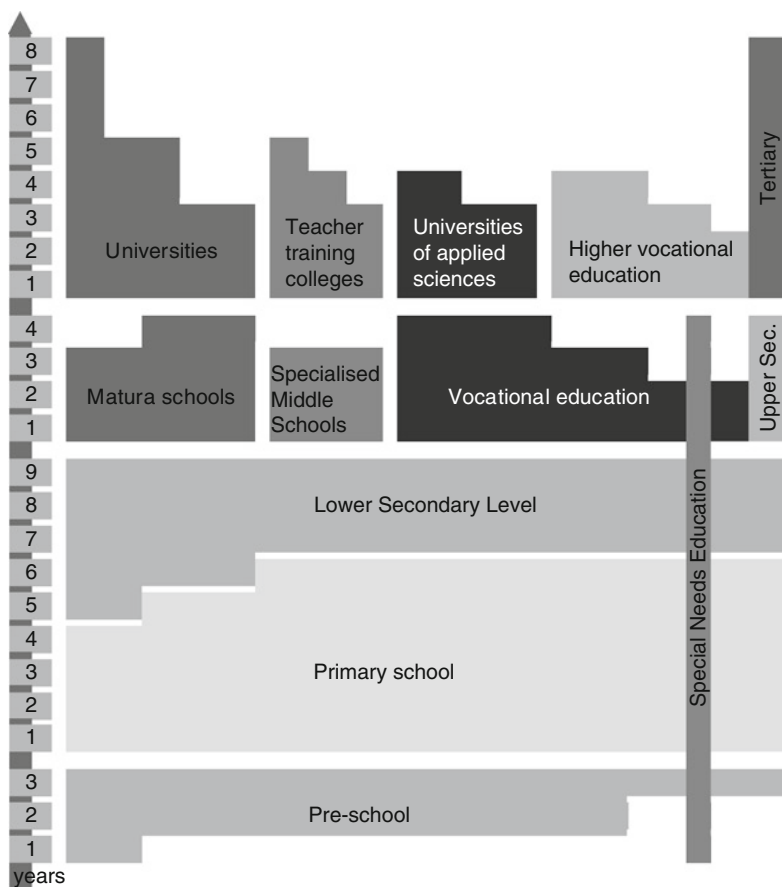


Fig. 9.1 Simplified diagram of the Swiss education system

¹All data cited in this chapter come from the data bank of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/15.html>) if not otherwise stated.

²According to this principle, superior levels (Confederation or cantons) can pass regulations or undertake tasks where and when the subordinate levels are not in a position to do so. The application of this principle results in a highly decentralised system where municipalities hold strong political responsibilities.

federalism’, each of the 26 cantons³ that form the country has its own education system, organised with substantial autonomy.

The coexistence of so many cantonal education systems implies the existence of different structures for compulsory schooling, with advanced or basic requirement tracks, which prepare respectively for academic/general versus vocational curricula. Compulsory education is divided into two cycles: the primary school and the lower secondary level, but their structures are not uniform between cantons. Nevertheless, for the majority of children, selection⁴ starts at the lower secondary level, when they are 11–12 years old, on the basis of the requirements of the track⁵ in which they are allowed to enrol. Under some conditions, changes from one type of track into another are possible even before the end of compulsory schooling. In reality, it is quite difficult. In 2006, 29.9% of the children at the lower secondary level were enrolled in a basic requirement track; 61.3% in an advanced one and 8.8% in a school without a specific track (see Fig. 9.2).

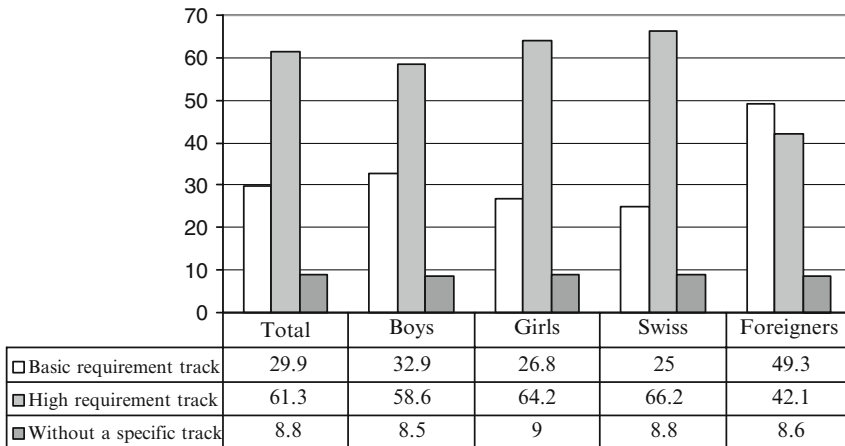


Fig. 9.2 Participation in different tracks within lower secondary education in Switzerland in 2006 (%)

³ The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP – EDK) is the council which brings together the 26 Ministers of Education. It is divided into four regional conferences that partly reflect the multilingualism of the country. Intercantonal agreements (‘concordats’) are the most binding instruments that permit cooperation between the signatory cantons. The Intercantonal Agreement on Education Coordination (dating from 1970) forms the concrete legal basis for intercantonal collaboration concerning compulsory education.

⁴ It is not really true to say that children choose the type of education they are going to follow, as they are about 10 years old. The selection is made on teachers’ decisions that are taken mainly on the basis of the school marks obtained and the performances students have reached. In some places cantonal tests are important. Therefore, teachers propose the type of school they consider suitable for the children; their parents have, under some conditions, the right to oppose those decisions. In theory, switches from one type of school to another are possible, but they are quite difficult to make.

⁵ Depending on the canton, there are between one and four tracks.

It is important to note the higher proportion of boys (32.9%) and foreign children (49.3%)⁶ in the basic requirement classes. Conversely, two thirds of girls (64.2%) and Swiss students (66.2%) follow advanced requirement curricula.

At the end of compulsory schooling (the ninth year), children's options are already dependent on the previous kind of education received, and the choices are successively more restricted. The upper secondary level is split up into two main pathways: general/academic education and lower vocational education and training.

The first pathway, which lasts 3 or 4 years, is through the Matura schools⁷ and provides the possibility of direct entrance to the cantonal universities and the federal institutes of technology. There are also specialised middle schools which prepare pupils for higher vocational education (universities of applied sciences), for instance, in the fields of healthcare, communications and information technology, and the social sciences.

In the second pathway, the most common form of lower vocational training is the 'dual system' (apprenticeship) that combines practical and theoretical learning. Students can choose from more than 200 careers involving both training in firms and courses in vocational schools (Dubs, 2006; Hanhart & Schulz, 1998). This training lasts at least 2 years, depending on the subject and the qualification attained (basic or advanced federal certificate). Full-time vocational training in school also exists, but it is quite rare. The federal professional baccalaureate can be obtained after having completed studies in addition to the vocational education and training, either at the same time or after the apprenticeship. This also gives students access to universities of applied sciences.⁸

Most pupils enter an upper secondary school immediately after finishing compulsory education. However, a growing minority of students do not continue directly into this stage. In fact, over the last decade, transitional short length courses, which do not end with a qualification, have been increasing.

A very small proportion of pupils enter the workforce after compulsory school and abandon further formal education without obtaining an upper secondary level diploma.

The Current Reforms in the Swiss Education System

Many changes are taking place within the Swiss education system. The national political authorities are willing to adopt the requirements that are shared worldwide due to the internationalisation of education systems, and to address issues such as mobility, harmonisation, quality, equity, accountability, efficiency and many others.

⁶ Depending on the type of data available, it is not always possible to characterise foreigners by their socioeconomic status. First generation young immigrants are often, but not always, of lower socioeconomic status.

⁷ It is possible to sit for the final examination and to get the certification at any age and without attending a school. Private courses exist for supporting students in their preparation.

⁸ In 2006, 80% of students were enrolled in a tertiary level institution (67% in a university, 33% in a university of applied sciences) and 20% followed an upper vocational institution.

All the levels of the education system have already been or are being reformed. For instance, the general education tracks underwent profound reform a decade ago, and this reform is currently being evaluated. A new law on vocational education came into force in 2004 and the landscape of tertiary education is being reorganised.

A new intercantonal Agreement on Education Coordination of Compulsory Schooling (*'Harmos Concordat'*) has been announced and came into force on August 1, 2009 for the signatory cantons.⁹ It is the first step of a formal process towards the harmonisation of some basic educational structures at the national level.¹⁰ At the same time, but independently, popular demand for harmonisation and coordination of education at the intercantonal level has been given clear political expression, thanks to the role of 'direct democracy'.¹¹ In fact, on May 21, 2006, Swiss citizens accepted some changes in the articles of the Federal Constitution concerning education and training in the country.

These two national projects aim at better coordination and collaboration between cantons on compulsory schooling and on the conditions that define and precede the transition to post-compulsory education.

The Target: 95% of Teenagers with a Diploma of Post-Compulsory Education by 2015

In 2005, the proportion of young Swiss who obtained a qualification at the end of post-compulsory education was 89%. This percentage is quite high compared with the mean of 82% among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and 83% among the European Union's member States (OECD, 2005). In light of that data, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education declared its eagerness to reach the target of 95% of teenagers with a post-compulsory certificate by 2015.¹² The rationale for increasing the proportion of boys and girls who complete their upper secondary education comes from the consideration that it has become an essential qualification to enter the workforce and to start a professional life.

It is possible to analyse the distribution of the two types of diplomas in Switzerland. Over time, the percentage of teenagers choosing vocational training

⁹At the same time, another Convention has been signed between the French-speaking cantons (*'Convention scolaire romande'*) aiming at a stronger coordination and harmonisation than the national one (*'Harmos Concordat'*). See www.cip.ch and www.edk.ch

¹⁰For instance, changes concerning the structure and the duration of compulsory education (which will start earlier), as well as the curricula that will be harmonised at the regional linguistic level.

¹¹Direct democracy is a system of democracy giving citizens more direct participation in the legislation process through such tools as referendums.

¹²The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Minister of Education (CDIP), *Lignes directrices du projet Transition, communiqué de presse du 27.10.2006*. The European Union declared that their target is 85% of young people with a certificate of post-compulsory schooling by 2010.

has diminished.¹³ The reasons put forward to explain this trend are numerous and will be discussed later. Nonetheless, the choice of the type of education remains quite differentiated with regard to cultural and linguistic areas inside the country, to gender and, to a lesser extent, nationality. In fact, boys, foreigners and German-speaking pupils more often choose vocational education.¹⁴

An analysis of the evolution of the diploma in terms of numbers completing confirms the increase in teenagers who complete upper secondary education (see Fig. 9.3). The rate of increase since 1990 is greater for girls than for boys, though girls have not yet reached the same level as boys in attaining this standard of education.

The decrease in the proportion of diplomas delivered in vocational education is mostly due to girls' diminishing interest for this type of training. At the same time, the increase in the percentage of females who obtain a qualification of general education is significant.

In order to increase the number of young people who obtain a post-compulsory education qualification, it is also important that they can do it as quickly as possible, to minimise the possibility of abandoning their study in the meantime. One of the strategies to increase completion is to reduce the amount of time and money it takes for the individual and the community. Some of the factors that add to that cost include changes in the educational pathway (e.g., with the breaking of an apprenticeship contract); a lack of apprenticeships available in the desired fields; and the necessity to wait 1 year in a transitional course before starting the training or education curriculum.

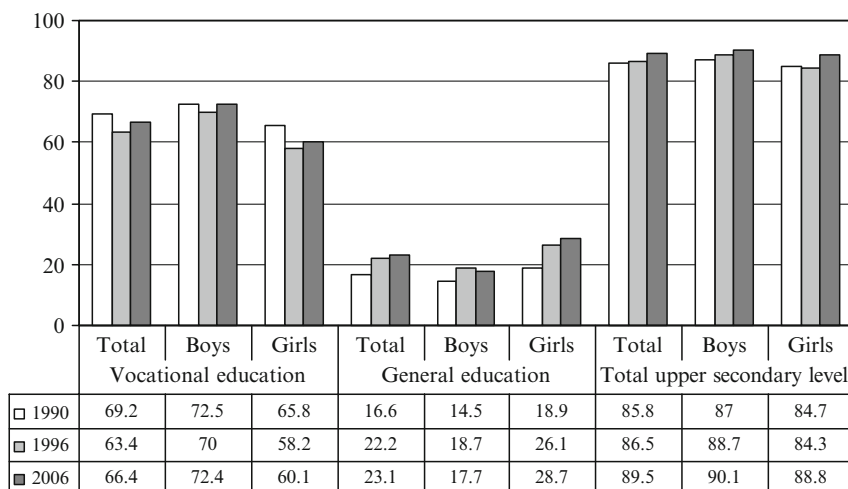


Fig. 9.3 Trend in students obtaining an upper secondary education diploma in Switzerland (%)

¹³ It was 76.3% in 1990 and 72.7% in 2006.

¹⁴ In 2006, at the upper secondary level, 79.4% of boys and 65.7% of girls were enrolled in vocational education, as were 72.4% of Swiss students and 74.6% of foreigners.

Analysis of the percentage of young people who enter post-compulsory education immediately after finishing the compulsory phase shows an important increase in the role of transitional courses.¹⁵

The choice of general education has risen slightly. On the other hand, direct entry into vocational training has diminished considerably over time. The decrease of the proportion of boys entering vocational training is not compensated by an increase in entry to a general/academic education stream, as it is for girls. However, the increase in the proportion of registrations for a transitional solution is roughly the same for both sexes.

Two major trends, obviously interwoven, can be identified: on the one hand, the decreasing number of young people in lower vocational training, and, on the other, the increasing number of enrolments in transitional programs. These two trends will be discussed in the following sections.

Trends in Lower Vocational Training

A major problem has developed concerning opportunities for apprenticeship training that has its roots in changes in industry that have affected the apprenticeship contracts' market. At the end of compulsory education, there is now a shortage of contracts in the fields of vocational training preferred by young people. There are several reasons that can explain this situation.

Number and Types of Firms Providing Apprenticeships Is Changing

The number of firms that provide apprenticeships – the essential partners of the dual vocational training system – is progressively decreasing, especially in some fields. For instance, in 2007, only 32% of Swiss firms supplied apprenticeship contracts (Burri & Brunner, 2007a, p. 4). They provided 79,000 apprenticeship places,¹⁶ but 3,000 of these remained vacant (about 3% every year). Among the firms providing apprenticeships, nearly 70% are large (with more than 100 employees), even though 60% of Swiss firms are small (fewer than 10 employees) (Mühlemann et al., 2004).

¹⁵TREE (Transitions from School to Work) is a longitudinal research study on school-to-work transitions carried out in Switzerland at the national level. This study largely confirms the data presented by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (Amos et al., 2003; Meyer, 2005).

¹⁶This number represents a slight increase (+3%) compared to that of the previous year. Since 2000, the small positive and negative fluctuations tend to result in an overall stable situation (Burri & Brunner, 2007a, p. 10).

Costs and Benefits of Apprenticeship Training

The proportion of firms providing training is relatively small, even if it seems that apprentice training is economically attractive. Many research studies conclude that, in Switzerland, firms make profits from the work of nearly two thirds of the apprentices trained. For the other one third of apprenticeship contracts that cannot be considered as lucrative, engaging the trained apprentice¹⁷ at the end of his or her contract can reduce the costs for the firm because it removes the recruitment costs and those arising from the training of a new employee. During the last year of their apprenticeship, the young trainees reach a level of competence that equals two thirds of the productivity of a qualified employee in that particular field (Mühlemann, 2008; Mühlemann & Wolter, 2007). For the firm, the training costs are compensated by the benefit arising from the apprentice's productive labour. The cost-benefit ratio depends on the firm's size and on its appreciation of the expected cost-benefit balance when the enrolment of an apprentice is decided.

Employers apply many selection criteria when they choose their future apprentice. A survey has been conducted in order to evaluate employer priorities: the way in which the profession has been chosen;¹⁸ the motivation¹⁹ and the skills²⁰ for it are considered as the most important elements (respectively 65%, 62% and 58%) in the candidate selection. The other criteria are: subjective impressions (47%), the candidate's school career (37%), his or her more personal characteristics²¹ (10%) and personal interests²² (5%) (Burri & Brunner, 2007a, p. 18, b, pp. 37–38).

The qualifications and qualities of the young candidate are also quite important, as firms want to engage people who correspond to the firm's aspirations and expectations (Mühlemann & Wolter, 2007, p. 46). As mentioned before, qualifications and education skills are not the most important selection criteria for a firm. However, the educational gaps of their apprentices oblige them to invest more time in their training, which also raises their costs. Of course, the educational gaps of a candidate can deter a company from engaging him or her. Nonetheless, other factors are considered in calculating the cost-benefit ratio, whose balance is always fundamental in determining the offer of apprenticeship contracts. Most reasons

¹⁷The proportion of apprentices who remain in the same firm is a good indicator for understanding the willingness of a firm to plan its staff renewal. The proportion depends on the company's size. In large firms (more than 250 employees) more than half (58%) of the apprentices trained remain at least 1 year after the end of their training; in the small ones (0–4 employees) the proportion is 18%. In between, the progression is linear. Differences appear according to sectors of activity: in the secondary sector, about half of the apprentices trained remain. In the tertiary sector, the volatility is much more important, with only one third of the trainees being re-engaged.

¹⁸This can include aptitude tests and the job interview.

¹⁹This means the interest shown for the profession and for the company.

²⁰They include technical, methodological, social and personal competencies, as well as the general state of health.

²¹Characteristics such as age, sex, nationality and place of residence.

²²For example, hobbies, sport and membership of different types of associations.

invoked by firms for training apprentices (or not) are bound to this rational calculation (that is, too low a benefit expected in relation to the time needed, or not sufficient work available for the apprentice). The short- or long-term perspectives are also always taken into account.

Number and Types of Apprenticeship Contracts

The evolution of the apprenticeship contracts' market is bound to that of the job market: the economic situation determines both. Two other trends that influence the economic situation (Flückiger, 2007) must be taken into account: economic globalisation and technological development that reduces the need for particular skills. The consequences are relocation, demand for mobility, expansion of the tertiary sector and reduction of small-scale and industrial production. They concern precisely the types of jobs in which the apprenticeship contracts were previously the most numerous and appropriate, and they have not been compensated by apprenticeships created in the service sector.

There is an imbalance,²³ which has become constant, between the supply of and the demand for apprenticeship contracts, not only from a quantitative point of view, but also from a qualitative one, and which depends on the fields considered. From a quantitative point of view, this vocational system is healthy if there are sufficient apprenticeship positions available – that is, there are at least 12% more contracts available than contract requests by young people looking for vocational training (Puipe, 2003). From the qualitative point of view, it is important to note the lack of apprenticeship positions in the professional branches that will be in particularly high demand in the future (that is, in the sectors of information and communication technologies, health and the retail trade). Conversely, the supply of positions is too high in some fields that will not guarantee a job in the future (Puipe, 2003, p. 20).

However, the imbalance is relative, as every year there are some apprenticeship positions that remain vacant in certain economic sectors (for instance, the building industry and hotel services).

It is possible that some contracts are not signed due to the uncertain future of certain professions, leading subsequently to problems of retraining, and the transfer of acquired skills into another profession or qualification.

Since apprenticeship salaries are not high (Schwaab, 2008) and the costs of the training vary considerably among young people and among firms, another reason some contracts are not signed can be due to the location of the position, obliging the candidate apprentice to incur possibly prohibitively high mobility costs.

²³ Since 2006, many initiatives have been created in order to change this situation: they are directed towards the candidates for vocational training (for example, an Internet platform with all the apprenticeships contracts supplied) and also to firms, in order to make them more aware of the advantages of this training activity.

It is now important to analyse the apprenticeship places that remain vacant. For instance, in August 2007, 96% of the contracts supplied that year were signed.²⁴ A few training possibilities were still open, in particular in the building, painting, and carpentry professions (8%) and in metal or machine production (6%). On the other hand, apprenticeship positions in trade/office and technical drawing professions were almost all assigned. The attribution of contracts for the health professions rapidly reached 99% (Burri & Brunner, 2007a, p. 15).

Finally, although demographic trends can partly influence the availability of apprenticeship contracts, researchers consider these as a minor factor.

Apprentices' Satisfaction with Their Field of Training

A survey concluded that 71% of young people engaged in apprenticeship training in 2007 declared that it was in the field that they wanted to be in; 6% of them said that they were trained for a profession that they didn't desire, and 16% for a profession that they considered a second choice²⁵ (Burri & Brunner, 2007b, p. 54).

The lack of satisfaction with the profession in which they are trained can have consequences for the young apprentices in the more or less short term, with the breaking of the training contract or with substantial difficulties in entering the professional world (Herzog et al., 2004b; Kaiser et al., 2007). Consequently, it is very important to avoid the situation of limited choices in which teenagers must start training for a profession that doesn't reflect their desires and expectations (Rastoldo, 2006). The lack of interest and motivation can re-emerge later (Finzi et al., 2008; Meyer Schweizer, 2009; Schmid & Stalder, 2007b). The proportion of rescinded apprenticeship contracts reaches nearly 20% every year.²⁶ This proportion is quite high, and it is harmful both for the teenager and the firm. For the teenager, such a situation causes a delay for his or her training (with much time and energy lost) and the uneasy feeling of failure, which can cause health problems (Michaud, 2001; Neuenschwander, 2008; Neuenschwander & Süss, 2004; Stalder & Schmid, 2006b). Firms are also losers, as the cancellation of a contract during the schooling year causes additional costs and organisational problems, and naturally a feeling of failure too, that can induce discouragement for training apprentices.

A research study conducted in the canton of Bern (Moser et al., 2008; Schmid & Stalder, 2007a; Stalder & Schmid, 2006a) shows that in the group of teenagers

²⁴More than half (61%) of the new candidates who start an apprenticeship are boys. The gender division of labour in the different groups of professions is still very marked. Boys are trained for professions in metallurgy (95%), the building industry (85%) and in technical fields (70%). The majority of girls are in the health sector (85%), retail (75%), clerical sector (65%) and hotel services (60%) (Burri & Brunner, 2007b, p. 33).

²⁵The remaining 7% of young people interviewed didn't reply.

²⁶Bessey & Backes-Gellner, 2008; Masdonati & Lamamra, 2007; Masdonati et al., 2007; Stalder & Schmid, 2006b.

who rescinded an apprenticeship contract, half of them very quickly signed another one, mostly in the same field but with another firm. For the others, only one in three hadn't found a solution after 18 months; most of them were immigrants and had already rescinded an apprenticeship contract. Their dropout was very often definitive. Another qualitative research study conducted in Geneva canton generally confirmed these conclusions (Rastoldo et al., 2009).

Recruiting apprentices has become very selective (Haeberlin et al., 2004), as the number of apprentice contracts has become more scarce. A study has concluded that a young candidate must write on average 18 applications in order to obtain a contract. Big differences appear among the various groups of professions. A candidate must apply more often for a place in retail services (on average 29 times), for desk or office jobs and health services (for both of these, 25 applications), and for places in hotel and household services (24). It seems to be somewhat easier to get a contract in the fields of the building, painting and wooden industries (10), metallurgy and machine industries (12) and in the drawing and technical professions (17) (Burri & Brunner, 2007a, p. 19).

Some significant differences concern the nationality of the candidates seeking a contract. In 2007, young foreigners wrote on average 39 applications before finding an apprenticeship place, while young Swiss made only 14 applications. More than 20% of young foreigners had to write more than 50 applications, and 10% wrote even more than 100 (Burri & Brunner, 2007b, p. 72; Fibbi et al., 2003). And while boys had to write on average 15 applications, girls had to send about 20 letters. It is clear that some individual characteristics influence, in a positive or negative way, the chances of a candidate obtaining an apprenticeship contract.

The motivation and the opportunity to mobilise social resources must be added to these socioeconomic and demographic factors, which include social origin, nationality, gender and age.²⁷

Overall, if employers want to enrol a new apprentice, they have an abundance of choice. Normally, they prefer the best candidates, those who have finished the higher requirement tracks and have been good students, with good marks. With the shortage of contracts available and the consequent candidate selection process, the result is a tendency towards young people who are over-qualified for the position obtained. Furthermore, as the number of low qualification jobs progressively decreases, every young person must obtain a diploma if he or she wants to be able to integrate into the labour market.

On the one hand young people can consider their personal interests, values, aptitudes and aspirations and the expectations of other people (including parents) in determining their career choices, but on the other hand a degree of rationality induces some young people to make choices depending on the actual opportunities available, and on the realities of the labour.²⁸

²⁷ It seems that employers prefer to engage candidates who are not too young.

²⁸ Research has analysed the various stages of the process leading to the choice of the professional field from the teenagers' perspective, describing the different constraints and successive decisions (Herzog et al., 2004a; Schulz, 2007).

Apart from all of the factors already mentioned (economic, political, demographic and personal), the education system must recognise its responsibilities. First of all, it does not enable all students to acquire the fundamental skills required to start an apprenticeship. Secondly, the skills transmitted do not match those needed in the job market. Finally, its mode of organisation favours discrimination against young people when they are hired. If the education system doesn't prepare students with curricula that are adapted to the needs of the economy, then the expectations that the job market has of the education system have not been made clear enough. The economic world and the education system are both responsible for the gap teenagers must face. Therefore, the gap between the skills taught at school and those demanded from the job market must be filled by the development of better collaboration and cooperation between the two parties. Nonetheless, if the preparation of students for a professional life is one of the missions of the educational system, it is not the only one (Perriard, 2005, pp. 16, 20).

The lack of apprenticeship places, especially those that need only basic qualifications, combined with increasing numbers of young people who complete compulsory education and are ready to start vocational training, means that more young people do not have any alternative, and are obliged to enter transitional courses. Generally, attendance in one of these short educational or vocational programs, before starting training that leads to some certification, is chosen by default by the teenager. One exception should be mentioned: those who must wait until they turn 18 before starting special vocational training (for example, health or child care training). The 1 or 2 years spent in such transitional programs lengthens the overall time before entering the workforce, causing costs for the young person and the community. The discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of these programs is still open. These options are positive experiences if they permit most of the teenagers who follow them to subsequently obtain a diploma instead of remaining without a qualification.

The Transitional Programs

The programs defined as 'transitional' or 'intermediate' generally follow post-compulsory education and precede upper secondary training. They do not provide a professional qualification. They are extremely varied, depending on the objectives pursued, but also according to the field and type of training. They are not coordinated at the national level, and they vary between cantons. The majority are organised at the public level, but private initiatives also exist. Each program can concern a different target group, as the age or the required skills can differ. Their content and organisation can also be extremely different. Participants must pay for most of them or receive a small remuneration, as in the case of courses organised by the unemployment insurance.

For instance, in 2005, young people involved in these kinds of training were distributed in the different programs in the following proportions:

- Programs with training in schools exclusively: 38%
- Programs combining theory and practice training: 27%

- Programs organised by the unemployment insurance: 29%
- Other types of learning (various information and training periods, language courses, etc.): 2%
- No information: 4% (Egger et al., 2007, p. 24).

According to Böni (2003, p. 98), the transitional programs do not fundamentally differ in content from an underpaid professional activity; they are similar to vocational training but they do not lead to a training certificate. Therefore, they have a lesser value on the job market.

Most of the transitional programs last 1 year. For 2006, figures are as follows:

- 1–6 months: 32%
- 7–12 months: 38%
- More than 12 months: 5%
- Don't know/no reply: 25% (Burri & Brunner, 2007b, p. 59).

The proportion of young people who spend a few months in a transitional program has progressively risen over the years;²⁹ it was 13.6% in 1990, 16.6% in 1995, 17.4% in 2000 and 19.7% in 2005.³⁰ In 2005, girls in the program (22.4%) outnumbered boys (16.9%); young foreigners (35.9%) outnumbered Swiss nationals (15.8%); and young people from the French-speaking part of the country (23.9%) outnumbered those from the German-speaking (18.8%) and the Italian-speaking regions (7.3%).³¹

A survey was conducted in 2007 on the upcoming activities planned by the 1,370 young people enrolled that year in a transitional option in Switzerland. The following figures were obtained in relation to where the young people interviewed anticipated they would be in a few months time:

- Searching (again) for an apprenticeship contract: 34%
 - In the preferred profession: 79%
 - In another profession: 21%
- Enrolled in another school: 23%
- Searching for a job: 13%
- Starting a supplementary training/language course: 7%
- Starting the apprenticeship contract already signed: 3%
- Other: 6%
- Don't know/no reply: 14% (Burri & Brunner, 2007b, p. 60).

Between two thirds and three quarters of young people, after having attended one of these transitional programs, subsequently started some certifying educational or vocational training (Egger et al., 2007, p. 50).

²⁹This is calculated as the percentage of the total number of pupils who were enrolled the previous year in the ninth (and last) year of compulsory schooling.

³⁰For instance, the absolute numbers were 9,693 teenagers in 1990 and 16,870 in 2005.

³¹Regional differences can be easily explained by the diversity in the cantonal education systems.

The choice and the availability of these intermediate or transitional programs is mostly dependent on external factors, such as the economic situation in the country: when the economy weakens, firms offer fewer apprenticeship contracts and these are allocated to the most qualified candidates (Fuhrer & Wolter, 2007). But personal factors can also play a role in the decision to undertake a transitional program, when it may be the only alternative for the young candidate. For instance, delaying for a year the decision to choose a profession to follow can be helpful for many young people.

Another important function of these programs is that they provide an opportunity to improve low educational skills. They are also useful when an apprenticeship contract has not yet been found, or prior to entry to vocational training that requires a minimum age.

Young People Without a Post-Compulsory Diploma

A typology of young people without a post-compulsory qualification has been established (Eckmann-Saillant et al., 1994). It is divided into six categories. The first one is composed of young people in ‘a precarious situation’ who are exposed to various social risks, for instance, physical or psychological problems, marginality, immigrant status and low social and economic status. The second category is that of the young ‘new immigrants’, who are characterised not only by cultural traits (as that of a foreign language) but also by an underprivileged legal status. The uncertainty concerning the length of their stay in Switzerland can prevent them from seriously starting any long-term training. The ‘passive conformists’ are middle-class young people who haven’t yet acquired the economic independence to live according to their aspirations. The ‘rebellious’ are in conflict with parents, school and society, a situation that can delay their entry into professional life. The ‘second generation immigrants’ are torn between two cultures and are not able to decide on the profession they will enter, since different professions are viewed and valued differently by the two cultures. The last category, the ‘young workers’ want to be economically independent as soon as possible.

The proportion of teenagers who leave the education and training system without a post-compulsory school qualification can be seen as an indicator of the education system’s failure in its effectiveness in retaining and training the young generation (every youth whatever his or her situation) until the threshold that permits minimal personal and professional development and provides the basis for lifelong learning.³²

One indicator is the proportion of young people aged 18–24 who leave school without finishing a post-compulsory education and who do not enter another type of training. An international comparison shows that the Swiss dropout rate³³ is among the lowest; its level already nears the benchmark of 10% aimed at by the

³²The responsibility of the educational system for giving all young citizens the fundamental right to education and training is a Constitutional principle (Federal Constitution, art. 41), and one of the objectives of the Harnos project (art. 3) is to give everyone the possibility of integrating into the labour market and develop according to his or her capacity.

³³It is important to note that the national definition of the rate of dropout is slightly different from that used for the international comparison on the basis of Eurostat data. The differences concern the length of time spent without training (4 weeks or 1 year) and the higher level of education obtained.

European Union for 2010, as declared within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy. This international comparison of dropout rates reveals major differences between countries, with percentages that range from 5% to 50%.

Between 1996 and 2006, the proportion of Swiss young people who left school prematurely³⁴ rose from 5.5% to 10.4%, with a decrease to 8.5% in the following year (see Fig. 9.4).

The factors that can lead to dropping out are numerous and quite complex given the multiplicity of life experiences and situations of each individual. The circumstances that can influence the decision to stop upper secondary education can be caused by socioeconomic, cultural and geographical elements or be linked to the family situation and the environment. Other factors such as conditions in the labour market, the organisation or functioning of the education system or the demographic context can also be determinants. In Switzerland, the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education can be tricky, as mentioned earlier, for instance arising from the problems engendered by the lack of apprenticeship contracts. A recently published report (Häfeli & Schellenberg, 2009) presents findings about the different factors that can encourage the vocational training of at-risk youth.

In the past dozen years, there has been no consistent gender differentiation in dropout rates; the trend alternates with small fluctuations around an overall stability. On the other hand, gender has some influence on the direct or indirect entrance to post-compulsory training that results in a qualification,³⁵ and also the type of training attended (Vouillot, 2007).

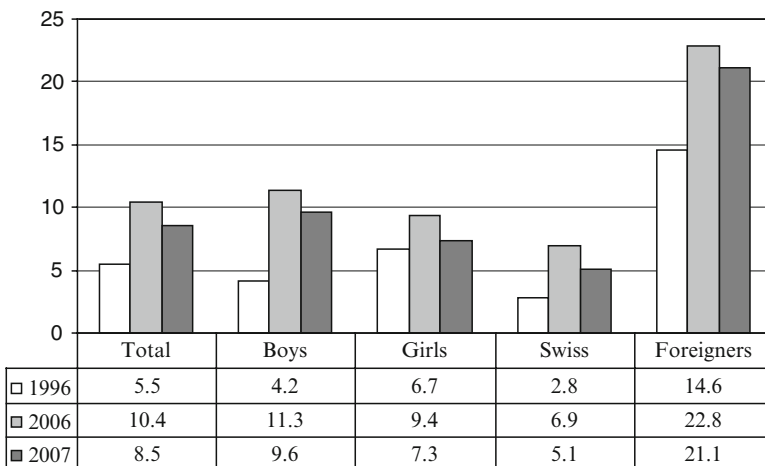


Fig. 9.4 Rates of dropout in Switzerland (% of 18- to 24-year-olds without post-compulsory education)

³⁴Increasingly, it is extremely difficult to have a profession without a post-compulsory qualification; those in this situation are at risk of being excluded from active life with the important economic and social consequences that this implies.

³⁵For instance, young people, especially girls, who want to acquire a profession in the health sector must wait until 18 years of age. In the meantime, they start a transitional program of 1 or 2 years.

Since 1996, there has been a clear difference between the proportion of young Swiss and foreigners who give up school. The dropout rate is about 5% for Swiss teenagers and between 15% and 25% for foreign students.³⁶ But foreigners do not constitute a unique homogeneous category and their situations can differ considerably, especially according to socioeconomic background.³⁷

Every year, a cohort of approximately 2,000–2,500 young people (that is, 2.5–3% of every cohort) gives up education but is not able, in the mid-term, to enter either a new education or training program at upper secondary level or the labour market. These young people are at a serious risk of being dependent on social security benefits, perhaps over a lengthy period of time.

Today, as a result of the ‘knowledge society’ and changes in the economy, an upper secondary qualification has become the minimal criterion for gaining a place in the job market and avoiding job insecurity, unemployment or dependence on social security.

The unemployment rate for 20- to 24-year-olds is relatively high: it reached 6.1% in 2005 and 3.4% for those aged 15–19, compared to the national average of 3.8% (Office fédéral de la formation professionnelle et de la technologie [OFFT], 2004; Weber, 2004, 2005, 2007).

For the same year, the average proportion of the adult population obtaining social security benefits in Switzerland was 3.3%; this percentage was the highest among the younger age groups (for those aged up to 17 years, and 18–25 years, it was 4.9% and 4.5%, respectively).

Very often, people in this situation have multiple problems; they combine lack of skills with personal problems, social and family difficulties, and have different degrees of motivation for further training.³⁸ Most of the time, the young who are motivated can more easily find a solution (even if a transitional one) than those who are not (or are less) motivated. Once excluded, they are in a situation in which the cantonal social services do not re-contact them, and so do not try to help those who probably need much more support than those who are helped. Providing support is then difficult as they rapidly disappear from the lists of regular students. There is no census or coordinated long-term monitoring for this category, and it is inevitable that their records are lost.

Since 2006, the political authorities have become increasingly aware of the problem and have adopted some measures that should prevent these situations. At the individual level, a national project, ‘case management – vocational training’, was launched for the 13- to 18-year-olds identified as having difficulties in following vocational training or entering the workforce (OFFT, 2007; Pagnossin, 2009).³⁹

³⁶In 2006, the proportion was 6.9% for Swiss nationals and 22.8% for foreigners.

³⁷The TREE longitudinal study shows that young people who dropped out come mostly from a lower socioeconomic status (Meyer, 2005).

³⁸The level of motivation of these young people is often discussed and questioned. For example, Böni (2003) concludes that most of the teenagers who, 2 years after having finished compulsory education are still without a professional solution, remain motivated and pursue their efforts in searching for an apprenticeship contract or a training alternative.

³⁹The following year a second project, ‘case management +’, was launched and concerns 18- to 24-year-olds.

The implementation is actually taking place at the cantonal level; it will be fully operational in 2011. On the one hand, the need for cross-institutional coordination has been recognised. It should include educational and social authorities, as well as those involved in the vocational training and economic sectors. All of these stakeholders should closely collaborate in order to identify those students who are still in compulsory schooling but are potentially in a precarious situation. In order to help them enter upper secondary education and, subsequently, the job market, objectives and measures must be jointly decided and coordinated by those who will be responsible for their planning and implementation. The accompanying measures must also be individualised and would be defined as successful when the young person finds his or her professional direction. On the other hand, ‘case management’ or coaching should be applied to those students identified as at-risk before finishing their compulsory education and they should be individually accompanied until they have acquired a qualification and are integrated into the workforce.

At the same time, a special program developed by national and cantonal authorities with the economic sector will involve private firms. It aims at helping them in some aspects that can be a source of difficulty in their role of training. Special attention will be given to administrative and social aspects in order to help them in their (present and future) training partnerships.

All these measures are quite expensive and will need much energy and organisation for them to be adopted. But young people without a qualification or a job are also expensive in the long term. Hopefully this coordinated plan will be successful, but it is too early yet to evaluate it.

Conclusion

The choice of a profession is a long process, carried out over various stages and during which time many people can inform and/or influence the teenagers’ decisions. Contextual factors, such as the responsibilities of the educational system and the economic situation of the country must also be taken into account, as they can produce various important effects. Most research is on transition, either as a global process or focused on analysing its determinants and influences at the individual level (Masdonati, 2007; Neuenschwander, 2007; Neuenschwander et al., 2006).

Vocational training is the most popular pathway within upper secondary education – hence the economic partnership in the dual system attracts much attention. In fact, some problems, the origins of which are external to the educational system, have important vocational training consequences. It has been seen that economic aspects (such as costs and profits, selection criteria) and the sociological ones (including influences of immigration, lower socioeconomic status, exclusion and discrimination) all have an impact on vocational training.

The Swiss VET system promotes inequity⁴⁰ as it develops a specific mode of selection that is different from selection procedures of exclusively based programs

⁴⁰ As concluded by a German study (Maaz et al., 2008).

(Hupka et al., 2006). It should be added that this selection intervenes after the program-based selection at the lower secondary level; these institutional aspects must not be forgotten. A good level of achievement at school is also, but not always, important (Imdorf, 2007a, b).

Completing post-compulsory education has become essential for successful integration into the workforce. Young people who enter into the job market directly after compulsory schooling are very rare, but many teenagers spend a year or two in transitional courses before starting upper secondary education. The debate on the usefulness of these short-term training courses, increasingly praised by young people for different reasons, even if they do not lead to certification, is still open. They are, however, flourishing, partly because of the problems encountered due to the lack of apprenticeship places, and because vocational training is extremely popular in Switzerland. Three quarters of teenagers initially choose vocational training as their upper secondary education pathway, even if this proportion is declining slightly. Most of the remaining students (nearly one quarter) enter a general/academic education. Nonetheless, a very small minority of about 2–3% of every cohort do not acquire a qualification, risking unemployment or dependency on social security benefits during their future life.

Research on dropping out is mostly reported in studies on vocational training or transitional solutions. Short interruptions or ‘deviations’ from the standard pathways do not always imply that teenagers have definitely abandoned the educational and training system, but only delayed; they can re-enter it later.

It appears that having not obtained an apprenticeship contract in the desired field, or having already gone through a transitional program, are the best predictors of rescinding an apprenticeship contract (Kaiser et al., 2007). Other research adds that being immigrants, of low socioeconomic status, living in an urban region, and/or having low school achievement, are the most usual characteristics of teenagers who stop, at least once, their vocational training (Bertschy et al., 2007, 2008a, b). Qualitative research on young people rescinding their apprenticeship contract has concluded that stopping a vocational training program is a phenomenon that cannot be easily generalised, as it is extremely complex, but that it is not always synonymous with definitively dropping out (Lamamra & Masdonati, 2009; Rastoldo et al., 2009).

Currently 89% of young Swiss people have attained an upper secondary school qualification, a high percentage by international standards. The target is to reach 95% of young people living in Switzerland with this level of qualification. Many measures have been considered to attain this objective. Most of them are based on better coordination and cooperation at the national level, and concern those pupils who are thought to be at risk before finishing compulsory schooling. It is too early to evaluate these measures since they have not yet been completely implemented; many of them are just political declarations of intention and the success of their realisation cannot be assessed for many years.

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Introduction to the Nordic Education Systems

Eifred Markussen

The following chapters have a closer look at dropout and completion in three of the five Nordic countries: Iceland, Finland and Norway.

In all of the Nordic countries upper secondary education builds on a compulsory education lasting 9–10 years. A common feature of the compulsory education systems in all the Nordic countries is that they are unitary: the children are kept in common schools and there is no tracking within compulsory education. After completing compulsory education most continue into post-compulsory, with transition levels varying from 93% in Iceland and Finland to 98% in Norway.

Upper secondary education is structured differently in the three countries. The academic programs are organised in more or less similar ways, but vocational education is very different – both in the content of the education and how it is organised. In Norway, there is a ‘2 + 2’ model, where half of the vocational education (2 years) is carried out as a student in school and the other half (2 years) as an apprentice in a workplace. Iceland has a model that resembles that of Norway, but with far fewer apprentices. Finland has mainly a school-based system for both vocational education and academic courses.

Dropout is considered a large social problem in all of the Nordic countries. There is a shared view across the countries that failure to complete upper secondary education is a loss not only for the individual, but also for society more broadly. Persons who fail to gain an upper secondary qualification find it harder to get jobs and end up in weaker labour market positions compared to those who achieve a qualification, and for the community this represents a loss of potential skills and human capital.

Measurement of dropout and completion varies across the countries. In Iceland, 62% of those born in 1982 had completed upper secondary education at the age of 24, 30% had dropped out, and 7% were still in upper secondary education. In Norway, 68% of those that started in upper secondary education in 2003 had completed 5 years later, at the age of 20–21, while 19% had dropped out, 8% had gone

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through all the years but without meeting all requirements, and 6% were still in upper secondary education. In Finland, the focus is on those not in education, employment or training (NEET), and in 2004, 11.8% of all persons between 15 and 24 years of age were in this category.

Even though Nordic education systems may be viewed as part of an egalitarian, redistributive model, where education has been considered a means of reducing social inequalities and the focus has been on developing common schools and inclusive programs, dropout stands out as a serious problem and challenge. In this context, it is also worth noting that social background is identified as an important variable predicting dropout in each system, that research concludes social inequalities are reproduced through the education system, and that one of the outcomes of this reproduction is dropout from upper secondary education.

The following country chapters on Iceland, Finland and Norway, in addition to outlining trends and patterns in dropout and completion, examine and discuss different measures implemented to reduce dropout and increase completion. Many of these measures, recently implemented, have not been evaluated or are being evaluated at the moment, but there is a preliminary view that many of them seem to have had little or short lasting impact only. This has not always been the case. The Nordic countries have been the source of major educational policy reforms over the last 2 decades – reforms that have re-shaped upper secondary school provision and produced major changes in participation. One such measure that has had a significant impact on reducing dropout and increasing completion is the Norwegian Reform of 1994 (Reform 94), which opened up upper secondary education for whole cohorts and helped democratise participation. Similar reform efforts have occurred across the Nordic countries, as the following chapters reveal.

Chapter 10

Dropout and Completion in Upper Secondary Education in Finland

Risto Rinne and Tero Järvinen

The Structure of the Finnish Educational System

The basic structure of the Finnish education system is rather simple (see Fig. 10.1). Compulsory education starts from the year in which children turn 7 and ends when they are 16 years old. In addition, all 6-year-olds are entitled to pre-school education for 1 year before starting comprehensive school.

The Finnish comprehensive school includes primary and lower secondary schools and is uniform in nature; different tracks leading to different educational outcomes are not part of the system. However, inside the comprehensive school there is an extensive special education system for at-risk students, which has expanded systematically and rapidly since the comprehensive school reform in the early 1970s (Kivirauma, 1989; Simola et al., 1999; Jahnukainen, 2003; Myllyniemi, 2008) (Fig. 10.2). Special education can be either full-time or part-time in nature, the latter alternative being more common. The number of special education students in Finland is high by international standards. Approximately 8% of those in comprehensive school can be classified as full-time special education students (officially transferred to special education – mainly full-time) and some 22% as part-time special education students (Kivirauma et al., 2004; Statistics Finland 2005, 2008).

This new division within the common comprehensive school has seen not only a growing numbers of pupils going to the special education track, but also a growing *proportion* of pupils going there. The proportion of pupils transferred to special education in Finnish primary schools, for instance, has consistently increased over the past 10 years.

The post-compulsory upper secondary level comprises general and vocational education, which are delivered in different schools. Education in upper secondary general schools is based on courses, without traditional year classes, and ends in a nationally comparable matriculation examination. This usually takes 3 years.

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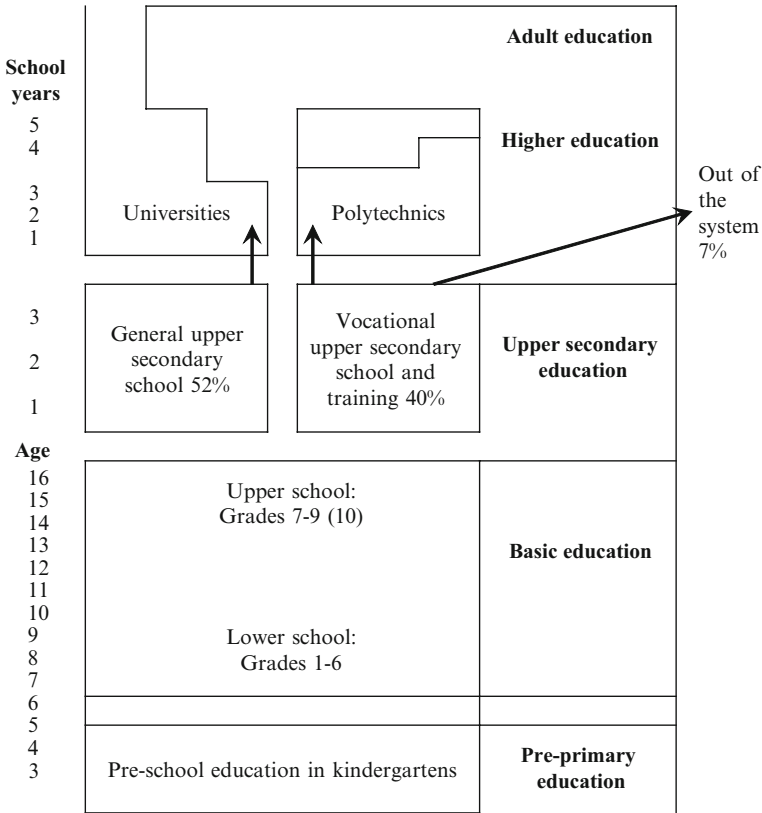


Fig. 10.1 The Finnish educational system in 2007

Note: The flow sizes of pupils into the secondary branches of education and out of the educational system after completing comprehensive school are based on estimates derived for 2006. See Vanttaja & Rinne (2008)

In vocational education and training, study is primarily organised in year classes, meaning full-time studies for 3 years. The admission requirement for upper secondary education is a comprehensive school certificate. Students apply to both forms of education through a joint application system, and the selection is based on students' school reports.

Basic vocational education and training consists of eight study fields, the most popular fields being technology and transport, business and administration, and health and social services. The study fields are further divided into 119 study programs, leading to 53 basic vocational qualifications. For example, the field of technology and transport consists of 60 study programs leading to 26 basic vocational educational qualifications. Dividing study fields into specific programs is based on the aim of providing students both basic occupational skills as well as more specialised skills in some areas.

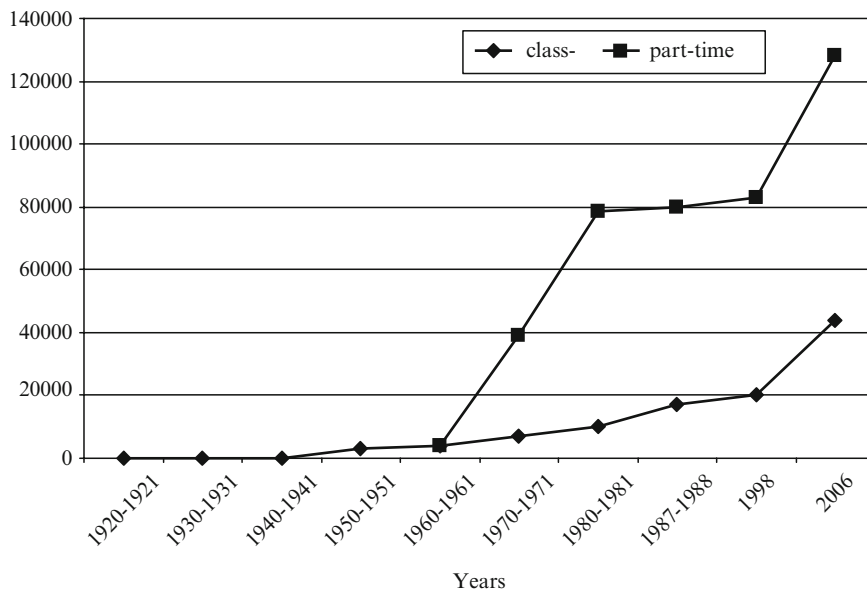


Fig. 10.2 The numbers of pupils participating in special education in Finland in the years 1920–2006 (Sources: Rinne & Kivirauma, 2005; Statistics Finland, 2008)

Upper secondary general school and a school-based vocational education are not, however, the only educational alternatives after completing compulsory education in Finland. A small minority (about 2–5%) of the comprehensive school leavers continues their studies in some other educational institutions, for example in voluntary additional basic education (Grade 10) or in adult education centres.

Finland also has an apprenticeship training system, although compared to some other European countries, such as Germany or Norway, it has traditionally been quite a marginal educational route. The popularity of apprenticeship training has, however, gradually increased. In 2006, 18% of all vocational upper secondary qualifications were based on apprenticeship training (Statistics Finland, 2008). As the apprenticeship training is based on a work contract, the practical training periods take place at the workplace in connection with ordinary work assignments. This is complemented by theoretical studies arranged at educational institutions, typically at institutions providing vocational education and training. Furthermore, upper secondary vocational qualifications may also be obtained through competence tests, independent of how the vocational skills have been acquired. In 2006, 17% of all basic vocational qualifications were obtained through competence tests (Statistics Finland, 2008).

At the tertiary level, Finland established, in 1996, a dual model of higher education, which includes universities and polytechnics. Every student who has completed upper secondary school is allowed to apply for tertiary level education. Upper secondary general school certificates and vocational school certificates are not, however, comparable, since there is no national exam included in vocational education and training,

but in general education there is. In Finland, the selection of university students is based both on entrance examination and applicants' upper secondary school certificates, and universities and faculties usually have their own minor subject quota for those students who have completed vocational school. In practice, quite a few vocational school graduates continue their studies in universities, polytechnics being the more common alternative, in addition to going to the labour market.

Both upper secondary and higher education are free of charge in Finland, which means that there are no tuition fees; students only need to pay for the study materials they use. There is also a multiform and extensive adult education system in Finland. Participation in adult education is among the highest in the world (Tuijnman & Hellström, 2001; Antikainen, 2005; Rubensson, 2005; Raivola et al., 2006).

Finland at the Top of the World Rankings

As a result of globalisation, and the increased influence of supranational organisations in particular, nation states such as Finland have come under increasing pressure to follow neo-liberal orthodoxy in educational policy and planning. By examining the policy documents and practices of the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union, for instance, it is possible to see the heavy influence of free-market neo-liberalism in the thinking about educational reform and policy-making, and almost no nation state can avoid its profound influence.¹

It is, however, important to remember that even if the same policy discourse does enter the policy systems of different countries, policy implementation is a highly complicated and fortuitous affair. National policy-making is always inevitably a process of bricolage: a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas, amending locally tried approaches, theories, research, trends and fashions and flailing around for anything that might work. Many policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, which are reworked and tinkered with and inflected through complex processes of influence and ultimately re-creation in the national or local context of practice (cf. Ball 1994, 2001).

The OECD differs from the other supranational organisations, in that its influence over the education policy of the member states is based on information management. The OECD has not made any legally binding decisions or issued any obligatory education policy recommendations. On the other hand, the OECD has become established as a kind of *éminence grise* in the setting of educational policy in all industrialised countries (Rinne et al., 2004; Kallo, 2009.)

The OECD has been quite diligent in making and publishing country reviews, as well as thematic reviews, concerning educational issues. In addition to organising

¹Many studies related to supranational/global influences on national educational policies have recently been carried out within Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning and Education (CELE), in the University of Turku (e.g., Kallo & Rinne, 2006; Niukko, 2006; Seppänen, 2006; Kallo, 2009), but in the framework of this article it is not possible to concentrate on these in detail.

Table 10.1 The ranking of Finnish comprehensive school students in PISA studies in the years 2000–06

Year	Reading	Mathematics	Natural science	Problem-solving
2000	1	4	3	na
2003	1	2	1 ^a	2 ^a
2006	2	2	1	na

na Research results are missing

^a Tied position

Source: OECD (2006).

numerous meetings and consultations on educational politics, its impressive book series *Education at a Glance*, in which countries are ranked on the basis of various educational indicators, has had a great influence in steering the direction of education politics in many countries.

Countries have also been ranked three times with the help of a new vehicle of evaluation, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and every time, in 2000, 2003 and 2006, Finland has been at the very top of the ranking. The ranked lists presented in Table 10.1, based on PISA studies, show the excellent ranking of Finnish comprehensive school students (15-year-olds, 57 countries involved in the latest study). In addition, although differences in the performance of the students representing different sexes, regional areas and social backgrounds were also clear in Finland, these differences were among the smallest in the populations studied.

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion, both nationally and internationally, related to Finland's huge success in PISA competitions. For example, high-quality teacher education and especially the Finnish comprehensive school system related to junior years of schooling have been seen as explaining the success of Finnish students. In Finland, study results, especially those presented in the PISA 2000 study, have been enormously important in damping down heavy criticism directed towards the comprehensive school, the critics of which appeared in Finland in the early 1990s in the wake of global neo-liberal educational politics. Without PISA, the turn of the tide in educational policy would undoubtedly have been stronger, and the post-war tradition of equality in educational opportunities might have weakened more drastically than it has. The neo-liberal voices criticising the comprehensive school, as well as educational equality as one of the most important aims of the Finnish educational system, have been dampened, but have not altogether vanished.

The Main Patterns of Post-Compulsory Graduation and Dropping Out

One reason the dropout rate in Finnish comprehensive school has been minimal since the 1960s is the extensive special education system within the comprehensive school (Simola et al., 1999). For instance, in the 2006–07 school year, only

0.23% of the comprehensive school leavers, 152 pupils, did not succeed in obtaining the basic education school leaving certificate (Myllyniemi, 2008).

Annually, more than 90% of Finnish compulsory school leavers continue their studies either in upper secondary general schools or in vocational institutions. During the past 10–15 years, a little more than half of the comprehensive school graduates have continued their post-compulsory studies in general upper secondary schools, whereas the share of those continuing in vocational education and training has varied between 33% and 40%. Nowadays, it is also possible to study and get certificates simultaneously in both institutions, but this opportunity has not been popular among young people so far.

General upper secondary school has been a popular choice, especially among girls and young people from more advantaged social backgrounds, while boys and working-class youth have been over-represented in vocational schools. In addition, many fields of education are either male- or female-dominated in vocational education, with technology and transport being the most male-dominated (84% male students in 2006), and social and health services the most female-dominated field (90% female students) (Rinne, 2007; Statistics Finland, 2008). In 2006, half of the students who completed compulsory school continued their post-compulsory studies in general upper secondary education (females: 60%, males: 43%) and 40% continued their studies in vocational schools (females: 31%, males: 49%) (Myllyniemi, 2008).

In Finland, different upper secondary school forms have traditionally had different societal functions. The aim of the general schools has been to prepare students for higher education studies with higher status, whereas the objective of vocational schools has been to produce skilled (mostly manual) workers for different sectors of the labour market. It is more typical for the general school students to continue their studies after graduation, whereas the risk of being unemployed is higher among the vocational education students. While 45% of those who graduated from the general schools in 1998 were still studying in 2005, the corresponding figure among those who had graduated from vocational education and training was only 16%. The unemployment rate 7 years after graduation was 8% among the former vocational education students, whereas it was only 4% among those who had graduated from general schools (Statistics Finland, 2008).

In a situation where over 90% of those finishing comprehensive school continue their studies, upper secondary education can, in practice, be considered a part of compulsory education in Finland. Annually, only 5–8% of 16-year-olds drop out of the education system immediately after comprehensive school (Myllyniemi, 2008). On the basis of official statistics and other nationally representative data available, it is not possible to give exact numbers about how many of these dropouts will recommence their studies later on. What is known is the fact that 12% of Finnish young people aged 15–24 were outside both education and working life in 2005. Although this statistical group of ‘outsiders’ consists mainly of the young unemployed, it also includes those in military service, young housewives/-husbands and those whose situation is unknown (Länsi-Suomen lääninhallitus, 2007).

The risk of dropping out of upper secondary education has slightly increased during the past few years. Previously, students who had succeeded best in

comprehensive school almost exclusively chose the general educational route. Now, some of them are choosing the vocational route, which means that the least successful students have more difficulty getting into vocational schools than before. In 2006, 7% of those Finnish young people who completed their compulsory education did not continue their studies in post-compulsory education, while the proportion of early school leavers in the previous year was 5% (Myllyniemi, 2008).

Despite the increased popularity of vocational schools, and the fact that dropout in vocational education has evenly diminished during the first years of the new millennium, vocational schools still have the greatest dropout in the context of upper secondary education in Finland. In addition, among vocational school dropouts, interruption of studies almost exclusively (90% in the school year 2004–05) means dropping out of the whole educational system – at least temporarily; whereas for half of the general school dropouts, the interruption of studies means continuing in some other form of education (Statistics Finland, 2008).

Interruption of upper secondary education was more common among males than females in Finland until the school year 2004–05, when the situation changed in vocational education and training. However, dropping out of the educational system altogether is more typical for boys than girls, for whom dropping out more often means continuing in some other form of vocational education (Statistics Finland, 2008).

Main Predictors of Dropping Out

It has become a widely held assumption that those young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who are outside all education, training or employment are condemned to an economically and socially marginalised future. Difficulties in the early stages in one's labour market career are seen as leading to an increased risk of subsequent unemployment or insecure employment. Prolonged unemployment, in turn, has been found to be connected with health and social problems, and as a result, with economic, social and political exclusion (e.g., Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Korpi et al., 2003).

In international discourse, it has been stated that after being 2 years outside education, employment opportunities are seriously diminished and returning to education becomes less probable (Vanttaja & Järvinen, 2006; Myllyniemi, 2008). As a result, those young people who are outside both education and working life at the age of 16–18 have been called 'youth at risk'. It is worthwhile to notice that in the Finnish context, the dropout phenomenon has been examined as an issue wider than just school interruption, and it has usually been connected with those young people who are outside both education and working life. As a result, the category 'NEET' (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is much closer than that of 'early school leavers' when speaking of dropout youth in the Finnish context.

During the past few decades, Finnish girls and boys have had almost an equally great likelihood of being outside education and working life at the age of 16–18. In turn, young people from disadvantaged social backgrounds, immigrant youth, disabled young people as well as former full-time special education pupils have had

the greatest risk of being excluded from education and working life immediately after comprehensive school. These groups are not mutually exclusive, but partially overlapping. For instance, both the disabled and immigrants can be found among the typical group of special education pupils (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2001; Järvinen & Jahnukainen, 2008).

In Finland, on average, the children of parents in weak labour market positions, with low incomes and basic education, have a greater probability of being excluded from education and working life at the age of 16–18 than the rest of the population (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2001; Vanttaja, 2005). The connection between social background and one's educational career has long been known, and it has been documented in many studies in Finland and elsewhere (e.g., Kivinen & Rinne, 1995; Järvinen, 2003; Kivinen et al., 2007). On the other hand, the educational situation of immigrant youth, including Finnish-born youth with immigrant parents, is relatively new in Finland, since the number of immigrants has increased in Finland only during the past few decades.

Unfortunately, there is no information available in official Finnish statistics related to the social, regional and ethnic background of young people outside both education and working life. However, based on the census register data gathered for research related to the living conditions of Finnish young people (Autio et al., 2008), it is possible to examine the different background factors related to being outside education and working life among Finnish young people aged 15–24. This information is presented in Table 10.2.²

Gender and region are not very closely connected with young people's exclusion from education and working life in contemporary Finland, whereas the educational level of parents, and especially immigrant status, are strong determinants of young people dropping out of those fields. The less educated the mother or father is, the greater the likelihood that their offspring is outside education and working life. In the whole population aged 15–24, the proportion of these young outsiders was 11.8% in 2004, whereas among those whose mother had not continued schooling after compulsory school, the proportion of dropout youth was 18.3%. Among immigrant youth, the proportion of those outside education and working life was 30%, and among those born outside the European Union as many as 38.6% were outside education and simultaneously without a job in 2004.

According to research, finding employment is difficult for immigrants in Finland (e.g., Jaakkola, 2000; Forsander, 2002). The employment status of immigrants weakened especially in the 1990s due to the recession, and this affected both those who had been in Finland for a longer time and new arrivals. In a few years the unemployment rates increased several-fold, and at worst, that of immigrants was over 50%. In addition to high unemployment rates, the problems that immigrants face include unstable work careers and, in the case of more highly educated immigrants, finding work that corresponds to their level of education and professional training, as they are usually employed in jobs for which they are over-educated. Immigrants also often work in jobs that are of low status

² Those in military service or retired are not included in the numbers presented in the Table 10.2; the group under examination hence consists mainly of unemployed youth and those at home with their children.

Table 10.2 The proportion of young people outside education and working life in the Finnish population aged 15–24 by gender, region, country of birth and parents' educational level in 2004 (%)

Background characteristic	Rate
Gender	
Males	11.3
Females	12.0
Both sexes	11.8
Region	
Countryside	12.1
Small town	11.4
City	11.3
Country of birth	
Finland	11.0
Other European Union country	22.9
Countries outside the European Union	38.6
Mother's educational level	
Basic education	18.3
Upper secondary education	11.9
Higher Ed./Bachelor's degree	7.8
Higher Ed./Master's degree	5.7
Father's educational level	
Basic education	16.3
Upper secondary education	11.7
Higher Ed./Bachelor's degree	7.4
Higher Ed./Master's degree	5.8

Source: Statistics Finland (2008).

where it is difficult to motivate Finnish employees to accept them (Forsander & Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2000; Kyhä, 2006).

The problems of the post-compulsory education of immigrant youth have been examined in several studies, many of which are local in nature (e.g., Romakkaniemi & Ruutu, 2001). One problem relates to participation in post-compulsory, secondary level education. The difference in participation between immigrant youth and the other Finnish youth is significant. First of all, immigrant youth complete secondary education (general or vocational) at an older age than among the general population. Of those young people born in Finland, 65% have completed some sort of secondary education by the age of 19, while among immigrant youth over half do so only at the age of 21. Secondly, only 14% of the general population have completed only compulsory education at the age of 24, but among immigrants of the same age the corresponding figure is as high as 43%. Thirdly, although one half of all 20- to 24-year-old Finnish-born youth are general upper secondary school graduates, only 3 out of 10 immigrants of the same age are, and among those of African background, the proportion is as low as 1 out of 10 (Järvinen & Jahnukainen, 2008).

The consequences of exclusion from education and work on the later lives of Finnish young people have also been studied using longitudinal data and methods

(Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2006; Vanttaja & Järvinen, 2006; Järvinen et al., 2007).³ Based on the results of this follow-up study, it seems that on average, the assumption that unemployment at the beginning of one's work career combined with limited education has negative consequences on one's later life course holds true. Those Finnish young people who are outside both education and working life at the age of 16–18 often end up in weaker labour market positions and with lower income levels as adults than others belonging to the same age cohort. As young adults, half of the target group had been either unemployed, or for some other reason outside the labour market (e.g., on a disability pension). Over half of the women and two thirds of the men had not completed any kind of education after compulsory education, and hence still had only a basic education at the age of 31–33 (Vanttaja & Järvinen, 2006). In addition, less than one third of the early school leavers had managed to carve out a stable labour market career (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2006).

Although integration into society had been more difficult for those belonging to the group of unemployed early school leavers than in the population as a whole, life courses representing both exclusion and inclusion were found in the study. Despite the weak 'societal prediction', there were many in the group of early school leavers who had continued their education at a later age and succeeded in finding their place in the world of work. About 10% had continued higher education and ended up in the high-income group. The correlation between one's total education and career was strong. Those who had participated in adult education, especially those who had completed a higher education qualification, most often ended up in a successful labour market career; whereas those with only basic education had most often ended up outside the active labour force and/or in the low-income group (Vanttaja & Järvinen, 2006). Also, the social background of early school leavers was closely connected with the kind of labour market careers they came to have, and the link between parents' educational level and the later success of their offspring was especially strong (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2006).

Programs, Policies and Practices in Reducing Dropout in Finland

Since the 1990s, and especially after Finland's entry into the European Union in 1995, different types of educational and labour market projects and practices intended to reduce the social exclusion of young people have become more common. In the course of time, the emphasis in these practices has shifted from offering employment to offering education, with combinations of education and work-based training being more and more common. Despite the fact that the youth unemployment rates have been higher in Finland than in European Union and OECD countries on average

³In this particular research project, the target group consisted of a 50% sample of all Finnish youth aged 16–18 (except those in military service) who were unemployed and had not continued their schooling after compulsory school in 1985 (n = 6,983). The life courses of these young people were followed at 5-year intervals up to and including the year 2000.

during the past 10–15 years, the length of unemployment periods are usually quite short for most young people (Järvinen, 2006). This is not, however, the situation in the case of the least educated young people, who have serious difficulties in both getting and keeping a job, and who quite often have problems in their personal lives as well. To support these young people, alternative forms of education, new kinds of pedagogical practices and vocational guidance as well as various methods supporting young people's life management have increasingly been developed during the past 10–15 years (Järvinen & Jahnukainen, 2001; Silvennoinen, 2002; Opetusministeriö, 2005).

Transition from basic to secondary education has been seen as a critical stage from the points of view of the educational and social exclusion of young people. In 2005, the Finnish Ministry of Education appointed a committee whose task was to make proposals for action which will guarantee that the whole age group has opportunities for further education and training. The committee's final report set a goal that in the year 2009, 97.5% of compulsory education school leavers would start in upper secondary education or training, or in additional basic education (Opetusministeriö, 2005).

Related to transition from basic to secondary education, two main problems in Finland are young people's dropping out of the educational system immediately after compulsory school, and failure to complete vocational education. During the past few decades, an attempt has been made to reduce young people dropping out of education as well as interruption of (vocational) schooling, for example by increasing vocational guidance and individual counselling (both in basic and secondary education), by adding more work-based learning into the curriculum of vocational education; and by paying special attention to the teaching and learning of certain 'risk-groups' of young people, such as immigrant youth, disabled youth and young people with learning difficulties or social problems.

In Finland, instead of emphasising the societal nature of the dropout phenomenon and concentrating, for example, on the social inequalities related to it, the problem of dropout has typically been viewed as an individual-level phenomenon. Partly as a result of this kind of understanding, system-wide reforms in reducing dropout have been unusual in Finland.

However, besides the extensive special education system described earlier, the establishment of additional basic education (Grade 10) can also be mentioned as an example of these kinds of system-wide reforms. This educational program – targeted at those young people who have difficulties in continuing their schooling after compulsory school or who have difficulties in making their educational choices – started as a project as early as 1977, and it was systemised several years later, in 1985. Under the circumstances of rapidly increased youth unemployment rates in the late 1970s, the aim was to offer an extra year in basic education for those young people who had dropped out of education immediately after compulsory school, or who wanted to improve their grades in order to get into the educational track of their choice (Silvennoinen, 2002).

Those young people who have completed basic education in the same or the previous year are eligible to apply for this program. Instruction is often carried out in cooperation with compulsory schools and vocational schools, and representatives of working life are also often included in the cooperation, mainly by offering places for students' practical training, which is an important element in this form of education. Another key element in this training program is individualised vocational guidance.

An individual study plan is formulated for every student, often in cooperation with the representatives of the local employment authority (Opetusministeriö, 2005).

Since the beginning of the 1990s, measures of support targeted at young people considered 'youth at risk' have expanded, and partly as a result of this, the number of pupils in additional basic education has decreased (Opetusministeriö, 2005). At the beginning of the 1990s, about 5% of those completing their basic education continued their studies in additional basic education annually. During the first years of the new millennium the proportions varied from 2% to 3%, the proportion being 2% in 2006 (Statistics Finland, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998; Myllyniemi, 2008).

Despite the decline in the number of students in additional basic education, it is still seen as an important measure of support in combating the educational exclusion of young people. In its report, a committee appointed by the Ministry of Education proposed that voluntary additional basic education must be made the young person's statutory subjective right, and participation in this form of education should be made possible not only for school leavers of the same and previous year, but also for those who have finished their schooling 2 years earlier (Opetusministeriö, 2005).

In addition, the gender division of students in voluntary basic education has changed over the course of time. At the beginning, most of the students were boys, whereas the majority are now girls. It seems that boys who have problems in transition from basic to secondary education prefer work to education, and try to get a foothold on the labour market as soon as possible. Their participation in education varies depending on the youth labour market situation, whereas girls take a more positive stand on education as a means to improve one's possibilities of getting a job. Although the proportion of boys in additional basic education declined in the course of the 1980s, it increased again immediately at the beginning of the 1990s, when youth unemployment rates rose rapidly in Finland (Silvennoinen, 2002).

Another supporting measure worth mentioning is a program called youth workshop activities, which in the range of public sector services is located partly in the field of social work and partly in the fields of education and labour markets, and as such is a multidisciplinary activity. This also means that the measures of support offered by youth workshops are based on multi-professional cooperation between the representatives of the educational system, employment authorities, and welfare, health care and youth work (Opetusministeriö, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2008).

Youth workshops have developed from projects to permanent services. Currently, approximately half of the Finnish municipalities organise youth workshop activities, and about 7,000 young people participate in these activities (Ministry of Education, 2008). The aim of the youth workshops is to promote young people's integration into labour markets, as well as to support their future planning and life management. The workshops offer young people a chance to work under the supervision of a youth workshop trainer, as well as an individually tailored path to education or working life. In the youth workshops, the participants work and receive on-the-job training while simultaneously improving their life-management skills. Individual counselling and life-management support is offered by a multidisciplinary team consisting of special education

teachers, psychologists, guidance counsellors, social and youth workers and representatives of the health service (Opetusministeriö, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2008).

Young people involved in activities offered by youth workshops can be either unemployed or still in education, in which case the aim is ensuring that they get a basic or vocational school certificate. The typical client involved in youth workshop activities is a young person who is under 25 years of age, unemployed and who has not completed any post-compulsory schooling. Since immigrants are quite well represented among young people involved in youth workshop activities, the need for experts in immigrant work has increased during the past few years. In 2006, a total of 52 different mother tongues were spoken in the workshops. The duration of youth workshops is individually determined; they usually last 1 year, but shorter periods are also possible (Opetusministeriö, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2008).

In vocational education and training, the correspondence of education to the world of work has been a key development focus area. For example, the proportion of studying at the workplace through learning at work has been increased and competence tests as a form of quality assurance have been included in the study program. Since 1998, and with the financial support of the European Union, various types of workshop activities have also been introduced in regular vocational education and training in Finland. The central idea of vocational schools' own workshops is learning by doing, which has been seen as an efficient method of increasing commitment in those young people who have difficulties in handling the theoretical contents of instruction in vocational education. Students can be involved in workshop activities a few hours a day on a regular basis, or they can get individual guidance a few times a week or month, or even more rarely, depending on their personal needs (Opetusministeriö, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2008).

One of the recently introduced measures of support targeted at young people at risk of educational exclusion is preparatory training for vocational education, from which students can flexibly move on to attain education leading to qualification. This program involves vocational counselling as well as teaching and learning the basic study skills that are needed for completing vocational education. The aim of the preparatory training is also to strengthen the general life-management skills of the students. The length of the study period in preparatory education varies individually; the aim is that students can move from preparatory to vocational training, leading to a qualification as soon as it is seen as appropriate from the point of view of each individual student. In preparatory training, special attention has been paid to the learning and schooling of certain groups of young people, such as disabled youth and immigrant youth (Opetusministeriö, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2008).

Individual support for young people at risk of educational and social exclusion is also offered by local employment authorities in Finland. Young people outside educational institutes have the opportunity to utilise the educational and occupational career counselling services of employment offices. Despite scarce resources, the social guarantee that has been implemented since the beginning of 2005 obliges local employment authorities to offer an activation plan for every unemployed job seeker below 25 years of age after they have been unemployed for 3 months. Activation plans can include offering education, work-based training, preparatory training of

different kinds or employment, with offering education being the prime measure of support for those young people who lack upper secondary education qualifications.

Some Conclusions and Widening the Perspective: Finland – Not at the Top After All?

Finland is riding along on its fame in the OECD international educational rankings. In the latest country review (OECD, 2006), Finland received first place in natural sciences as well as second place in reading and mathematics. In 2000 and 2003 Finland was also ranked among the best, awarded first place in reading in both reviews, and thus the national success story seems steady enough. In addition, in the Finnish comprehensive school, the interdependent differences in achievement are comparatively small in international comparison.

Further, Finnish young people are more highly educated compared to youth in many other OECD countries, and young people's exclusion from both education and working life is also less of a problem in Finland than in many other countries belonging to the European Union (European Commission, 2005; OECD, 2008).

On the other hand, success at school, choice of educational careers and climbing up the educational ladder are still closely connected with one's parents' social status and level of education, even in the Finland of the 21st century (Järvinen, 2003; Kivinen et al., 2007). Even though the significance of the home as the definer of school success has weakened during recent decades, the clear discrepancies have not disappeared anywhere. Due to the recession in the beginning of the 1990s, and the simultaneous new course taken in educational policy, clear internal differentiation in the school establishment as well as the genesis of educational routes for the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' can be seen. For instance, in relation to choices concerning secondary education, choosing general school is more common among children with highly educated parents than among children of less educated parents (Rinne, 2007), and it is even eightfold more probable for the offspring from a highly educated family to end up in a university than for a child from a family with lower education (Kivinen et al., 2007).

It is also of utmost importance to note that Finnish children do not reach the PISA kind of top rankings in all the other comparative research. For example, in an international comparative study by the World Health Organization (2004, pp. 43–44), it came to light that only a small minority (5%) of Finnish children and young people truly enjoy being at school. When comparing 15-year-olds regarding this issue, Finnish young people brought up the rear.

In a comparative study published by UNICEF regarding the overall well-being of children and young people, Finland was ranked as third out of 15 countries in 2005. Only the Netherlands and Sweden were ahead of Finland in this study. However, even in this comparison, Finland received low scores when comparing the 'family and friend relations' of children (12th), and the 'experience of subjective well-being' of children (9th). Regarding those issues, Finland's ranking was clearly below average (Kangas, 2008).

In Finland, there has recently been a lot of discussion related to the polarisation of young people into those who are coping well in many areas of life and those who are at serious risk of social exclusion. Fear has been expressed that these groups of young people are becoming increasingly separated from each other (Autio & Eräranta, 2008). Based on available official statistics as well as recent survey studies, one can argue that on a general level, this polarisation hypothesis holds true. It seems that the proportion of young people who are at risk of social exclusion has increased during the past 15 years in Finland. Firstly, exclusion from the family sphere has become more common among children and young people: the proportion of children and young people placed outside their home or in custody has constantly increased during the years 1991–2006. Also, the proportion of young people with both low incomes and mental health problems has increased during the same period. Although the employment situation of young people has become better during the past few years, youth unemployment rates are still higher in Finland than in other countries belonging to the European Union on average (e.g., Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2005; Myllyniemi, 2008).

There are several differences related to the well-being of boys and girls in Finland. Loneliness, for instance, is more common among young males than among young females, as is a negative attitude towards schooling. Mental health problems, in turn, are more common among girls than boys. One must note, however, that although risk of becoming socially excluded has somewhat increased during the past 10–15 years, the great majority of Finnish young people are satisfied with their life as a whole, and with their health and social relations in particular. In a nationally representative study, when asked what school grade (using the Finnish scale of 4–10) young people aged 15–29 would give to their overall life satisfaction, 92% of them responded at least 8/10. In all, it seems that the life situation of the majority of Finnish young people is good or even extremely good, whereas the minority of young people have serious life-management problems and severe difficulties in many areas of life. In this respect, the above-mentioned polarisation hypothesis holds true (Myllyniemi, 2008).

This small, although growing minority of Finnish children and youth seems to be at risk of wider social exclusion, and this social truth has strong influences on both everyday life at school and the whole educational system. The idea of raising the educational level of the entire population and establishing educational equality has been at the centre of Finnish education policy since World War II. For over a century, the country has struggled to guarantee the offspring of all families an optimal level of education in every possible way, despite their economic, social, regional or educational background or status, and regardless of gender or ethnic origin. In Finland, there has been a strong faith in national solidarity, which means that the weakest have also been taken care of.

Over the past 2 decades, however, there have been clear signs of change in the thinking around the aims, delivery and organisation of education. The provision of education has more radically than before been based on ever hardening competition. There has been a tendency to regard education more and more as being the servant of the production economy and in terms of economic investment and efficiency. These steps towards ever deeper neo-liberalistic educational policy may

threaten to marginalise and cause difficulties to an ever-growing number of children and young people.

The signs of change are clear enough to warrant stopping to contemplate further, and more widely, the goals of education: to ask seriously what the future of Finnish children and young people will be like, not only as regards their academic success, but also concerning their well-being at school and the quality of their future.

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Chapter 11

Dropout in a Small Society: Is the Icelandic Case Somehow Different?

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Icelandic Education

Early in the 20th century, the Icelandic education system was poorly developed, with no compulsory education and no legal framework for primary education. During the next 100 years, however, the system became mature, flexible and fairly advanced – largely on par with systems in the other Nordic countries (Guttormsson, 2008). While the total Icelandic population did not reach 300,000 until the 21st century, numerous studies have shown that Icelandic education developed in ways similar to much larger systems, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, and apparently dealt with many of the same problems (e.g., Jóhannsdóttir, 2006; Jónasson, 1999, 2003; Jónasson & Tuijnman, 2001). Such studies draw attention to important similarities between different systems and warn against over-emphasising their differences, though they of course exist. The conclusion is that much can be learned about various aspects of many major problems in Iceland simply by analysing studies from its neighbours. Moreover, these neighbours may also benefit from Iceland's experience, as information about a number of issues is relatively easy to come by in the quite well-documented Icelandic setting.

By comparison, the Icelandic system still faces one outstanding problem: an extremely high dropout rate in upper secondary education. This phenomenon is considered so crucial that recent legal reform has focused particularly on it. This chapter will describe the Icelandic education system with an emphasis on upper secondary education, present Icelandic findings on the problem of school dropout, and describe the programs and policies that have been developed to address this issue.

Icelandic society generally emphasises education, with an eye to ensuring that every child and young person has an equal right to education, free of charge, in both compulsory and upper secondary school. The following statement reflects a fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system:

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... everyone should have equal opportunities to acquire an education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, religion, possible handicap, and cultural or social background. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2002, p. 7)

Icelandic children normally start school at the age of 6 and progress automatically from one year to the next throughout 10 years of compulsory education as shown in Fig. 11.1. Implicit in the main principle of an equal right to education is the compulsory schools' responsibility to attend to the educational needs of each student. Pupils with special needs have the right to study support, based on evaluation of their needs. Special educational support can take place in the special education classroom, in the general classroom, or in both, which is most often the case. Less than 0.5% of each cohort attends special schools; on the other hand, around 20% receive special educational support while attending mainstream classes (Statistics Iceland, 2007).

After completing compulsory education at the age of 16, most students proceed directly to upper secondary school, despite it being non-compulsory (see Fig. 11.1). Since 2000, over 90% of 16-year-olds have enrolled in upper secondary level each year (Statistics Iceland, 2006a, 2008a). Upper secondary studies are typically 4-year programs (with some notable exceptions, however), and are supposed to comprise students in the age group of 16 to 20.

The compulsory system, comprising primary and lower secondary schools, is financed and operated by the municipalities. The upper secondary system, in contrast, is operated and financed by the central government, except that the municipalities provide up to 40% of construction costs. According to the Upper Secondary School Act of 1996, upper secondary school administration is based on legislation regulations and the curriculum guide issued by the central government. The structure of the

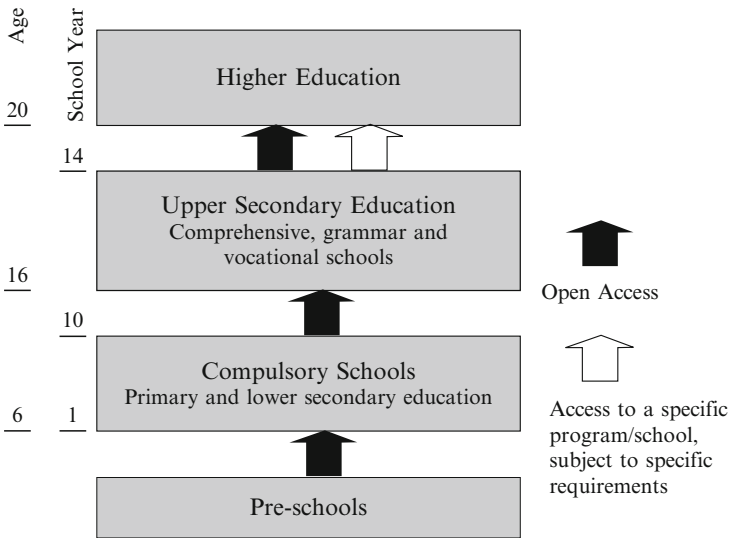


Fig. 11.1 The structure of the Icelandic educational system (Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2005)

system and the curriculum framework is dictated by the central government, albeit the schools have a rather limited but increasing scope for independent action. Thus, the administrative structure is essentially two-layered, where one layer represents the central government and the other the individual schools. A new Upper Secondary School Act was passed in 2008; it is meant to take effect gradually and enter into full force no later than 2011. We will describe the system in terms of the previous (1996) Act, as this has moulded the system and remains in effect to a great extent, but we will also point out changes implicit in the new Act.

Upper Secondary School in Iceland

The Icelandic school year is 9 months long. Some upper secondary schools offer evening adult education classes and distance education. While distance education is organised independent of age, evening classes are organised specifically for adults. Distance education has been on the rise since 2003, while special adult education classes have diminished (Statistics Iceland, 2008b). Generally there is no tuition charge for upper secondary schooling, though vocational students pay part of their materials costs. In addition, students in adult and distance education pay partial tuition (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2002, 2005).

In the last grade of compulsory school, students have until now taken nationally coordinated examinations in up to six subjects (Icelandic, mathematics, Danish, English, social science and natural science); these have in fact been optional, but entrance into different upper secondary programs has been to a varying degree conditional on passing at least some of them, as determined by the ministry. The decision regarding entrance requirements has now been moved from the ministry to individual schools under the new Upper Secondary School Act (2008), and at the same time the national examinations have been abolished in their current form. The changes are, though, not dramatic; everyone had the legal right of entrance into the upper secondary school level, irrespective of academic results, at the end of compulsory education under the Upper Secondary School Act of 1996. However, admittance into many specific programs was contingent on student outcome in the national examinations. Therefore, those not taking any such examination or performing poorly had somewhat limited options at the upper secondary level.

Upper secondary studies are typically 4-year programs (with some notable exceptions, mainly involving expressly shorter-duration programs) and are supposed to cover the age group of 16 to 19 (with graduation at the age of 20). There are about 30 upper secondary schools in the country, and they fall into three main categories. Firstly, there are traditional grammar schools offering only matriculation examination programs. For a long time, such schools formed the homogeneous backbone of the secondary system. Secondly, various vocational schools developed from the late 19th century onwards. Such schools were specialised, with those offering programs for the industrial arts emerging as the most prominent. Thirdly, since the late 1970s, comprehensive schools have been established in accordance with the

government's policy of opening schools that offer both vocational programs and academic programs for the university entrance examination (UEE). Comprehensive schools combine the two former types of schools, following not only the rationale of economy in rural areas, but also fundamentally the goal of eradicating as much as possible any question of status difference between the different types of programs, and facilitating transfers between programs and schools whenever students so desire. The explicit rationale for building up the comprehensive system was that students could easily change tracks. But implicit was that they could move from the academic or *gymnasium* track to the vocational tracks if they could not cope with the former (Jónasson, 1997). In fact, this did not happen frequently; rather, what transpired fairly soon was that academically able vocational students, especially in the comprehensive schools, switched to academic programs (Jónasson, 1994). In the years 2007 and 2008, more than half of all 16- to 19-year-old students attended comprehensive schools, roughly one third attended grammar schools, and about 7% vocational schools.

Recently, the vocational schools have been permitted to offer matriculation programs, typically in combination with their vocational programs. This merging of academic and vocational programs has been a leading development since the 1970s (Jónasson, 1997, 2008). It is also a major principle behind the most recent law on upper secondary education, where the explicit rhetoric is to claim that the status of vocational and academic education should be equivalent within a holistic system, such that the university entrance examination might be completed from both the vocational and academic tracks (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.).

Around 100 branches of study are offered at the upper secondary school level, of which over 80 are vocational. Every branch offers pathways to further education. The main pathways are as follows: (1) academic programs; (2) an arts program; (3) a multitude of vocational programs such as the industrial arts, which have been the mainstay of vocational schooling; (4) a general program; and (5) a variety of (normally short-term) work-related programs. These programs are defined in terms of credits. Usually the students are expected to complete 17 to 18 credits per semester (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008), but in most schools they are allowed to take more or fewer credits per semester. The matriculation examination usually requires 140 credits.

Academic programs typically take eight semesters (4 years) and conclude with the matriculation examination. Four different study programs are offered: social sciences, natural sciences, languages, and business and economics.

The *arts program* takes 3 years and is designed to prepare students for further education in the field.

The category of *vocational programs* exhibits by far the greatest variety of courses, generally taking six to eight semesters, but with very few exceptions of shorter- or longer-term programs. Vocational programs may be divided into two categories: study in certified trades which confer professional licences in the respective professions, and study that prepares students for certain jobs but gives no legally protected qualifications. Study in certified trades is conducted either through

a master training program or through school-based vocational training. The vocational training for students in master training programs is primarily in the workplace in companies or with a master craftsman, but students complete the academic portion of their studies in a school according to a set curriculum. Students in school-based vocational education and training (VET) programs receive their general and special training in a school, followed by training in the workplace. In both programs, students are responsible for obtaining a work contract or workplace training position themselves. Students in other forms of vocational education study largely in a school environment, although training in the workplace is frequently part of the program (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2007a).

Students can complete matriculation examinations both from vocational programs and the arts programs by taking additional courses (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2007a, 2008). The proportion of students completing matriculation examinations using this option has been growing over the last years. From 1996 to 2002, around 3% of matriculations were of this type, with a steady increase since. In 2002, 6% of those completing matriculation did so by taking additional courses, as compared to 15% in 2007 (Statistics Iceland, 2009a).

The *general program* takes 1–2 years and is mostly intended for those who do not fulfil admission requirements for other courses of study and thus need to improve their academic skills in core subjects before entering other lines of study. This program is also for students who have not yet decided which path to pursue (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008). In a sense, this option can be regarded as a simple prolongation of the compulsory lower secondary school.

Work-related programs are designed for students who have had extensive special education in compulsory school and are unable on academic grounds to participate in other courses of study (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008). The work-related programs are part of the mainstream system and some of the comprehensive schools make a special effort to offer such programs.

As in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, most students complete programs giving access to higher education. Academic programs attract by far the most students. Statistics from 2008 show that roughly half of the 16- to 19-year-old cohort attended academic programs, 16% were in VET (including apprenticeships), 8% were in apprenticeships, around 10% in general studies, and 1% in work-related studies. One fifth were not registered in upper secondary school. Roughly 70% of the 16- to 19-year-old students in academic courses were either in natural or social sciences. Almost one third of the apprentices were in building and construction branches (30%); 22% in electrical industry branches; 14% in vehicles and transport branches; 13% in hairdressing and beauty therapy; and 12% in metal, machinery technique, and production branches (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). Moreover, males are more likely to opt for the vocational programs than females (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a).

The upper secondary school level emphasises flexibility. In the introduction to the booklet on upper secondary education in Iceland that every student receives during the last grade of compulsory school, the Minister of Education, Science and

Culture emphasises that students in academic programs can easily switch to vocational courses, and students in vocational programs can pursue further studies to complete the matriculation examination. Also, students can transfer credits between different schools and fields, augmenting the ease of changing programs, both for students who want to switch tracks from vocational to academic studies and vice versa, as well as within fields (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008). The credit unit system introduced with the new Upper Secondary School Act should make transferring between schools or study programs easier yet, since the system will thereupon be further harmonised (see below).

The educational reform of the entire school system that the Icelandic central government is currently undertaking is of particular relevance here because the dropout issue was given absolute priority in the most recent legislation (the Preschool Act, No. 90/2008; the Compulsory School Act, No. 91/2008; the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92/2008). The intention explicit in the reform is that education shall be organised so as to meet the requirements and expectations of students, substantially increase curriculum flexibility, add to the number of educational pathways offered, facilitate the completion of upper secondary programs in 3 rather than the normative 4 years, and create conditions for more students to complete defined study programs, with a view to decreasing school dropout (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.). The possibility of completing traditional 4-year studies in a shorter period of time has existed since the early 1970s, when the unit credit system was implemented parallel to the sequential class (first by the relatively new grammar school, *Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð*, in 1972). Most students, however, complete their studies in 4 years or more, rather than in fewer than 4 years (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a). The special emphasis on facilitating completion of upper secondary school in a shorter time than 4 years might change this, but the laws are not clear in the sense that they do not state how many credit units students need to complete for their graduation. This will probably be stated in the new national curriculum that is under development, and if not, each school will have to define it in its curriculum and submit it for ministerial approval.

The following discussion involves the provisions directly related to dropout. The 2008 legislation provides for a new qualification called the *upper secondary school leaving certificate*, requiring 1½ or 2 years of study, but not entailing any specific courses. Other qualifications provided for are vocational certificates which confer professional licences in the respective professions, the matriculation examination (i.e., UEE), and other final examinations which are defined by upper secondary schools and prepare students for certain jobs but give no legally protected qualifications. Finally, upper secondary schools may now begin to offer post-secondary education (the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92/2008).

The new upper secondary school leaving certificate is aimed at students who do not plan to complete further qualifications, and one of its main purposes is to decrease school dropout at the secondary level. Whether the certificate will make much difference to students is not clear, since it conveys no rights except to further

study at the same school level, which the students have anyway (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.). However, the certificate may induce students to complete at least 1½ years of upper secondary education, instead of the 1 year which many have typically completed before dropping out. This remains to be seen.

Finally, it is important to emphasise two important principles inherent in the reform. One is making vocational education equivalent to academic education. For example, the academic and vocational matriculation examinations are rendered equivalent. This is the official statement but it is not made explicit in the legislation as to how this is to be effected, so the exact ramifications remain unclear. The second principle, and in fact one of the major aims of the new legislation, is decentralising the upper secondary school system, even though the schools have to obey guidelines set by the ministry (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.). Again, it is unclear how the ministry will balance its control with that of the schools, but there is no doubt that the government continues its effort to bolster vocational education, apparently against the odds of it actually being effective (Jónasson, 1998, 2003, 2008). Schools themselves, by being given extra freedom, may find ways to diminish the dropout rate.

Tertiary Education

The Icelandic tertiary system is essentially a unitary one, kindred to the United Kingdom and perhaps the Swedish systems, and thus it fits the 5A level of UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (Jónasson, 2004). In terms of the European Bologna framework for higher education, the university level is largely a 3 + 2 + 3-cycle system, with essentially no post-secondary, non-university track. This refers to a first cycle of 3 years (bachelor's level), 2 years at master's level, and 3 years at doctoral level.

Because Icelandic students do not normally complete their studies at upper secondary school until the age of 20, they might be expected to graduate from university at somewhat older ages than their peers in neighbouring countries, especially as it is not uncommon for Icelandic students to take a year off after matriculation. Comparison of the proportions of students in Iceland, Sweden and Denmark who completed a matriculation examination and bachelor's degree in 2000 and 2001 as a percentage of the reference cohorts indicates that the picture is not so clear-cut. While Icelandic students graduate from upper secondary school somewhat older than in Denmark or particularly in Sweden, the Icelanders are not as distinct in age from the Danish students as the formal systems might lead us to expect. Moreover, the differences largely disappear when moving to the level of higher education: in all three countries, the highest proportion of students graduated at the same age, at around 24–26 years (Jónasson, 2002). Note that these points are only meant to bring out qualitative aspects, that is, to show that the basic profiles of the three countries are quite similar. In any case, the formal system

descriptions fail to tell the full story. Such descriptions would imply that Icelandic students should lag behind the Danish and Swedish students by a whole year, but they do not.

Patterns of School Dropout

At the age of 16, most students proceed directly to upper secondary school. Nonetheless, early school leaving is more common in Iceland than in many other OECD countries. An Icelandic study of a cohort born in 1975 showed that around 40% had not yet finished upper secondary school at the age of 24 (keeping in mind that the normal completion age for most study programs is 20). This result resembles that from a comparable Icelandic study of a cohort born in 1969. On the other hand, of those who had not completed the upper secondary level, around 16% were studying at that level at the age of 24 (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a; Jónasson & Jónsdóttir, 1992). A recent study on early school leavers (European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2005) showed the Icelandic situation to be somewhat special, in that the Icelandic population gradually does complete school, showing changes even in cohorts aged over 30. As shown in Fig. 11.2, the dropout rate is quite high for both males and females of every age group, but it gradually decreases with age to reach a low of around 20% for females in their 30s, and for males in their 40s. Thereafter it increases with age.

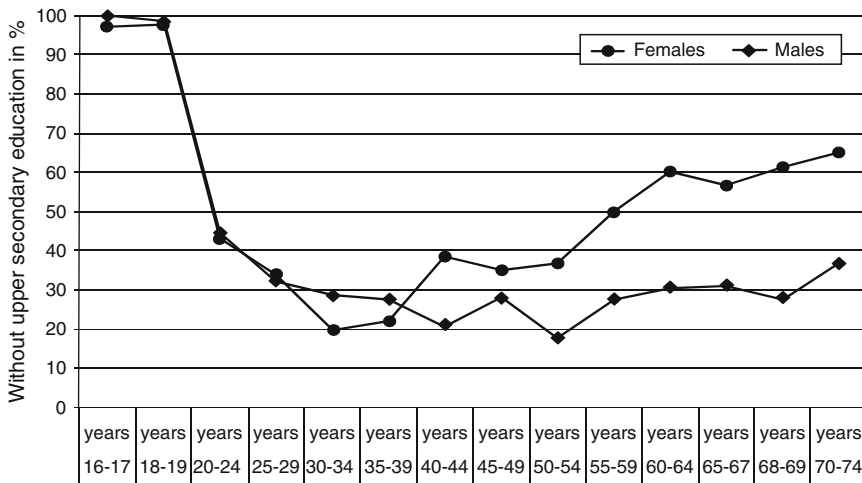


Fig. 11.2 Proportion of a cohort which has not obtained any formal certificate after compulsory education in Iceland, 2003 (Source: Jónasson & Dofradóttir, 2008)

It should be noted that even though Iceland's dropout rate is high and of great concern, the system is actually flexible in a modest but compensating way. This is demonstrated by the fact that the upper secondary programs stay open to older cohorts than the system is mainly tailored for. While the system accepts students of any age, it is based on an age range of 16–19. Still, statistics show that over the last 10 years, only about 60% of students in upper secondary schools have been in this age range. A little less than 30% have been 21- to 29-year-olds, and roughly 10% have been older (Statistics Iceland, 2006a). Understandably, many older students opt to attend evening classes or register for distance education, in both cases more so with increasing age.

The dropout rate is greater among males than females. Furthermore, the rate is greater outside the capital region and among students from families with low socioeconomic status (Blondal & Jónasson, 2003; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, *in press*). In addition, dropout is greater from vocational programs than from academic programs (Statistics Iceland, 2004).

Through the years, students in the capital region have, on average, achieved higher grades than students outside it in the nationally coordinated examinations at the end of compulsory school (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a, 2002b; Námsmatsstofnun, 2006). The surveys of student cohorts born in 1969 and 1975 showed that the dropout rate was higher outside of the capital region. When controlled for academic achievement in the national examinations at the end of compulsory school, however, the difference in dropout rate between the capital region and other regions disappeared (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a). This suggests that the problem of varying regional educational attainment at upper secondary level can be traced to academic achievement in elementary school. Similar analyses showed much lesser effects of gender and students' socioeconomic background when academic achievement was taken into account.

The Icelandic study of the cohort born in 1975 showed that at age 24, almost a quarter of the cohort had either never enrolled in upper secondary school (7.3%) or had not completed any courses there (15.3%). Moreover, of the students who dropped out, over half (55%) left before completing the equivalent of one school year. This means that they completed less than one quarter of the majority of programs offered at this school level, whether towards matriculation examinations or the many vocational programs. As for completing the equivalent of two school years, about 80% of the group that quit left before that stage (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a). Similar findings were obtained in the comparable study of the cohort born in 1969 (Jónasson & Jónsdóttir, 1992).

Why Do Students Drop Out? Theorisation and Explanations

In an earlier study on the education, attitudes to school and psychological characteristics of the Icelandic cohort born in 1975 (4,180 individuals), dropout was examined from three different perspectives (Jónasson & Blondal, 2005a). It was

looked at from the *system perspective*, where there was speculation on the extent to which dropping out can be attributed to the Icelandic work and education infrastructure and to the curricular choices open to students; the *school perspective*, where consideration was given to how various schools operate; and finally the *individual perspective*, where dropout causes are understood in terms of the attributes of the individual, or in terms of the individual's immediate social environment.

The System Perspective

Consider first the *system*¹ *perspective*. The explanations hitherto given for Iceland's high dropout rates, based on the educational system, are primarily four:

1. There is the general assumption in the system that upper secondary education may take too many years, in any case longer than in other Nordic countries (Jónasson, 2002). (As discussed previously, upper secondary education has typically been characterised by 4-year programs.) This assumption is probably based on the notion that those students who succeed in completing the first half of the studies would be less likely to drop out if they had 1 year left instead of 2.
2. The school system may be overly flexible, allowing students to come and go as they please, so that they lack compulsion to complete their studies. Whereas flexibility is normally seen as an advantage, here it is considered a disadvantage.
3. The implicit societal emphasis on general rather than vocational education seems to influence many students to make apparently non-intuitive choices; thus, despite having deeper interest in vocational subjects, they choose academic tracks. The Icelandic system leaves the choice of upper secondary tracks completely up to the students except in those relatively few instances where they do not fulfil the prerequisites of a specific program. There is considerable evidence that students feel pressure to choose academic tracks even though their basic interests fit vocational tracks.
4. The labour market attracts students out of school. This explanation points out how expansion of the Icelandic labour market in recent years has resulted in unusually enticing job opportunities for young people with little formal educational qualifications, compared to other European countries (European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2005). In the Icelandic cohort study, job opportunities were one of the three main reasons students gave for quitting school (Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a).

Working along with school has been very common in Iceland. In 2003–05, around 60% of 16- to 24-year-old students either in upper secondary or tertiary-level education worked along with studying, and on average worked for 28 hours per week! Additionally, 8–9% of students not working during their studies were in fact looking for work (Statistics Iceland, 2006b).

¹Alternative terms to *system* might be *external environment* or *macro context*.

The School Perspective

It is possible to divide the perspectives that schools have into two types, based on their image or role in society. On the one hand, some exceptionally prestigious schools mainly have the aim of preparing their students for higher education, and even for a few special fields of higher education, such as medicine or engineering. On the other hand, the remaining schools have the broader aim of educating a very diverse student group that will not necessarily continue studying after upper secondary schooling. The prestigious schools are not seen to effectively encourage students who do not meet their educational standards to continue; these schools do not necessarily see it as a problem when students leave before completion. The schools with broader aims try to retain their students (admittedly to a varying extent), and unequivocally attempt to decrease their dropout rates.

Added to all this are school finances, which are quite complex. A significant portion of school funding is on a per capita basis, related to the number of students completing their courses, irrespective of their level of achievement. This is supposed to support the government policy of encouraging schools to retain students. However, how sensitive a school is to this pressure depends on the type of students it generally accepts, on how retention is measured, and how the individual school balances the pros and cons of retaining educationally weak students with respect to the funding system.²

Although school effectiveness has not been a major focus of Iceland's school dropout discussion, a study of this matter is now underway under the leadership of the present authors. Also, an Icelandic study has previously indicated that the relationship between different upper secondary schools and student progress at university level, controlled for previous academic achievement, is far from simple (Jónsson & Blondal, 2005b). It was not the case that students coming from the so-called best schools progressed faster through university than those coming from schools which definitely had a lower overall status.

The Individual's Perspective

In the Icelandic cohort study, those defined as school dropouts (i.e., those not currently studying and not having completed an upper secondary education by the age of 24) were asked about their main reasons for leaving school (Jónsson & Blondal, 2002a). The most common reasons given by both males and females were categorised under the headings 'I was bored with my studies' and 'I had

²Recently, a number of schoolmasters were reprimanded formally by the Ministry of Education for incorrect bookkeeping on this issue, an action they find unfair. The controversy centres on the precise moment at which a student is to be counted as a dropout. School appropriations are related to the number of students who have not dropped out.

financial difficulties'. A common category for males was 'I got a good job,' and for females, 'I had a child'. The findings also showed that around half of the dropout group, looking back (at age 24), felt that leaving school had been the right decision, considering their situation at that time. It should also be pointed out, however, that half of the group thought their situation in the labour market would be better if they had completed upper secondary education. Practically everyone wanted to add to their education, although 60% believed it would be difficult to start studying again within the formal education system. Although these findings give insight into why students leave school, it should be noted that the phenomenon of dropout is complicated; many different factors come into play, often during different periods in the student's life. The individual factors that have most often been identified are students' academic performance and school engagement (see Rumberger, 2004).

Performance in academic programs at the lower secondary (compulsory) level has been clearly demonstrated to be one of the strongest predictors for upper secondary dropout, in Iceland as well as elsewhere (see Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Figure 11.3 shows the percentage of a cohort of Icelandic students who had completed upper secondary education – either matriculation or vocational programs – by the age of 24, as a function of grades in a standardised test in Icelandic at the end of compulsory school (age 16). It also shows the percentage of the cohort that got certain grades (the line), for example 5% of the cohort got grades lower than 3, and 31% got grades higher than 7 (the grade system is from 1 to 10).

The figure demonstrates three points. First, grades clearly predict the graduates from academic programs: the higher the grades, the more likely the students are to

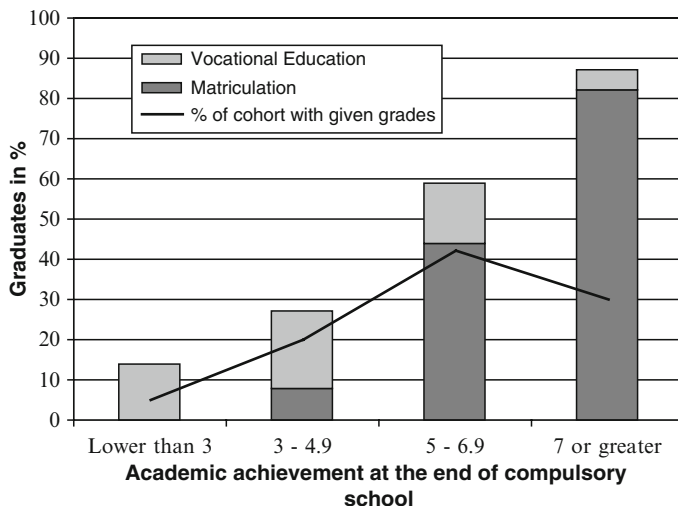


Fig. 11.3 Proportion of a cohort who completed upper secondary education by program in light of academic achievement at the end of compulsory school (Source: Derived from Jónasson & Blondal, 2002a)

have completed the matriculation examination by the age of 24. Second, grades do not predict completion of vocational programs; and third, the figure also shows that only 60% of the group with average grades (5–6.9) completed upper secondary education. This means that while the relationship between academic achievement and educational outcome is robust and clear, very little is known about the most numerous groups, despite realizing that their probability of graduation is 60% and therefore their chance of dropping out is 40%.

The Icelandic cohort study also showed that students who had low grades at the end of their compulsory education, and later dropped out of school, had generally lower self-esteem when aged 24. Moreover, to some extent they had different attitudes towards school and education than their peers who completed the matriculation examination. Interestingly, the attitudes of those who left school were similar to the attitudes of those who actually completed a vocational education. The findings indicated that, compared to those who completed a matriculation examination, those who left school and those who completed a vocational education were not as pleased with either the institution they attended or their studies, and had been more interested in vocational than academic subjects during lower secondary school (Jónasson & Blöndal, 2002a).

Programs, Policies and Practices for Reducing Dropout

In Icelandic politics, dropout is generally viewed in the context of the competitive national economy, of school efficiency, and of flexibility in providing educational opportunities. Dropout is seldom associated with how employable individuals might be. For years, the reason has been ‘unusually good job opportunities for workers with few formal educational qualifications’ (European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2005, p. 95). In 2008, this changed with the global financial crisis that seriously affected the Icelandic economy. It is possible to discuss the changes at three levels: the governmental or systematic level, the school level, and the informal institutional level.

The *governmental level* has two threads. The first has been discussed in relation to the new legislation which was partially aimed at reducing dropout. The second is gradually increased emphasis on counselling within the educational system. At the *school level*, the strategies can be characterised as the preventive initiatives. The third level, the *informal institutional level*, has two strands: the adult education provisions at the upper secondary level, and a variety of remedial initiatives that have government support but little direct government involvement.

Prevention Measures

Two of the recent measures taken by the Icelandic government in order to lessen school dropout are in line with recent recommendations of the OECD (Field et al., 2007). More flexibility and diversity shall be guaranteed in the course supply at upper secondary level, along with increasing freedom of student choice

within the tracks they choose. The plan is to achieve this by further decentralizing curriculum design at the upper secondary level. Schools are encouraged to develop further and more flexible lines of study to fit the needs of their students (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.). This, of course, begs the question of what grounds students have to compose their own tracks.

A second measure in line with the OECD recommendations is changing the framework of the system by encouraging, but not requiring, a shortening of the general length of upper secondary school courses from 4 to 3 years. This has been discussed in Iceland for several years now (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, n.d.; the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 80/1996). A remoulding of the credit system allows schools to organise study programs which will lead to the matriculation examination within 3 years, although it is not yet clear to what extent schools will take the government's torch and carry out this idea.

The legal framework is furthermore aimed at facilitating the combination of academic and vocational tracks, by making the formal character of the system more comprehensive than before. Access to higher education is to be eased from both directions. This valorisation of vocational training is expected to help combat dropout in the Icelandic context, since many students seem to opt for academic programs for reasons of prestige or the desire to keep their options open, even when their skills or interests lie elsewhere. Directing these students to the 'right' program for them is now, as in the past, hoped to reduce dropout. However, it remains quite uncertain how the next level higher – universities – will react to this modification.

Schools have gradually put considerable emphasis on counselling, *inter alia*, to increase school retention. This development has been supported with government regulation. Both compulsory and upper secondary schools have been obliged to provide access to counselling (the Compulsory School Act, No. 66/1995; the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 80/1996). Some primary schools have developed career education programs that are a part of the school's formal curriculum and should ease the transition to upper secondary school. Supportive programs, career counselling and guidance have been further expanded by the Upper Secondary School Act of 2008. Each school shall describe arrangements for counselling and guidance in its school syllabus. The new legislation makes it mandatory for schools to provide support to students with special needs, including social or emotional problems as well as specific (and even perhaps cognitive) problems such as dyslexia. Although none of the legislation demands the professionalising of guidance posts, it is worth noting that the University of Iceland offers masters' and doctoral programs in career counselling and guidance.

In a wider perspective, various social and welfare programs are connected to dropout prevention at the compulsory level. Many communities have been experimenting with or implementing policies in this regard. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program receives financial support from the continuing education fund for compulsory schools. Some schools have adopted School Management Training (SMT), which aims at providing a positive learning environment for students, including positive experiences in both academic and social life.

Remedial Initiatives

There are a host of remedial initiatives operating in Iceland, run largely by different organisations, often closely connected to the municipalities, sometimes supported by the government but not under its purview (Jónasson & Tannhäuser, 2009). It is important to note that, in general, current policies target most of all those who dropped out from upper secondary school and those who completed only compulsory school without ever enrolling in the next level higher. It is possible to identify three separate providers of ‘second-chance’ schooling: (1) upper secondary schools, (2) lifelong learning centres, and (3) traditional providers of continuing education and various labour market bodies. All three types of providers share two general objectives: to educate unskilled workers in the labour market, and to lead individuals with a disrupted school or employment history back into the educational system or labour market.

By tradition, the Icelandic upper secondary system is one system for all age groups, which means one can enter the system at any age. This is very visibly demonstrated in the industrial arts. However, from the early 1970s, adult education classes were established at many of the upper secondary schools, which essentially ran the day program (normally at some greater pace) in the evenings (Jónasson, 2006). In some sense it was a separate arrangement, even though the system was the same (the same teachers, curriculum and credentials). These evening programs were strong for a roughly 30-year period but now seem to be waning somewhat, perhaps because of substantial options offered by distance education. An objective of public policy, expressly aimed at reaching out to adults, is to increase distance and distributed learning at upper secondary level as an alternative to evening classes. In 2008, 77% of upper secondary students attended day school, 16% registered in distance education programs, but only 7% were in evening school. This is in contrast to 12% in evening school in 2001 (Statistics Iceland, 2009b).

The Upper Secondary School Act of 1996 provided for the structure of ‘senior departments’, allowing them to be organised in collaboration with the municipalities and specified craft associations or employers. In line with the provisions of the Act, schools have participated in the development of lifelong learning centres and government financial allocations have been provided. These are now seen as a very important addition to post-school opportunities, especially for those with the least educational background.

Additionally, both the central and municipal governments have cooperated with an agency (the Education and Training Service Centre, run by the Confederation of Icelandic Employers) and trade unions to develop schemes that assess real competency, as an alternative to enrolling in upper secondary courses and completing them. This again seems a notable feature of the educational spectrum for two reasons. The first is the extent to which the labour market players have united in this endeavour, and the second is the way the agency attempts to reach the least skilled, inter alia, providing a strong emphasis on recognising the real competence these

people have and equating it with school credits. This facilitates re-enrolment in appropriate courses even after having dropped out, with individual competence being evaluated through guidelines developed by the Education and Training Service Centre ([Education and Training Service Centre, n.d.](#)).

Nine municipalities outside of the capital region run lifelong learning centres that endeavour to serve the entire community in regard to second-chance education. These centres are partly based on the Upper Secondary School Act of 1996 and provide educational opportunities related to local needs and available educators. They are non-profit, independent corporations, run in collaboration with the local authorities, local school authorities, and local trade unions (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2007b). One of their missions is to provide second-chance schools for adults, along with career counselling. They received a considerable stimulus through the agenda set forth by the former Icelandic government in 2003, since it emphasised the development of a powerful lifelong learning network, in collaboration with social partners. Furthermore, the government provides funds for counselling, enabling the centres to reach out to regional companies with career guidance.

Conclusions and Future Perspectives

Are students who drop out in Iceland somehow special in comparison to peers in other countries? Since so many Icelanders leave school early, could their composition as a group be 'different' from the parallel groups in countries with high graduation rates? There is no question that Icelandic dropouts are very diverse; they certainly do not form a homogeneous group from any perspective, but lacking are comparative data for asserting that this is any different from other countries. In particular there is a need to investigate in comparative terms how the employment situation affects the composition of the group, but perhaps a dramatically changing employment situation in Iceland may hand us a valuable longitudinal design.

The very strong and simple relationship between dropout and standardised marks at the end of compulsory education presents a double paradox (see Fig. 11.3). One part is that there is a strong linear relationship between these marks and the likelihood of graduating or dropping out, where a non-linear relationship would have been more understandable. While the relationship is very robust and clear, we know very little about the most numerous group, despite realising that their probability of dropping out is 40%.

The second part is precisely how many drop out with good school performance. The largest dropout group had average grades from primary school, and thus did not seem to have particular difficulties with studying. To explore this it may be necessary to move out of the statistical arena and divide the overall group of dropouts into three distinct groups on the basis of their academic performance at the end of compulsory education, since much of the information available is of a qualitative nature. Then it would be possible to speak more concretely about each separate dropout

group. On that basis, it may be possible to pinpoint quite different causes for dropout in each group and be able to suggest differing, specific remedies, for instance for the academically weak group or the medium or strong one. If this proves a useful approach, one or more of the groups might be comparable to dropouts in countries with a low dropout rate, whereas the other one or more groups might not be.

It will be very interesting to observe what developments for dropout rates the recent reform in the Icelandic educational system will lead to; however, this will be somewhat complicated to assess. The patterns were changing, though admittedly very slowly, and perhaps very little indeed for males, during the period in which the employment market was stable. Concurrent with the employment market changes, the curricular composition will evolve as the system becomes even more comprehensive. Then the question may be: Will giving students more leeway in choosing their courses, and thus the composition of qualifications, influence those who are most likely to drop out to stay?

But there are, of course, a variety of complicating factors. There are a number of nearby environmental distractions (peers, siblings, parents who may oppose student desires, etc.) which a school should perhaps sense and may thus be able to counteract.

The short term will, unfortunately, see substantial increases in unemployment in Iceland. It will be instructive to investigate how this will influence school choice and both the dropout rate and dropout patterns.

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Chapter 12

Early Leaving, Non-Completion and Completion in Upper Secondary Education in Norway

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Introduction

The Structure of Upper Secondary Education and Training

In one way, the Norwegian system of education can be understood as part of the Nordic model – an egalitarian, redistributive system. Upper secondary education is by and large public, as are other types of education. From an international perspective, the Norwegian Parliament was from very early on, as early as 1920, ready to adopt the principle of a common school for all (Dokka, 1988). The right to freely available public education was extended from 7 years at the end of the Second World War to 13 years from 1997; 10 of these years are compulsory.

Over the last 4 to 5 decades, Norway has also moved from a school system practising segregation to a school system focused on the principle of inclusion; for instance, in the case of special education, extended use of special classes and special schools has been substituted, at least in theory, by mainstreaming (Markussen, 2009). In this period, the concept of *equality* has also undergone change, from one of formal equality, via the principle of equality-of-resources and, later, equality-of-results, to the principle of equality-of-opportunities, which remains the focus today (Hernes, 1974; Aasen, 2006).

The project of modernising upper secondary education in Norway by developing an organised, public and universal system – including both general and vocational education – started in the 1960s. Integrating both vocational schools, with different traditions, and the apprenticeship system into the overall upper secondary education system has been a long and complicated process, characterised by tensions, conflicts and compromises (Olsen, 1996; Michelsen & Grove, 2005).

During these years, there has been considerable reform activity within Norwegian upper secondary education. As well as an ongoing process introducing small changes,

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there have been three key or major reforms over the last 40 years. The first was in 1976, when the general, academic upper secondary schools (*gymnas*), which prepare students for higher education, and the vocational schools, which prepare students for the labour market, were merged into a common unified system of upper secondary education.

The second major reform – Reform 94 – more or less created the Norwegian upper secondary education as it is today, when it comes to structure and the qualification system. The main features of this reform were (1) to give every 15- to 16-year-old a statutory right to 3 years of upper secondary education, thereby making it possible for all students within vocational education and training (VET) to complete; (2) to give every student a right to a place in one out of three chosen study programs; (3) the reduction in the first year of upper secondary from 109 courses to 13 study programs; and (4) the introduction of a ‘2 + 2’ model within VET (the model will be explained below). The main driving force behind this reform was the mismatch created by falling job opportunities in the youth labour market and an upper secondary system without the capacity to accommodate all the young people who were flocking to upper secondary.

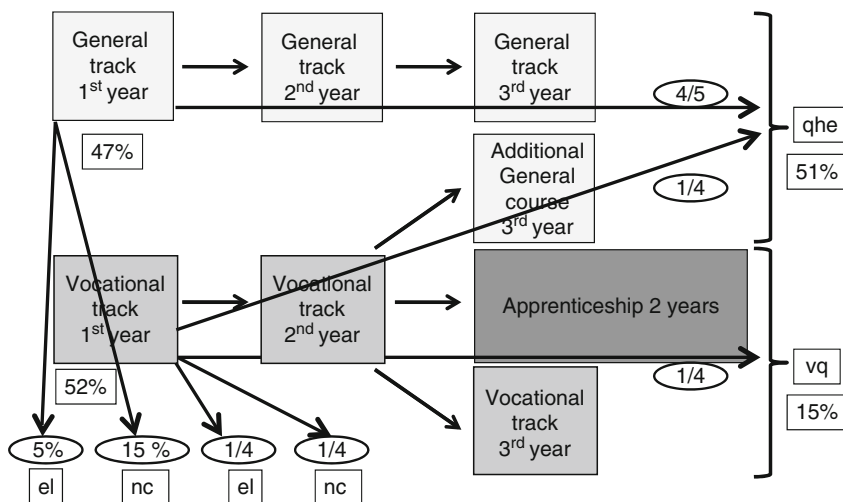
The third comprehensive reform was in 2006, and it led to changes in primary as well as in lower and upper secondary education. In upper secondary it adjusted some of the structures; for example, reducing the number of vocational study programs from 12 to 9, and creating new subject structures within the different programs. Compared to Reform 94, which had really transformed upper secondary education, the reform of 2006, according to Markussen (2007), produced only small adjustments to structure and qualification systems.

It is possible to postpone commencement in upper secondary until 5 years after completion of compulsory education. Nevertheless, the large majority of students start immediately after lower secondary. There are no general entry requirements, apart from having completed compulsory education. While admission in general is fairly unrestricted, there are entry requirements to certain educational programs. If there are more applicants than the number of places, admission to a program depends on the grade point average (GPA) from 10th grade. Among those applying for upper secondary in 2005, 2006 and 2007, 83% were admitted to their program of first choice (Frøseth et al., 2008). This selection was based on GPA from the last year of compulsory education. Hence, GPA regulates admission to the most popular study programs. It also regulates entrance to the second and third years of upper secondary. Still, this is a restrained form of meritocracy, in so far as the counties are obliged to provide school places securing everyone admission to one out of three individual choices.

During transition from compulsory education, and through the different levels of upper secondary education in school or apprenticeship, the students have a ‘right to necessary guidance on education, careers and social matters’ (Opplæringslova [Education Act] § 9-2).

The Main Pathways

Upper secondary education consists of both general and vocational tracks (see Fig. 12.1). Within the general tracks there are three study programs: (1) general academic studies; (2) music, dance and drama; and (3) sports and physical



Note: qhe = qualification for higher education, vq = vocational qualification, el = early leaver, nc = non-completer

Fig. 12.1 Structure and throughput in upper secondary education in Norway (Source: Markussen et al., 2008)

education. The students in these programs follow a direct 3-year line through upper secondary. After finishing and passing all exams, they are qualified for entering higher education.

There are nine vocational study programs: (1) building and construction; (2) design, arts and crafts; (3) electricity and electronics; (4) health and social care; (5) media and communication; (6) agriculture, fishing and forestry; (7) restaurant and food processing; (8) service and transport; and (9) technical and industrial production. Starting in a vocational program, there are three paths through upper secondary (see Fig. 12.1).

The main road through VET is the so-called 2 + 2 model, which means that the students first complete 2 years of schooling and then 2 years of apprenticeship in a firm. It is important to stress that this is the normal model for vocational education, and that VET, including the apprenticeship system, is a part of upper secondary education. The 2 + 2 model is a corporatist arrangement in which the public sector provides school places and the business sector provides apprenticeships. It is possible to qualify for around 180 different occupations through the 2 + 2 model, and when a person has gone through this education, passing all exams, he or she is able to start as a qualified worker within his or her given occupation. Approximately one sixth of all who start their third year of training/education in upper secondary are apprentices (Frøseth et al., 2008). However, only around 50% of the new apprentices are 18 years old, the rest are older. As in some other countries, there has traditionally been an age-related heterogeneity among apprentices in Norway. Should not enough apprenticeships be available for the 18-year-olds, the county authorities

are obliged to offer them training at school in the form of a third-year course. Both these vocational tracks provide the students with a certificate after a craftsman's or journeyman's examination.

The second road within vocational education is a 3-year, school-based education structured towards an occupation. This is possible for 10 different occupations.

The third option for those who have started in a vocational study program is to switch to an additional general course. This is possible after 2 years in a vocational program, and those who complete after 3 years are qualified for higher education. It has turned out to be an option with a fast-growing popularity among vocational students, and has established itself as an important alternative to apprenticeship (Høst and Evensen, 2009). However it is not an easy pathway to higher education, as the students have to complete all the general subjects in 1 year. Statistics show that these students are more likely to fail by the end of third year than other students, and this happens for 30–40% of them (Markussen et al., 2008).

The system allows students to switch pathways. If students wish to change programs, the right to education is extended by 1 year. The structure of the system makes it easier to switch from a vocational to a general track than the other way around. The county can approve apprenticeship contracts which prescribe that the entire education, or larger parts than prescribed by the curricula, may be completed as on-the-job training. However, until now this has been available to only a limited number of students.

After qualifying from upper secondary education, students have achieved either (1) *qualification for higher education*, (2) *vocational qualification*, or (3) *competence at a lower level* (Opplæringslova [Education Act] §3-3).

Qualification for higher education is achieved mainly by completing within one of the three general programs. Vocational qualification is gained mainly by going through and passing all exams, including the journeyman's exam at the end of an apprenticeship, within one of the nine vocational programs. Competence at a lower level is obtained by all those not achieving qualification for higher education or vocational qualification. Students may obtain competence at a lower level in a planned manner, as the end of a consciously chosen track of education and training, or they may receive it by default. The latter is by far more common, and will be the case if the students, for instance, leave school, fail, or do not fulfil the requirements in one way or another (see below).

Governance of Upper Secondary Education

Upper secondary education is administered at two levels of government, the state and the county level. There are 19 counties in Norway. In cross-national comparisons, the Norwegian education system has traditionally been characterised as centralised (Telhaug & Mediås, 2002). However, developments in the governance of post-compulsory education since the 1990s have seen increasing decentralisation, as the state has passed on authority to counties and schools (NOU, 2003, p. 16).

The system for upper secondary education is managed within the framework of a mixed system of government, balancing centralised and decentralised authority, as well as corporate influence. The state defines the goals and provides the budgetary framework for post-compulsory education. The regional authorities are responsible for operating and developing the schools, and for developing strategies to attain national goals. The counties are to provide upper secondary education throughout the country, making equivalent educational courses available to everyone. Even though VET and apprenticeships are regarded as an integral part of the system, the responsibility to establish apprenticeship places rests with employers, and the numbers of apprenticeship places are dependent on market fluctuations.

Local authorities may delegate certain tasks to the local administration, to councils, and to the schools. Within nationally binding frameworks, determined by law and curricula, the counties, school principals and teachers may exert influence on subject matter, teaching aids and methods. Even if the reform of 2006 assumes an even larger degree of local freedom of action, new techniques of state administration such as audits and inspections/supervisions are gaining ground. Thus, the balance between modern technocracy and institutional trust, centralisation and decentralisation, is an unsettled empirical question.

After the adoption of the Norwegian Apprenticeship Act in 1950, the social partners – the main organisations representing the employers and the employees – were entrusted with a high level of autonomy for the administration and control of the apprenticeship system through professional self-government (Michelsen & Høst, 2004). From 1992, the secretariat for the National VET Council was formally integrated into the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. The National VET Council has, since 2004, had its mandate redefined. It no longer has any decision-making authority, for instance in approving new curricula and trades or dismantling existing ones, but is instead an advisory policy board for the national educational authorities. A corresponding shift in tasks has occurred in the VET boards at the county level (Høst, 2008).

Viewed from a neo-corporate perspective (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985), all of these changes can be understood as a movement away from self-government, in which the social partners were given considerable space for self-regulation in policy-making and policy administration, to a regime of participation, in which the social partners are consulted for advice, but are clearly subordinate to the state.

Main Patterns of Early Leaving, Non-Completion and Completion

Several studies of dropout and completion have documented that even though nearly the whole cohort enters upper secondary education, far from everybody completes (Markussen et al., 2008; Statistics Norway, 2009; Støren et al., 2007). This section will give a brief presentation of the main patterns of dropout and completion in upper secondary education in Norway.

Although upper secondary is voluntary, every year 98–99% of those completing compulsory education apply for a place. Figure 12.1 shows numbers based on a sample study within the cohort starting upper secondary in 2002 (Markussen et al., 2008). Around half the cohort applied for vocational programs and the other half for general programs. Thus, education is the main activity for young people, and around 91% of 16- to 18-year-olds are in upper secondary (Raabe, 2007). As the labour market in Norway has a lot of opportunities, including for youth, the unemployment rate for those under 20 years of age is usually low. It is also very common for young people to combine upper secondary education with work, and all together more than 40% of 15- to 19-year-olds take part in some form of paid work (Statistics Norway/AKU, 2008). This situation may contribute to a certain ‘pull effect’ on students to opt out of school.

In this book, ‘dropout’ is a term used to describe those who do not complete an upper secondary qualification. This chapter makes a distinction between two groups of young people that in other countries would be treated as one group, ‘dropouts’. The term *early leaver* is used here to describe those young people leaving upper secondary education without finishing all the years required to complete; either 3 years as students or 4 years as apprentices. Those who stay the entire time but eventually end up not passing all of the required exams are labelled *non-completers*.¹ The two distinct terms are used when referring to results from the study *Early Leaving, Non-Completion or Completion?* (Markussen et al., 2008). Most studies on dropout do not distinguish between early leaving and non-completion, meaning that when referring to research in other countries, the term *dropout* will cover both early leaving and non-completion.

In this chapter the concern is with early leaving and non-completion only from upper secondary education. Early leaving in compulsory education does exist, but only in very small numbers. Non-completion in compulsory education does not even exist officially, although 7–8% complete without achieving grades in all subjects, or they achieve the lowest grade in one or more subjects (Frøseth et al., 2008). These students are eligible for studies in upper secondary education, but it is likely they will have difficulty successfully negotiating all upper secondary demands.

For the study by Markussen et al. (2008), a total of 9,749 young people in the south-eastern part of Norway were followed for 5½ years: from applying for a place in upper secondary in spring 2002, until autumn 2007 (the numbers in Fig. 12.1 are based on this study). The results show that 5 years after finishing compulsory school, two thirds (66%) had completed upper secondary. Among these, 51% achieved qualification for higher education, and 15% achieved vocational qualification. The remaining one third (34%) had not completed upper secondary within 5 years, thereby obtaining *competence at a lower level*. Of these, 15% had left early,

¹Until 2007, Statistics Norway used the term ‘dropout’ to refer to both groups. The Norwegian translation ‘frafall’ literally translated means ‘falling out’. From 2007, Statistics Norway have presented their yearly statistics on dropout and completion in a new way, distinguishing between ‘completers’, ‘non-completers’, ‘dropouts’ and ‘continuers’.

and 19% ended up as non-completers after finishing all their years in upper secondary but without passing all of the required exams (Markussen et al., 2008).

Statistics Norway does a full-scale mapping of attainment of qualification for every cohort. According to Statistics Norway (2009), the throughput of students in upper secondary has been remarkably stable across cohorts after Reform 94. The share that completed within 5 years in the cohorts entering upper secondary in 1994, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 varied between 68% and 72%. The above-mentioned studies report status of completion after 5 years, but it is worth mentioning that the vast majority complete in the prescribed 3 years for pupils or 4 years for apprentices (Markussen et al., 2008; Statistics Norway, 2009).

The throughput of students in upper secondary improved considerably after the implementation of Reform 94, especially among the students within VET. As a result of this reform, completion among VET students doubled from 30% for the cohort entering upper secondary in 1991, to 60% for the cohort entering in 1994 (Støren et al., 1998). The main reason for this was that Reform 94 made it possible for all students to go through VET. Prior to the reform, many were stopped after the first or second year because there were too few places at the next level.

Despite this improvement, the completion rate remains significantly lower among students in vocational programs, as compared to students in general programs (Markussen et al., 2008; Statistics Norway, 2009; Støren et al., 2007). The average early leaving rate for all students based on the cohort study was 15%. Figure 12.1 shows that among those who started in a general track, around four out of five achieved qualification for higher education, while 5% dropped out, and 15% did not complete. Within the vocational programs, the situation was much worse: one quarter ended up with vocational qualification, one quarter with qualification for higher education, one quarter dropped out, and one quarter were non-completers. The differences in competence achievement between different education programs may be due to variations in the composition of students with regard to individual attributes such as GPA from lower secondary, records of absence, etc., and context variables such as different opportunities of obtaining an apprenticeship between different trades, and different pedagogical practices and learning cultures within the different programs (Markussen et al., 2008).

A proportion of those leaving early do this between the second and third year. Half of these early leavers appeared to be applicants for an apprenticeship who did not obtain a place, and as a consequence, opted out (Markussen & Sandberg, 2005). Thus, the process of obtaining an apprenticeship seems to affect early leaving among VET students.

To sum up, recent studies of completion, non-completion and early leaving in upper secondary education in Norway have shown that about two thirds complete upper secondary education within 5 years; while one third do not. Not completing upper secondary may be due both to early leaving or non-completion (not passing all exams required).

The reform of 2006 brought some changes in upper secondary, and one intention is to improve the throughput of students. It remains to be seen if and to what extent there will be any changes in the patterns of completion, non-completion and early leaving in upper secondary education as a consequence of this reform.

Main Predictors of Early Leaving, Non-Completion and Completion

Research results have revealed a significant variation in early leaving, non-completion and completion rates in upper secondary related to a large number of factors. Girls have better completion rates than boys, and students whose parents have higher education complete upper secondary to a greater extent than those who have parents with a lower educational level. Students from a minority background more often leave early or do not complete compared to other students, and there are large differences in the completion, non-completion and early leaving rates among students within different education programs. Several of these factors also correlate with each other. For instance, girls achieve better grades than boys, and there are large differences in the composition of students within different education programs with regard to the students' grades, and records of absence (Markussen et al., 2008).

This section will concentrate on results from multivariate analyses, and start by giving a short account of what have been identified as the main predictors of early leaving, non-completion and completion in upper secondary education in Norway. Finally, it will look more closely at apprentices and try to identify the factors that can explain variation in their achievement of competence.

Markussen et al. (2008) looked into the factors which influence early leaving, non-completion and completion in upper secondary education. They conducted a multinomial logistic regression analysis of the conditions that influence the likelihood of having either left early or not completed, as compared to having completed upper secondary education after 5 years. Several variables were included in the analysis, such as gender, family background, achievement from last year of compulsory school, educational content and working methods in compulsory school, adjustment to school, ambition and future plans, spare time activities, and education program and county.

GPA from the last year of compulsory school was found to be the most decisive factor influencing early leaving, non-completion or completion after 5 years in upper secondary. The better the grades, the lower the likelihood of both leaving early or not completing, as compared to completing (Markussen et al., 2008). Other studies have also provided evidence of the importance of school achievement during compulsory education for early leaving, non-completion or completion in upper secondary (Støren et al., 1998, 2007).

The influence of background variables on the likelihood of early leaving or not completing, as compared to completing upper secondary education within 5 years, was quite weak after controlling for grades from compulsory school. Analyses have revealed that background variables to a great extent affect the outcome of upper secondary education through the effect these variables have on school achievement (Markussen et al., 2008; Støren et al., 2007). However, even if the influence is fairly weak, a number of background variables have proven to have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of early leaving, non-completion and completion in upper secondary education. These variables include gender,

parents' educational level and their position in the labour market, with whom the young people lived as 15-year-olds (both parents or not), and majority/minority background (Markussen et al., 2008). Although the effect of each individual background variable was relatively weak, the collective effect of coming from a home where the parents lived together, had higher education, worked, etc. was highly significant both for grades in compulsory school and the attainment of qualification in upper secondary education. Thus, it makes sense to give a brief account of how these background variables have proven to affect the likelihood of early leaving or not completing, as compared to completing within 5 years. Below, all effects are referred to on the condition 'other things equal', and as compared to the likelihood of completing upper secondary education.

Boys have a higher likelihood of not completing within 5 years than girls, but there is no difference between boys and girls when it comes to the likelihood of early leaving. The parents' educational level had only a weak effect on competence achievement, but those who had parents with compulsory school as their highest educational level had a somewhat greater likelihood of leaving early than students who had parents with higher education. Students living with both parents as 15-year-olds had a lower probability of leaving early or not completing than students who did not live with both parents. Students with a minority background had a higher probability of leaving early or not completing within 5 years than students with a majority background (Markussen et al., 2008). Another study of the same data demonstrates that early leaving is far more common in vocational tracks among students with a minority background than among majority students. In the general track, non-completion stands out as a significantly greater problem among minority students than among majority students (Lødding, 2009).

All things equal, there has also proven to be great variation in the likelihood of early leaving or not completing, as compared to completing, among students in different educational programs. This indicates that there are conditions linked to the education programs which are related to competence achievement in upper secondary education – that is, even taking into account variations in the composition of students between education programs, with regard to, for example, school achievement and parents' educational level (Markussen et al., 2008).

Completion, Non-Completion and Early Leaving Among Apprentices

There have also been analyses conducted into which factors affect the likelihood of completing upper secondary education among apprentices, as compared to dropout (both early leaving and non-completion) (Markussen et al., 2008; Støren et al., 2007). GPA from compulsory school has a highly positive impact on the likelihood of apprentices completing upper secondary education within 5 years. The effect of background variables disappeared when controlling for GPA. This indicates that the influence of background variables on competence achievement among apprentices

is transmitted via grades from compulsory school. Number of absences had a negative effect on the likelihood of completing upper secondary, while considering oneself as practically inclined and process-oriented, and focusing on homework, had a positive impact on the probability of completing upper secondary as an apprentice (Markussen et al., 2008).

These analyses showed that far fewer factors had an effect on completion, non-completion and early leaving among apprentices, when compared to the analysis of the entire group of young people. This may be explained by the fact that apprentices after all are a selected group.

The share of applicants obtaining an apprenticeship varied from 65% to 80% over the 5 years prior to 2008, dependent on variations in economic cycles (Høst, 2008). Analyses have shown that the probability of obtaining an apprenticeship increases with low records of absence and higher GPA from compulsory education, majority background, being a boy, having a father with vocational education and having a statutory right to upper secondary education (Markussen et al., 2008; Markussen & Sandberg, 2005; Støren et al., 1998, 2007; Støren & Skjersli, 1999; Vibe et al., 1997).

Analyses have also shown differences in the chances of obtaining an apprenticeship between trades (Markussen et al., 2008). According to the statutory right to upper secondary education/training, the county municipality is obliged to offer an alternative education in school to students who do not obtain an apprenticeship. In this context it is worth mentioning that research has indicated that the education/training offered in the alternative arrangement to an apprenticeship – the school-based track – does not seem to be of the same quality as the education offered within the apprentice scheme. Students who do not obtain an apprenticeship, and therefore are offered the school-based track leading to a trade or journeyman's certificate, have higher early leaving rates (Støren & Skjersli, 1999) and a larger share of these students fail in the qualifying examination (Støren et al., 2007). This is to some extent due to differences in earlier school achievement among those who obtain an apprenticeship and those who do not, but the differences do not disappear in multivariate analyses where variations in school achievements are taken into account. This suggests a difference in the quality of the education and training offered to apprentices and to those who do not obtain an apprenticeship (Støren et al., 2007).

Understanding Completion, Non-Completion and Early Leaving

Since 1994 about two thirds of every cohort has completed upper secondary education with a qualification for higher education or a vocational qualification. The remaining one third either leaves before finishing or stays through all years but without completing all requirements, and by doing so achieves competence at a lower level. The main predictive variable, when it comes to early leaving and also non-completion, is the student's schooling abilities, as measured by GPA from the last year of compulsory education.

The analyses within the project *Early Leaving, Non-Completion or Completion?* also identified some other school-related variables predicting early leaving and non-completion. Most important is the finding that low identification and engagement with the school, as measured by absence, misbehaviour, feeling socially excluded, having low ambitions and putting little effort into school work, have a negative effect on the probability of completing upper secondary education.

In addition, the analyses showed some demographic and background variables predicting early leaving and non-completion: gender, minority/majority background, parent's education, mother's labour-market status and family structure.

These findings are consistent with research in other countries (e.g., Alexander et al., 2001; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Entwisle et al., 2005; Finn, 1989; Janosz et al., 1997; Lamb et al., 2004; Rumberger, 1987, 2004; Traag & van der Velden, 2008).

Prior to the *Early Leaving, Non-Completion or Completion?* project, there had not been any large-scale studies of early leaving conducted in Norway. One reason for this may be that early leaving has not been considered a real problem until recently. Until Reform 94, being outside upper secondary was not regarded as a problem; rather, it was common that many young people aged between 16 and 19 were working, or switching between education and work. Reform 94, with its strong structural, financial and normative means to make upper secondary normal for all 16- to 19-year-olds, was, however, implemented shortly after a deep recession, which resulted in unemployment for many young people. Thus, the construction of the early-leaver category in Norway may be seen as a consequence of both the state of the labour market and the reform giving every young person a statutory right to upper secondary education.

The launching of the research project *Early Leaving, Non-Completion or Completion?* was one response, as early leaving began to emerge as a problem. Because of the lack of earlier Norwegian research, it was necessary to turn to the international literature when trying to explain early leaving and non-completion and the results of the study. One might say that the study – and other Norwegian research on this topic – has been influenced by approaches employed by researchers internationally.

A three-step explanation will be used to try to explain early leaving and non-completion of upper secondary education in Norway:

1. Compulsory education produces students with a large variation in skills, and not everyone is equally prepared to successfully master upper secondary education.
2. In the transition from lower to upper secondary education, when advising students what kind of upper secondary education to choose, the system does not recognise this variation in knowledge, skills and attitudes.
3. When working with these students in upper secondary education, the system does not recognise this variation, either.

As shown above, GPA from the last year of compulsory education is the variable with the strongest predictive power for the outcome of upper secondary education. An important question is how GPA from compulsory education, as an expression

of the students' knowledge, skills and attitudes, is produced. To attempt to answer this question, two contributions from the international research literature on the subject, by Finn (1989) and Rumberger (2004), will be called on.

Finn (1989) draws up two models for understanding dropout as a process starting in the early years of schooling. Following the 'Frustration–Self-Esteem Model', early school failure leads to an impaired self-view, making the individual oppose the school. This opposition may take the form of misbehaviour, truancy, and in the end total withdrawal. In the 'Participation–Identification Model', Finn focuses on participation as a starting point. If the students are not participating, this might lead to poor achievement, followed by low identification with school, and finally withdrawal.

Rumberger (2004) argues that to study dropout one has to include both an individual and an institutional perspective. His framework, based on the individual perspective, is built on three central elements: engagement, educational performance and background. Educational performance and engagement are related and affect each other. Background influences both performance and engagement. In this way, background, engagement and performance are mutually interrelated. In his institutional perspective he argues that people's actions are shaped by the settings in which they live, and that students' behaviour and achievements have to be studied within different contexts: families, peer groups, schools, local communities, and the larger environment (Rumberger, 2004).

Drawing on Finn (1989) and Rumberger (2004) it is possible to construct a conceptual framework to understand early leaving, non-completion and completion in Norwegian upper secondary education, as displayed in Fig. 12.2.

When children enter primary education, they differ in their relationship to school. Through their early years of living they have acquired different understandings of what the school is and how important schooling is. They also come into primary education with a varying level of knowledge and skills. As shown in Fig. 12.2, much of this variation is due to different backgrounds: gender, minority/majority background, family structure, parents' education, parents' labour market status and cultural capital.

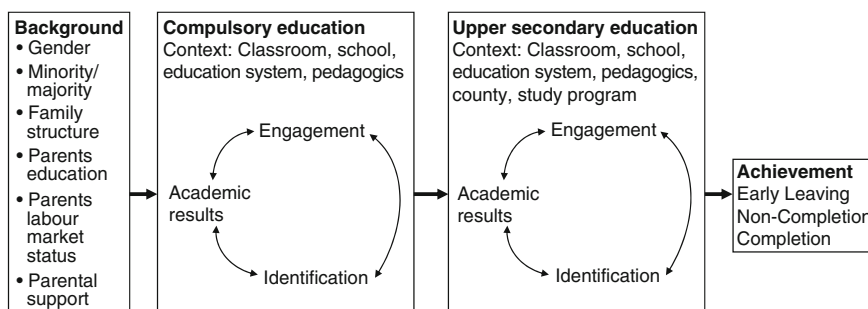


Fig. 12.2 Conceptual framework for understanding student achievement in Norwegian upper secondary education (Source: Markussen, Sandberg & Frøseth, forthcoming)

Some children then, meet school on their home ground, the school recognises them, they identify with school, and the school identifies with them. These children enter a positive circle (Fig. 12.2): they perform well academically, their identification with the school is strengthened, and they show a high level of engagement. Others enter a negative circle: they meet school on away ground, the school does not recognise them, they identify with school to a lesser extent, and vice versa.

These children do not perform as well academically, they do not obtain the same identification with the school, and they show a lower level of engagement (Finn, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Newmann et al., 1992; Rumberger, 2004; Wehlage et al., 1989). This happens because the school does not adjust its teaching to the variation in the students' knowledge, abilities and skills.

This process first takes place in compulsory education, resulting in varying achievements (see above). These varying achievements imply considerable variation in students' abilities to meet the requirements of upper secondary education. Based on studies of upper secondary education in Norway, it is argued that, as a result of the different lives they have lived with their families and in kindergarten and compulsory school, a large proportion of every cohort at the age of 15–16 has not acquired the necessary requirements (knowledge, skills, attitudes and engagement) to complete upper secondary education, at least not at this stage in life.

Even though this is the case, as many as 98–99% of the cohorts apply and start in upper secondary every year (Markussen, 2003; Frøseth et al., 2008). And nearly everyone applies for, and starts on, a track aiming at qualification for higher education or vocational qualification. Being aware of the great variation in abilities, and being aware of the demands to be fulfilled in order to complete, it could be argued that the education system is doing some students a disservice when leading those not capable of completing, into tracks aiming for full completion. Knowing that it has been possible since 1994, it is worth questioning why very few students (less than 1%) are offered alternative courses – for instance more practical courses aiming for full competence or courses aiming for competence at a lower level.

When these students start in upper secondary, many of them enter into a new negative circle of 'academic results–identification–engagement' (see Fig. 12.2). Teaching in upper secondary does not, as with the transition process to upper secondary, recognise the extent of variation among the students, and treats nearly everyone as if they are capable of completing. Many of the students aiming for completion are not capable of this, and when they experience low levels of identification and engagement, and low academic results, these students have – since upper secondary is not compulsory – the option to leave; and as shown above, many of them do.

The education system is acting upon a tacit assumption, that basically every single individual at the age of 16 has the ability to complete upper secondary education by achieving qualification for higher education or vocational qualification. Yet, it could be argued that many do not have the ability. Because of this, many students start out with goals they are not able to reach.

It may be better if this tacit assumption was replaced by a new basic understanding, explicitly stating that 15- to 16-year-olds at the point of leaving compulsory education have, through the lives they have lived in family, school and society,

achieved very different knowledge, skills and attitudes. Not all of them have obtained the necessary abilities at this stage of life to achieve qualification for higher education or vocational qualification.

Building on this understanding, it would be better for upper secondary education to provide targeted programs, in accordance with students' abilities. For those with appropriate skills, this may be to help them achieve qualification for higher education or vocational qualification. Or it may be to help students aim for and achieve what is called *competence at a lower level*, a theme returned to below. Aiming at competence at a lower level is also targeted education that may break the negative version of the circle illustrated in Fig. 12.2.

Policies to Reduce Early Leaving and Non-Completion

Concern over high early leaving and non-completion rates in Norway has intensified the search for effective tools to (1) prevent young people from quitting, (2) channel early leavers back to school or into qualifying work, and (3) prevent those staying on from ending up as non-completers. Attention will now turn to describing some measures implemented on national and system-wide levels in order to reduce early leaving and non-completion and increase completion in Norway's upper secondary education.

In 1994, as described above, a comprehensive reform of upper secondary education in Norway was implemented. One of the main reasons for this reform was that upper secondary education was not able to cater for all those young persons aged 15–16 who had just finished compulsory education and who wanted to start upper secondary. Because of lack of capacity a large number of young people (those with the lowest GPA from compulsory education) at the age of 15–16 were being forced out of education, becoming early leavers without entering upper secondary education. Amongst other reasons, Reform 94 was introduced in order to put an end to this early leaving between the compulsory and post-compulsory stages of education that was forced upon young people by the system. And this was a success. As noted earlier, a result of this reform was that nearly everybody started in upper secondary education. Furthermore, the reform succeeded in improving throughput and completion: completion among VET students doubled from 30% in the cohort entering upper secondary in 1991, to 60% in the cohort entering in 1994 (Støren et al., 1998).

As mentioned above, in the decades prior to Reform 94, it was common for many young people aged 16–19 to be working or switching between education and work, so that being outside upper secondary education was not considered to be a problem. But when the opportunities in the labour market vanished and upper secondary education was opened up to everybody, the norm was created that every young person should attend upper secondary education. As this took place, not following the norm became a problem, and it could be argued that it was only after the implementation of Reform 94 that early leaving and dropout from upper secondary

education emerged as a real problem. It is interesting that the reform that reduced the numbers of early leavers before post-compulsory education and increased the numbers of completers from upper secondary, also created early leaving and drop-out from upper secondary education as a problem and a challenge.

It was not only Reform 94 itself that was meant to reduce early leaving and improve completion. As part of the reform, some measures aimed at helping potential dropouts to stay in school were also introduced. Two of these measures, the *Follow-Up Service* and *competence at a lower level* are worth describing.

The main task of the Follow-Up Service is to help students who have a statutory right to upper secondary education but who are out of school or work, back into education or to work. The service still exists, but it has not been evaluated for nearly 10 years, so it is not possible, based on data, to say how it is working at present. From earlier evaluations it is known that the service has been struggling to fulfil its task, as almost the only options they had were to return early leavers to school (Grøgaard et al., 1999).

As a part of Reform 94, a new form of competence was introduced. The legislation in relation to upper secondary education stated that after finishing upper secondary education, the students should acquire one out of three possible forms of qualification: qualification for higher education, vocational qualification, or *documented partial competence*. From 2001 the name of this third form of qualification was changed to *competence at a lower level*. At the same time it became possible for students to undertake study towards this competence at a lower level qualification within their upper secondary education, and to work for this as a *learning candidate*, rather like an apprentice in a workplace. At the end of this education, the learning candidate does an exam called the *Competence Test*, and after passing this exam he or she receives a *Certificate of Competence*, documenting the qualifications he or she has acquired through upper secondary education. Competence at a lower level was introduced in order to give those not capable of achieving qualification for higher education or vocational qualification another option within the system, and can be seen as a measure to keep students in upper secondary education.

From 2007 a new way to achieve planned competence at a lower level, the *Certificate of Practice*, was introduced, allowing students to complete their upper secondary education over a 2-year period. The main part of the education is based on practical work in the work place, like an apprentice. When fulfilling these 2 years, and achieving a Certificate of Practice, students will have two options: either to end their education and apply for work on the basis of their Certificate of Practice, or to continue their education as an apprentice aiming for a full vocational education by obtaining a trade or a journeyman's certificate.

In 2003, a national *Plan of Action against Early Leaving in Upper Secondary Education* was launched. In an evaluation, Buland and Havn (2007) point out that a considerable diversity of strategies were developed throughout the country, including career and employment counselling; new systems for early warning; supplementary qualification for teachers in handling the challenges related to early leaving; special attention to the first few months of upper secondary school for

students at risk; additional alternative possibilities for young people for working outside of ordinary school; and improved cooperation between schools in order to facilitate transition from one level of education to the next. These are seen by the practitioners involved as effective means for preventing early leaving and non-completion.

According to the analysis by Buland and Havn (2007), in order for work to reduce early leaving to be successful, it needs to be 'firmly rooted in the educational system on all levels, not as a project, but as an ongoing, ordinary part of the activities of every school'. Thus, they conclude, the task involves systematic, enduring, goal-oriented hard work in different arenas simultaneously. Two evaluations of projects on partnership for career guidance in compulsory education, and in a lifelong perspective, support the significance of these success criteria (Borgen et al., 2008; Røste & Borgen, 2008).

In 2006, a new comprehensive reform of all education for persons between 6 and 19 years of age was implemented. The Government and the Parliament gave many reasons for this reform, but in upper secondary education one of its main aims was said to be the reduction of early leaving and non-completion and the improvement of completion (St.meld. nr. 30, 2003–04).

As a part of the reform, several elements aiming at reduced dropout and increased completion were introduced. Three of these measures are worth mentioning: *career guidance*, the *Elective Program*, and the *In-Depth Study Project*.

Career guidance for young people was highlighted in the reform of 2006 as a measure for preventing early leaving and non-completion. The aim is to bring about a significant improvement of the guidance service through several means, including partnerships for career guidance, which involve a range of different actors at different levels and across sectors. Supplementary qualification for school counsellors is seen as crucial to the endeavours.

In order to strengthen students' basis for choosing educational programs and subjects in upper secondary, two new subjects have been established: the *Elective Program* is taught to all students in lower secondary throughout all 3 years; and the *In-Depth Study Project* is taught in the vocational tracks in upper secondary during the first and the second year.

The three main areas of the Elective Program are knowledge about the structure in upper secondary and working life; trialling of possible programs in upper secondary education; and training, mapping out, and discussing the implications of the student's own interests and circumstances concerning their individual educational and work life choices. The trialling of programs can take place in an upper secondary school or in a local workplace.

The objective of the In-Depth Study Project is that students should be able to try out one or more trades and gain experience with the content, tasks and working methods used in different vocational subjects before they select their own pathway.

Norway has implemented two comprehensive reforms, in 1994 and 2006, and in both cases an important reason for these reforms, amongst many others, was to reduce early leaving and non-completion and increase completion. It has been

shown that Reform 94 succeeded in both reducing the numbers of early leavers between the compulsory and post-compulsory stages of education, and increasing the completion rates within upper secondary education. But early leaving and non-completion rates are still worryingly high and the 2006 Reform is aiming to improve this situation. Special measures seeking to reduce dropout and increase completion – better career guidance and the two new subjects (the Elective Program and the In-Depth Study Project) – have been designed, piloted and recently implemented, and are under evaluation at present. Thus, while it is impossible at the time of writing to say whether they will work as intended, the ongoing evaluations will hopefully tell us more.

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Introduction to the New World Education Systems

Stephen Lamb

Dropout has attracted a lot of attention in countries sometimes referred to as the *new world* nations: the United States, Canada and Australia. Headlines such as ‘high school dropout crisis continues in US’,¹ ‘high school dropout crisis threatens US economic growth’,² ‘battle to boost Year 12 completion rates’ (Australia),³ ‘high-school dropouts – a black mark on Canada’s secondary school system’⁴ reflect deep-seated concerns in each country about the problem of dropout and its effects. Yet these nations, sharing similar colonial histories, have been at the vanguard of building modern, democratic secondary school systems. They have been very successful in transforming their secondary schools into mass systems. The continuing concerns over the problem of dropout are based on a sense of failure – a sense that the systems have failed to deliver on their promise of providing universal secondary education that is non-selective, meritocratic and provides equal chances of success to all regardless of social background, race and gender.

The United States led the way. According to Trow (1977, p 114),⁵ mass secondary education in the United States was built through a system of comprehensive high schools, devoted initially to the education of the great mass of students for work and life and the preparation of a small minority for higher education which, over time, became the major function. Mass rates of high school completion were achieved as early as the middle of last century. The comprehensive high school was

¹CNN, May 5, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/05/05/dropout.rate.study/>

²Committee on Education and Labor, May 12, 2009, <http://edlabor.house.gov/newsroom/2009/05/high-school-dropout-crisis-thr.shtml>

³*The Age* Newspaper, January 24, 2009.

⁴Communiqué of the CD Howe Institute, October 22, 2009, http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/commentary_298pr.pdf

⁵Trow, M. (1977). The second transformation of the American school system. In J. Karabel, & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 105–118). New York: Oxford University Press.

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important to these achievements. It removed the practice of channelling students into separate academic and vocational schools (or streams) at a relatively young age which was and remains common to many European systems. It catered to students from diverse backgrounds with diverse talents and abilities and it did so by establishing a single certificate, the high school diploma, which offered a broad range of common and elective options.⁶ While comprehensive high schools and development of the graduate diploma contributed to the unprecedented growth of secondary education, they still act as a source of differentiation in pathways. They do this largely through the role of tracking, in which students take different programs (vocational, general, academic) based on their subject selections, despite being in the same school.

In Canada, there is considerable diversity across provinces, but the secondary school systems have developed many features similar to the United States. Comprehensive high schools are a common model with vocational and academic programs offered within the same school. Secondary school diplomas are awarded to students who complete the requisite number of compulsory and optional courses. In the main, students follow tracks or streams of study (vocational, academic, general) based on their elective choices.

In Australia, the comprehensive school is also the main model of schooling, though private and selective-entry schools are significant, depending on the state or territory. Widespread program reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, designed to democratise participation and improve rates of graduation, led to the development of school qualifications not dissimilar to the high school diploma in the United States.

Despite these efforts to develop truly universal models of secondary education, dropout remains an issue in each of the systems as the following case studies show.

⁶See Green's study *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and USA*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Chapter 13

High School Dropouts in the United States

Russell W. Rumberger

Introduction

One of the major educational challenges in virtually all industrialised nations is raising the education level of the workforce. This includes getting more students to complete upper secondary school or what is referred to as ‘high school’ in the United States. Completing high school is increasingly viewed as a minimal requirement for entry into the labour market and for further, post-secondary education. In fact, with the economy generating an increasing number of jobs that require at least some post-secondary schooling, students who earn no more than a high school diploma will most likely have diminishing economic prospects in the future economy.

Despite the growing importance of graduating from high school, a large segment of the student population in United States fails to complete it. Moreover, while an increasing percentage of adolescents have enrolled in high school over the last 4 decades, the percentage of students completing high school has actually declined. This chapter provides a brief overview of the United States educational system and then reviews research on the patterns of high school dropout and graduation, the causes of dropping out, and what programs and policies have been developed to reduce dropout and improve high school graduation rates.

The United States Educational System

The United States educational system is composed of both public and private schools, with about 89% of school-age children (ages 5–17) attending public schools (Snyder et al., 2009, Table 2). Public schools are governed and funded by the government, while private schools are governed by religious and non-religious authorities and generally funded privately, but do receive limited government funding for particular programs.

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Because the constitutional authority for public education resides in states, the United States has 50 state educational systems and another one for the nation's capital, the District of Columbia. In addition, all states except Hawaii delegate substantial authority to the more than 15,000 local education agencies known as 'school districts', which are governed by locally elected school boards and range from very small, rural districts to very large, urban districts. As a result, there are widespread differences in schools throughout the United States in terms of funding, governance, school structure, the role of teacher unions, school practices and school 'quality', whether quality is defined in terms of resources, practices, or student outcomes (Card & Krueger, 1998). Public schools in the United States are also highly segregated, reflecting widespread differences in the demographic characteristics of students in terms of social class, race and ethnicity, immigration status and language background (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Despite these differences, there is actually a fair amount of commonality among schools and state school systems, including the provision of secondary schooling. The most common school structure in the United States consists of three grade-level configurations: 'elementary schools', with grade spans typically ranging from kindergarten to Grade 5 enrolling students aged 5–10 years; 'middle schools', with grade spans typically ranging from Grade 6 to 8 enrolling students aged 11–13 years; and 'high schools', with grade spans typically ranging from Grades 9 to 12 enrolling students aged 14–17 years (see Fig. 13.1). But there are substantial variations that often include only one or two grade-level configurations. For example, in some local school systems, elementary schools range from kindergarten to Grade 8; in other school systems, high schools range from Grades 7 to 12; and in some, typically rural, school systems students attend a single school ranging from kindergarten to Grade 12. Of all public secondary schools in 2006–07 that included Grade 12, 58% were 4-year high schools (Grades 9–12), 13% were 6-year high schools (Grades 7–12), and 21% were combined elementary/secondary schools (Snyder et al., 2009, Tables 98, 100). Yet because combined schools are typically smaller, a higher proportion of students actually attend 4-year high schools.

Not only does the structure of secondary schools vary among states and localities, so do requirements for attending and graduating. Each state specifies the compulsory schooling age, dictating the age that students must attend school. The minimum age that students can leave school ranges from 16 to 18 (Snyder et al., 2009, Table 165). Since it typically takes 4 years to complete the requirements for a high school diploma, students who leave before the age of 18 are not assured of earning a diploma.

Most states also specify the requirements for earning a high school diploma, although school districts can add additional requirements. These requirements vary among states and have changed over time. In 2006, among states that specified course requirements, the number of course credits¹ varied from a low of 13 in such states as California, Wisconsin and Wyoming, to a high of 24 in such states as

¹A course credit is known as a Carnegie unit and represents the credit received for completing a 1-year course.

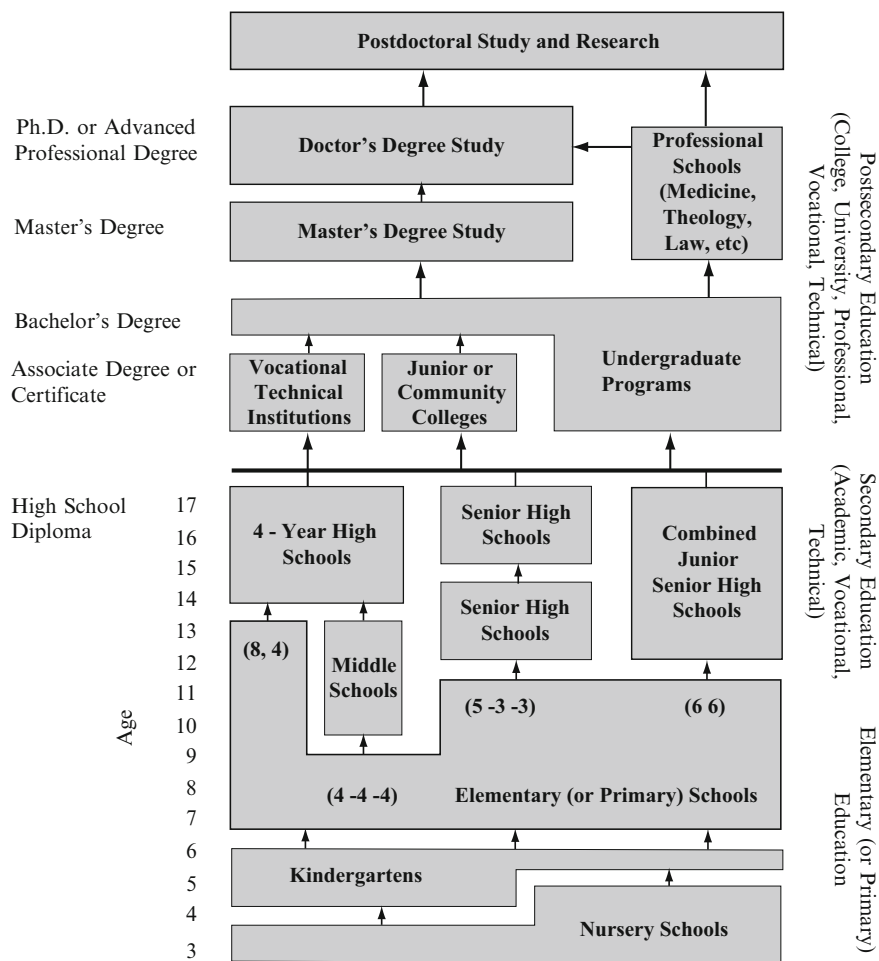


Fig. 13.1 Structure of education in the United States (Source: Snyder, 2009, Fig. 1)
 Note: Adult education programs, while not separately delineated above, may provide instruction at the elementary, secondary or post-secondary education level. Chart reflects typical patterns of progression rather than all possible variations

Alabama, Florida and South Carolina (Snyder et al., 2009, Table 167). Alabama appears to have the most rigorous requirements: 4-year courses in English, social studies, science and mathematics, together with eight additional courses. This translates into four academic and two additional courses for each of the 4 years of high school. Such requirements leave little room for error – students who fail to earn six credits per year would not progress in school and would run the risk of not graduating in the expected 4 years.

Most of the requirements for earning a diploma focus on academic courses: English, social studies, science and mathematics. A few states require courses in the

fine arts and foreign languages. Only two states, Arkansas and Delaware, require students to take any career and technical education courses (American Diploma Project, 2007), although all states offer them and many students take them: in 2004 high school graduates nationwide completed an average of 3.5 credits of career and technical education courses (Planty et al., 2007, Fig. 3).

Students in many states must also pass a high school exit exam in core subject areas, primarily English and mathematics, in addition to meeting course requirements. With the growth of the accountability movement and standards-based reform in the 1990s, assessments are used to ensure that students have mastered more rigorous, grade-level content standards. By 2006, 22 states required that students pass some sort of exit before being awarded a diploma, whereas previously or in other states, they only had to meet the course requirements (Snyder et al., 2009, Table 167).

Some states also use exams to award higher level diplomas that may benefit students' prospects for entering college. New York, for example, awards three levels of high school diplomas based on the types of course credits earned (all requiring 22 year-long credits), and on the number and scores on the Regents Exam: from a minimum score of 55 in five subjects for a Local Diploma, to a minimum score of 65 in eight subjects for a Regents Diploma with advanced designation (City University of New York, 2009).

In addition to determining the requirements for a regular high school diploma, states can award alternative or equivalency diplomas. These are typically awarded based on passing either a state or national examination. The most common national examination is the General Educational Development (GED) test administered by the American Council of Education, a private higher education organisation representing all sectors of United States degree-granting institutions (General Education Development Testing Service, 2008). The GED is a series of five subject exams in which, beginning in 1997, test-takers had to exceed the performance of at least 33% of traditional graduating high school seniors in order to pass the test. However, states establish their own criteria for using the GED results to issue high school certificates. Some states award regular diplomas, while other states award 'equivalency' diplomas or certificates based on either the GED or state-designed examinations. Some states also award other high school certificates in lieu of a regular diploma, such as certificates of attendance for students who fail to meet regular or alternative graduation requirements. Other states issue regular diplomas to all students who complete high school regardless of the requirements they meet, which makes it difficult to make comparisons across states.

Of all the high school completion certificates awarded in the United States in 2004–05, almost 94% were regular diplomas, 5% were equivalency diplomas, and less than 2% were other types of certificates.² But those percentages varied widely among states, with some states, such as California, awarding primarily regular diplomas (98%), while other states, such as Georgia, awarding much higher percentages of equivalency and other certificates (17%, compared with 83% regular diplomas).

²Based on Common Core Data. Retrieved February 7, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/output.asp>

The distinction between completing high school by earning a regular diploma and completing high school by earning an equivalency diploma is important for at least two reasons. First, research suggests that the economic benefits are not equivalent (Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Tyler, 2003). Second, the two types of diplomas help define both high school dropouts and high school graduates, as we now see.

Trends in Dropout and Graduation Rates

Identifying the number of students who drop out of school and graduate each year in the United States is complicated by the difficulty of tracking students over time, and the sources of data currently available to track them. There are also a number of measures of dropout and graduation rates that are used. Because these measures generate different rates, there has been considerable debate among scholars and government officials over the accuracy and use of these alternative measures (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2008; Mishel & Roy, 2006; Warren, 2005).

The federal government, in collecting dropout and graduation statistics from the states, defines a dropout as a previously enrolled student who has ‘not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved education program’.³ The United States Census Bureau, which collects national population data, also defines a dropout as someone who has not completed high school by earning a high school diploma or alternative credential.⁴ In other words, completing high school by any type of credential precludes someone from being considered a dropout by the federal government and by virtually all state governments. In fact, it is not even necessary to earn any type of high school credential to avoid being labelled a dropout – in California, for example, a student is not considered a dropout if ‘the student has transferred to and is attending a college offering a baccalaureate or associate’s program’.⁵

Yet not dropping out of school is not the same as graduating. The federal government also defines a high school graduate as someone who earns ‘a regular high school diploma’.⁶ Similarly, all of the nation’s governors signed an agreement in 2005 to voluntarily implement a common formula for calculating their state’s high school graduation rate, where graduation is defined as earning a diploma (National Governors Association Task Force on State High School Graduation Data, 2005, p. 15). Hence, keeping students from dropping out is not the same thing as getting

³ See Defining and Calculating Event Dropout Rates Using the CCD. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/dropout05/DefiningAndCalculating.asp>

⁴ See Defining and Calculating Dropout and Completion Rates Using the CPS. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/dropout05/DefiningDropoutAndCompletion.asp>

⁵ See Dropout Guidelines for October 2008 CBEDS. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/dropoutguide.asp>

⁶ See final regulations for the federal Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act issued in October 2008. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/proposal/uniform-grad-rate.html>

more students to graduate, and it is the latter that is most important to states and the federal government, and may be more lucrative for students.

The federal government calculates a number of different dropout and graduation rates (Laird et al., 2008):

- **Event dropout rate.** The percentage of persons in a population who drop out of school over a specified period of time, which is often a period of 1 year.
- **Status dropout rate.** The percentage of persons in a specified population who are not currently enrolled and have not completed school by earning a regular or an alternative (e.g., GED) high school credential.
- **Status completion rate.** The percentage of persons in a specified population who have completed high school by earning a regular or an alternative (e.g., GED) high school credential.
- **Cohort graduation rate.** The percentage of persons in a population who graduate – earn a regular high school diploma – over longer periods of time, such as the 4 year period from the beginning of Grade 9 to the end of Grade 12, and over multiple periods of time for the same population of students, such as the graduation rate over a 4-year period, a 5-year period, and a 6-year period.

State governments, too, calculate a number of different dropout, completion and graduation rates. In some cases, they are generated to satisfy federal reporting requirements; in other cases, they are used to satisfy state accountability and reporting requirements.

What do these rates reveal about the extent of the dropout problem in the United States? Based on the event dropout rate, 407,000 students dropped out of Grades 10–12 in the 2005–06 academic year, or about 3.8% of the students enrolled in United States schools (see Table 13.1). This is no doubt an undercount because it excludes students who dropped out before Grade 10. Annual dropout rates have been falling steadily over the last 25 years, from a high of 6.7% in 1979 to the current rate of 3.8% in 2006 (Laird et al., 2008, Table 4).

But annual dropout rates understate the likelihood that a student will drop out some time during his or her educational career. A better gauge is the proportion of dropouts in the population, referred to as the status dropout rate. Again, according to United States Census survey data, in October 2006 there were almost 3.5 million dropouts aged 16–24, representing 9.3% of the population (Table 13.1). These rates too have declined over the last 25 years, from a high of 14.6% in 1972 to the 2006 rate of 9.3% (Laird et al., 2008, Table 7).

Census data further reveal that 87.8% of the population aged 18–24 years had completed high school by October 2006 (see Table 13.1).

Dropout and graduation rates vary widely among demographic groups. First, dropout and completion rates vary by gender. Males are more likely to drop out and less likely to complete high school than females. Second, Blacks and Hispanic, who represent more than 30% of public school students (Snyder et al., 2009, Table 41), are more likely to drop out and less likely to complete high school than Whites and Asians. Third, students from low-income families are more likely to drop out of school than students from high-income families. Fourth, among Hispanics, foreign-born students have the highest dropout rates and the lowest completion rates,

Table 13.1 United States dropout and completion rates by demographic characteristics, October 2006

	Event dropout rates of 15- to 24-year-olds	Status dropout rates of 16- to 24-year-olds	Status completion rates of 18- to 24-year-olds
Total	3.8	9.3	87.8
Sex			
Male	4.1	10.3	86.5
Female	3.4	8.3	89.1
Race/ethnicity			
White, non-Hispanic	2.9	5.8	92.6
Black, non-Hispanic	3.8	10.7	84.8
Hispanic	7.0	22.1	70.9
Asian	4.1 ^a	3.6	95.8
More than one race	3.1 ^a	7.0	89.7
Family income			
Low income	9.0 ^a		
Middle income	3.5		
High income	2.0		
Immigration status			
Foreign born			
Hispanic	10.0	36.2	57.7
Non-Hispanic	2.5 ^a	4.2	95.0
First generation			
Hispanic	6.9	12.3	81.9
Non-Hispanic	4.7	4.2	95.0
Second generation or more			
Hispanic	4.8 ^a	12.1	83.5
Non-Hispanic	3.0	6.9	91.2

^aInterpret data with caution due to small sample size

Source: Laird et al. (2008, Tables 1, 6, 9)

while second generation and higher students have the lowest dropout rates and the highest completion rates. Among non-Hispanics, the picture is more complicated; first generation students appear to have both the highest event dropout rates, but the lowest status dropout rates, as well as the highest completion rates.

Yet dropout and completion rates alone may not be sufficient to reveal the extent of the problem. Census data have been criticised because they rely on respondents' self-reported educational status, which respondents may overstate, and because completion rates include persons who earn a GED, even though there is extensive evidence that alternative credentials do not provide the same economic benefits as a traditional high school diploma. Thus, both federal and state governments are attempting to measure the proportion of entering Grade 9 students who earn a regular diploma within 4 years, which is known as the *ninth-grade cohort graduation rate*. Such a rate is particularly difficult to measure because it requires tracking students over several years. This is problematic, in part, because students often transfer from one educational setting to another during their high school careers.

In addition, some students are retained, especially in the ninth grade, when they fail to earn enough credits to be promoted to the next grade level.

A number of specific measures are currently used to estimate the ninth-grade graduation rate, and all have limitations (Miao & Haney, 2004; Mishel & Roy, 2006; Warren, 2005). Recently, the federal government has adopted one measure known as the *averaged freshman graduation rate*, and has produced estimates for the nations' public schools and for the public schools in each state. These estimates show a graduation rate of 75% nationally for all public schools in 2004–05, with state rates varying from a low of 60% in South Carolina to a high of 88% in Nebraska (Laird et al., 2008) Table 12. Graduation rates also vary widely among school districts in the United States, with some districts – such as New York City and Los Angeles, the nation's two largest districts – having graduation rates of around 50% (Garofano & Sable, 2008, Table A-13).

Long-term trends show that the graduation rate was at its highest level in 1970 at 79% and then trended downward, reaching its lowest level of 71% in 1996 (see Fig. 13.2). The rate has trended upward since that time. Enrolment rates show different trends, reaching a low of 90% in 1980 and peaking at 95% in 2006. What accounts for those divergent trends is not clear.

Stagnating growth in high school graduation rates is not only problematic in itself, it is also problematic because it reflects the relative status of the United States in the global labour market. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) computes the percentage of upper secondary graduates to the population at the typical age of graduation. In 2006 the United States ranked 20th among OECD countries in the percentage of students who graduated from high school, with a graduation rate of 77% (OECD, 2008, Table A2.1). The average among all OECD countries in 2006 was 83%, and the average among the 19 OECD countries in the European Economic Union – those countries that represent our closest economic competitors – was 86% (OECD, 2008, Table A2.1). More disturbing, over the period from 1995 to

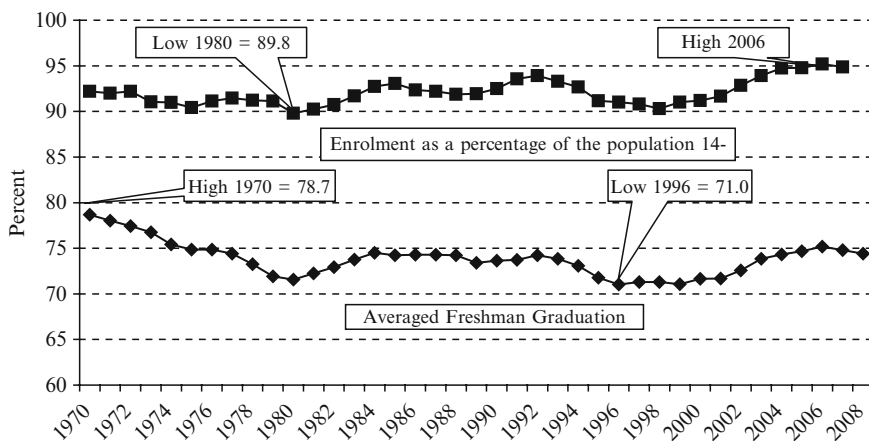


Fig. 13.2 Enrolment and graduation rates, 1970–04 (Source: Snyder et al., 2009, Tables 55, 104)

2005, the average graduation rate in the United States improved by a mere 3 percentage points, from 74% to 77% while the average graduation rate in OECD countries improved by 6 percentage points, from 77% to 83%. In other words, the United States is falling behind other countries in getting students to graduate from high school, hampering the ability to improve training and college participation beyond high school.

Why Do Students Drop Out?

Understanding why students drop out of school is the key to addressing this major educational problem; yet identifying the causes of dropping out is extremely difficult. Like other forms of educational achievement (e.g., test scores), the causes of dropping out are influenced by an array of proximal and distal factors related to both the individual student and to the family, school, and community settings in which the student lives.

Dropouts themselves report a variety of reasons for leaving school, including school-related reasons, family-related reasons and work-related reasons. The most specific reasons cited by a sample of 2002 10th-graders who dropped out were ‘missed too many school days’ (44%); ‘thought it would be easier to get a GED’ (41%); ‘getting poor grades/failing school’ (38%); ‘did not like school’ (37%); and ‘could not keep up with schoolwork’ (32%) (Rotermund, 2007a). But these reasons do not reveal the underlying causes of why students quit school, particularly those causes or factors in elementary or middle school that may have contributed to students’ attitudes, behaviours and school performance immediately preceding their decision to leave school. Moreover, if many factors contribute to this phenomenon over a long period of time, it is virtually impossible to demonstrate a causal connection between any single factor and the decision to quit school.

Although existing research is unable, for the most part, to identify unique causes of dropping out, a vast empirical research literature has examined numerous predictors of high school dropout and graduation (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The empirical research comes from a number of social science disciplines and has identified two types of factors: (1) individual factors associated with students themselves, such as their attitudes, behaviours, school performance and prior experiences; and (2) contextual factors found in students’ families, schools and communities.

Individual Factors

A variety of individual factors are associated with dropping out, including several demographic factors. Generally, dropout rates are higher among males, Blacks and Hispanics, immigrants and students from non-English backgrounds. Attitudes also affect dropout rates. Dropout rates are higher among students who have low educational and occupational aspirations. Several activities and behaviours also predict

dropout rates, including absenteeism, misbehaviour in school and pregnancy. Finally, poor academic achievement is a strong predictor of dropping out. Together, these factors support the idea that dropping out is influenced by both the social and academic experiences of students.

In addition to these proximal factors, a number of distal factors are associated with dropping out, such as student mobility. Both *residential* mobility (changing residences) and *school* mobility (changing schools) increase the risk of dropping out of high school (Haveman et al., 1991; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Teachman et al., 1996). Student mobility may represent a less severe form of student disengagement or withdrawal from school. That is, students may voluntarily transfer or be forced to transfer by school officials in an attempt to find a more suitable or supportive school environment before quitting school altogether. For example, one study found that students typically attend two or more high schools before dropping out (Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

Another distal factor is grade retention. Although retention may have some positive impact on academic achievement in the short run, numerous studies have found that it greatly increases the likelihood that students will drop out of school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Finally, a number of long-term studies have found that lack of early academic achievement and engagement (e.g., attendance, misbehaviour) in elementary and middle school predicts withdrawal from high school.

Institutional Factors

While individual factors clearly contribute to students' decisions to drop out of school, individual attitudes and behaviours are shaped by the various settings or contexts in which students live. As noted by the Forum on Adolescence, created by the National Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council to bring authoritative, non-partisan research to bear on policy issues facing adolescents and their families: 'Another important insight of scientific inquiry is the profound influence of settings on adolescents' behaviour and development' (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 1999, pp. 11–12). This perspective is common in such social science disciplines as economics, sociology and anthropology, and more recently has been incorporated in an emerging paradigm in developmental psychology called *developmental behavioural science* (Jessor, 1993). This paradigm recognises that the various settings or contexts in which children live – families, schools and communities – all shape their attitudes, behaviours and experiences. For example, the National Research Council Panel on High-Risk Youth (1993) concluded that too much emphasis has been placed on 'high-risk' youth and not enough on the high-risk settings in which they live and go to school. Similarly, a 2004 review of the literature on childhood poverty identified a wide variety of family, school, and community environmental factors that impede the development of poor children (Evans, 2004). Both reviews reflect the growing emphasis on understanding how these contexts shape educational outcomes.

This new perspective has important implications for studying and understanding the problem of school dropout. Anthropologists, by studying the experiences of dropouts in particular settings, have long illustrated the importance of the family, school and community contexts in understanding dropouts (Trueba et al., 1989). Recent developments in statistics have also allowed quantitative researchers to study the influence of context, particularly the school setting, on academic performance across large numbers of schools (Lee, 2000; Rumberger & Palardy, 2004). This research has identified a number of factors within students' families, schools and communities (and peer relationships) that predict dropping out.

Families

Family background is widely recognised as the single most important contributor to success in school. Socioeconomic status, most commonly measured by *parental education* and *family income*, is a powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behaviour. Parental education influences students' aspirations and educational support, while family income allows parents to provide more resources to support their children's education, including access to private schools, after-school and summer school programs and more support for learning within the home. In addition, students whose parents monitor and regulate their activities, provide emotional support, encourage independent decision-making (known as *authoritative parenting style*) and are generally more involved in their schooling are less likely to drop out of school (Rumberger et al., 1990; Rumberger, 1995). It has also been found that students in single-parent and step-families are more likely to drop out of school than students in two-parent families.

Schools

It is widely acknowledged that schools exert powerful influences on student achievement, including dropout rates. Four types of school characteristics influence student performance: social composition of the schools, structural characteristics, school resources, and school policies and practices (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

The social composition of schools – the characteristics of students attending the schools, particularly the socioeconomic composition of the student body – predicts dropping out even after controlling for the individual factors that influence dropping out.

The second characteristic has to do with the *structural characteristics of schools*, such as size, location and school control (public versus private) (McNeal, 1997; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Dropout rates from Catholic and other private schools are lower than dropout rates from public schools, even after controlling for differences in the background characteristics of students. Yet students from private schools typically transfer to public schools instead of or before

dropping out, so that student turnover rates in private schools are not statistically different to turnover rates in public schools. Smaller schools also have lower dropout rates. What is less clear is whether structural characteristics themselves account for these differences or whether they are related to differences in student characteristics and school resources often associated with the structural features of schools.

The third type of characteristic concerns *school resources*. Resources, in particular student/teacher ratios and teacher quality, appear to influence dropout rates even after controlling for a host of individual and contextual factors that might also influence dropout rates.

The final characteristic type has to do with *school policies and practices*. In particular, academic and social climate – as measured by school attendance rates, students taking advanced courses, and student perceptions of a fair discipline policy – predict school dropout rates, even after controlling for the background characteristics of students as well as the resource and structural characteristics of schools.

School factors contribute to student withdrawal in two ways. One way is indirectly, by creating conditions that influence student engagement and their *voluntary* withdrawal from school. Another way is directly, through explicit policies and conscious decisions by school personnel that cause students to *involuntarily* withdraw from school. These rules and actions may concern low grades, poor attendance, misbehaviour, or being over-age and may lead to students being forced to transfer to another regular or ‘alternative’ high school designed for students who do not fit into the regular school. This form of withdrawal is school-initiated and contrasts with the student-initiated form mentioned above. Some schools, for example, contribute to students’ involuntary departure from school by systematically excluding and discharging ‘troublemakers’ and other problematic students (Fine, 1991; Riehl, 1999).

Communities

In addition to families and schools, communities can influence students’ withdrawal from school. Differences in neighbourhood characteristics can help explain differences in dropout rates among communities, apart from the influence of families (Clark, 1992; Crane, 1991). Some evidence suggests that there is a threshold or tipping point on the quality of neighbourhoods that results in particularly high dropout rates in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Poor communities may influence child and adolescent development through the lack of resources (playgrounds and parks, after-school programs) or negative peer influences (Hallinan & Williams, 1990; Wilson, 1987). Community residents may also influence parenting practices over and above parental education and income. Students living in poor communities may also be more likely to have dropouts as friends, which increases the likelihood of dropping out of school.

Another way that communities can influence dropout rates is by providing employment opportunities both during and after school. Relatively favourable employment opportunities for high school dropouts, as evidenced by low neighbourhood

unemployment rates, appears to increase the likelihood that students will drop out, while more favourable economic returns to graduating, as evidenced by higher salaries of high school graduates compared to dropouts, tend to lower dropout rates (Clark, 1992; Bickel & Papagiannis, 1988). Working long hours outside of school can increase the likelihood of dropping out, although the impact of working in high school depends on the type of job held and on the student's gender.

Not only are settings important in influencing dropout behaviour, similar settings affect individuals differently. Why is it that some students persist in school while living in poor families or attending lower-quality schools? These different outcomes arise not only because of so-called 'objective' differences in individuals – intelligence, race or family situation – but also because of how individuals view or interpret their conditions. Thus, dropping out of school cannot be understood simply by studying the conditions of families and schools, or even the behaviours of students, but must also be understood by studying the views and interpretations of those conditions and behaviours by dropouts themselves. Anthropological studies of dropouts are based on this premise.

Finally, to understand why students drop out requires looking at school experiences and performance over a long period of time. Dropping out is more of a process than an event. Students don't suddenly drop out of school. Many dropouts show patterns of early school failure – disruptive behaviour, failing grades, repeating – that eventually lead to students giving up or being forced to leave because of poor attendance or disruptive behaviour (Alexander et al., 2001; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Cairns et al., 1989; Ensminger & Slusacick, 1992; Garnier et al., 1997; Roderick, 1993).

These three features – the contexts or settings of families, schools and communities; different interpretations of context; and school experiences over time – are all important for understanding why students (in the United States) drop out of school. In addition, dropping out must also be understood in relation to other activities or situations that youth face, such as school violence, gang involvement, teenage pregnancy and problems at home.

Responding to the Dropout Crisis

Reducing the number of dropouts has become a national policy concern – sometimes labelled a 'crisis' – both inside and outside of the government. In February 2005, the nation's governors (elected heads of state government) held a 2-day summit on high schools where Microsoft chairman Bill Gates stated:

America's high schools are obsolete. By obsolete, I don't just mean that our high schools are broken, flawed and under-funded – though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean that our high schools – even when they're working exactly as designed – cannot teach our kids what they need to know today... This isn't an accident or a flaw in the system; it is the system (Gates, 2005).

On April 9, 2006, one of the nation's leading news magazines, *Time*, featured a cover labelled *Dropout Nation* along with a number of stories about the dropout crisis in America. And Former United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and his wife

established a foundation in 1997, *America's Promise*, that is funding dropout summits in all 50 states and over 50 cities throughout the United States.

Both the government and private organisations are funding interventions to reduce dropout rates and improve high school performance. Because dropping out is influenced by both individual and institutional factors, intervention strategies focus on either or both sets of factors. *Programmatic strategies* provide would-be dropouts with additional resources and supports to help them stay in school without attempting to alter the characteristics of families, schools and communities that may place them at risk. *Institutional strategies* provide incentives, resources and supports to strengthen families, schools and communities. In addition, states have enacted a number of policies to improve high school outcomes. In general, few of these strategies to date have proven effective.

Programmatic Strategies

There are two programmatic approaches to dropout prevention. One approach is to provide supplemental services to students within an existing school program. The second approach is to provide a complete alternative school program, either within an existing comprehensive high school or in a separate facility (alternative school). Neither approach attempts to change existing institutions serving most students; instead they create alternative programs or institutions to target students who are somehow identified as being at risk of dropping out, or who have already dropped out.

Unfortunately, there is little scientific evidence on the effectiveness of these dropout interventions. One reason is that there have been relatively few rigorous evaluations of dropout intervention programs. Another reason is that the scientifically rigorous evaluations that do exist often fail to demonstrate program effectiveness. In 2002, the United States Department of Education established the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) to review scientific evidence on the effectiveness of a variety of educational interventions, including dropout interventions (United States Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2009). To date, the WWC has identified only 16 interventions with scientifically rigorous evidence: seven were effective in reducing dropout rates, six were effective in improving students' progress toward graduation (such as earning credits toward graduation), but only four programs were effective in improving high school completion rates. Moreover, none of these four programs were effective in helping students earn a regular high school diploma; rather they helped students earn an equivalent diploma by passing the General Educational Development (GED) test.

Institutional Strategies

Institutional strategies have the potential to reduce dropping out for a much larger number of students by improving some of the environmental factors in families,

schools and communities that contribute to dropout behaviour. Although the promise of systemic solutions to the dropout problem is great, the reality is not. The reason is simply that systemic changes are extremely difficult to achieve because they involve making fundamental changes in the way institutions work individually and within the system in which they are a part.

One institutional approach is to reform existing high schools under the assumption that as the school itself is not performing adequately for most students, then programmatic approaches would be insufficient to bring about the substantial improvement in student outcomes and high school performance. The most widespread approach for reforming existing high schools is known as comprehensive school reform (CSR). This approach involves multiple strategies to alter all facets of a school and 'is built on the premise that unified, coherent, and integrated strategies for improvement, knitted together into a comprehensive design, will work better than the same strategies implemented in isolation from each other' (United States Department of Education, 2002, p. 1).

Yet few CSR models have proven effective. A United States Department of Education centre, the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, found only 16 models that met their standards for rigorous evaluations: 10 were found to produce positive effects in student achievement, but only three were found to provide positive effects in dropout and graduation rates (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2006). An independent review of 10 comprehensive school reform models where at least half of the reform focused on secondary schools found only two evaluations conducted by outside evaluators that showed significant improvements in student outcomes (Borman et al., 2003). And the What Works Clearinghouse review of four CSR or new school models found that only one was effective at keeping students in school, two were effective in helping students progress in school, and none were effective in helping students to complete school (United States Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse, 2008).

One of the CSR models and one of the programmatic strategies found to be effective at keeping students in school utilised career and technical education as a component of the model. There is a growing interest among some educators and policy-makers to support and encourage different approaches – known as 'multiple pathways' – to help students meet rigorous academic standards, including career and technical programs and project-based learning (American Diploma Project, 2007; Oakes & Saunders, 2008). The idea is not to offer alternative credentials, but rather alternative ways to meet the requirements for a high school diploma.

Another institutional approach for improving high school performance is to close, rather than redesign, low-performing schools and replace them with new schools. The strategy is often coupled with creating a particular type of new school known as a 'charter school' – public schools that are established and managed outside the regular public education system, and that are freed from most of the regulations and requirements of regular public schools. Charter schools were established to provide choice within the public school system, to spur educational innovation, to create competition as a way to improve non-charter schools, and to improve student achievement. The extent to which charter schools have achieved those goals has

been the subject of intense and often partisan debate (Carnoy et al., 2005; Finn et al., 2000; Henig, 2008; Zimmer et al., 2009). Nonetheless, their popularity continues to grow. In 2006–07, there were 4,132 charter schools in the United States, up from 2,179 in 2003–04, with 521 of those secondary charter schools (Snyder et al., 2009, Tables 98, 101). In California alone, the number of charter high schools increased from 97 in 2000–01 to 271 in 2005–06 (Rotermund, 2007b).

The research evidence on the effectiveness of charter schools is decidedly mixed, based on two recent studies. The first study examined 669 charter schools in five districts located within five different states, and state-wide in three other states, and found that middle and high school charters are producing achievement gains that are, on average, neither substantially better nor substantially worse than those of traditional public schools (Zimmer et al., 2009). The second study examined charter school performance in 15 states and the District of Columbia and found that 46% of the charter schools had mathematics gains that were indistinguishable from the average gains among matched students who attended traditional public schools (TPS), 17% had gains that exceeded the growth in TPS, and 37% had gains significantly below those in TPS (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2009).

Efforts to reform other institutions that serve at-risk youth have also proved more difficult. One ambitious systemic reform effort was the New Futures Initiative, promoted and funded by the Annie E. Casey foundation beginning in 1988 (White & Wehlage, 1995). New Futures was an attempt to build new collaborative structures among existing public and private institutions in five cities (Dayton, Ohio; Lawrence, Massachusetts; Little Rock, Arkansas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Savannah, Georgia) to address the problems of at-risk youth, including school dropout. The key strategy was to establish an oversight collaborative in each city with representation from public and private sector agencies to ‘identify youth problems, develop strategies, and set timelines for addressing these problems, coordinate joint agency activities, and restructure educational and social services’ (White & Wehlage, 1995, p. 24). These collaborative organisations also included case managers who (1) brokered services among the disparate agencies serving at-risk youth and their families; (2) served as advocates for at-risk youth; and (3) served as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the collaboratives by providing information and feedback to the group about what reforms were needed. Evaluations of this ambitious, systemic reform effort found that it did little to reduce dropout rates and other problems of at-risk youth. As with other systemic reform efforts, the evaluations found little incentive or support from the intervention for changing the fundamental functioning of schools.

Systemic Reform Strategies

Three systemic reforms are designed to improve high school performance. One is to raise high school graduation requirements, either by increasing the number and rigor

of courses needed to receive a diploma or by requiring students to pass a high school exit exam. Although earlier research studies found no or limited effects of exit exams, more recent studies have found that high school exit exams have lowered high school completion rates, especially among low-achieving students (Reardon et al., 2009).

Another systemic reform is to raise the compulsory schooling age to 18 (Bridgeland et al., 2008). A recent review of several studies that examined the relationship between the state compulsory schooling age and dropout or graduation rates found that states with higher compulsory schooling ages had lower dropout rates or higher graduation rates (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

A third systemic reform strategy to improve high school performance is establishing dual enrolment programs, which allow high school students to take college classes while still completing their high school diploma. In 2003, 71% of United States high schools offered dual enrolment courses with more than one million students enrolled (Snyder et al., 2009, Table 152). A rigorous evaluation of one such program found that it did not improve dropout or graduation rates (Dynarski & Gleason, 1998).

Conclusion

Improving graduation rates has become a national concern in the United States. The federal and state governments, along with many private foundations, are pouring millions of dollars into dropout prevention programs and high school reform efforts. By and large, those efforts, at least to date, have not been successful.

Successfully addressing the dropout problem in the United States will require both capacity and will. Capacity requires technical expertise to develop and implement effective dropout prevention and recovery programs, as well as more ambitious systemic school reforms. While some schools have such capacity, most require additional resources, technical expertise, and incentives to restructure the existing schools. Such solutions have been tried, but have not succeeded. Research suggests why systemic reforms of schools and other agencies serving youth are problematic, but not how to address them.

The development of such capacity will require political will; but even with the will to reform schools, it is unlikely that the United States will ever eliminate disparities in dropout rates among racial and ethnic groups without eliminating disparities in the resources of families, schools and communities. To the extent that dropping out is a social and not just an educational problem, then effective solutions must address changes in families and communities as well as schools. But the more comprehensive the scope of change, the more difficult the change becomes. Ultimately, the ability to 'solve' the dropout problem in the United States may depend more on the country's ability to address widespread inequalities in the larger social and economic system (Rothstein, 2004).

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Chapter 14

Educational Systems and School Dropout in Canada

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Introduction

Describing pathways of school graduation and dropout in Canada is no simple task. Canada is a confederation of ten provinces and three territories,¹ each responsible for their educational structure and curriculum, from pre-school to post-secondary education, including technical and vocational education. There is no federal ministry of education, nor are there national standards for graduation qualifications, making it difficult to describe the educational system in Canada. Each province and territory is characterised by a unique geopolitical, socio-demographic, cultural, historical, linguistic,² migration, labour and economic profile. Over time, these unique patterns have been incorporated into the structure, curriculum, assessment and accountability policies across educational jurisdictions (Council of Ministers of Education Canada [CMEC], 2008).

Discussions of schooling in the context of graduation/dropout tend to be focused on the ability of the education system to provide youth with the tools and opportunities they need to take part in the labour force. Indeed, although many jurisdictions are implementing reformed programs with broader human development

¹Over half of the Canadian population is centred in Ontario or Quebec, and a very small proportion of Canadians live in the territories. Out of the approximate five million full-time equivalent enrolments across Canadian public elementary and secondary schools during the 2004/05 school year, about two million occurred in Ontario and one million in Quebec. More than 99% of the population (31 million inhabitants) live in one of the ten provinces. Canadian children and adolescents (5–19 years old) comprise 19% of the population.

²French and English are both official languages, and while all jurisdictions give access to public education in either language, few Francophones live outside Quebec. Just on 67.6% of the population speak English only, 13.3% speak French only, and 17.4% speak both French and English. More than 85% of French-mother-tongue Canadians live in the province of Quebec while only 4% of Anglophone Canadians live in Quebec (Census Canada, 2006).

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and socio-emotional aims, there is a clear preoccupation within the Canadian educational system to align students' educational experiences with the needs of the labour market. In response, there have been transformations in the programs and policies aiming to better prepare students for transition out of secondary school and into the labour market or on to further post-secondary education.

In order to situate the graduation/dropout experience in Canada within an international context, this chapter begins by highlighting the challenges inherent when constructing statistics that attempt to capture a single 'Canadian reality' by revealing the distinctiveness between jurisdictions. Once this variation is clarified, the discussion then identifies the commonalities among jurisdictions and in this respect, the aim is to draw a broad picture of the graduation/dropout situation in Canada, to identify principal determinants, and to describe some of the most important government initiatives to foster school success. The discussion begins by recalling the general structure of compulsory and post-compulsory education in Canada.

Compulsory and Post-Compulsory Education in Canada

Pre-School to Secondary Education

Subtle differences can be found in the organisation of the pre-school, elementary, secondary and post-secondary education systems across Canada (Fig. 14.1). Pre-school begins for most Canadian children 1 year prior to Grade 1, at between 4 and 5 years of age (in the form of junior and senior kindergarten, respectively). All Canadian children have access to pre-school; however, with the exception of two provinces (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) schooling prior to Grade 1 is not mandatory. In some provinces, public school is offered 2 years prior to Grade 1 (Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba), and in some cases, 3 years prior to Grade 1 (Saskatchewan, Alberta). Beyond the regular pre-school programs, some jurisdictions offer pre-school programs to students who are disabled or at high risk of school failure.

The total duration of (compulsory) schooling is 12 years for all Canadian youth, with some exceptions: (1) in Quebec, combined elementary and secondary schooling lasts 11 years;³ and (2) in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, students are mandated to 13 years of education (due to pre-elementary education requirements).⁴ Some jurisdictions mandate a middle school transition for students (i.e., Nova Scotia), whereas others leave middle school to the discretion of their districts. Thus, the amount of time students spend in high school ranges from 3 to 5 years. Students are generally mandated by law to stay in school until the age of 16 (or graduation) with two exceptions: in New Brunswick and Ontario the mandatory school leaving

³The typical age of graduation is thus 17 in Quebec, whereas it is 18 across all other jurisdictions.

⁴While pre-elementary schooling is not mandatory in the majority of jurisdictions, the overwhelming majority of children do attend pre-elementary schooling (i.e., 'senior and/or junior kindergarten' or *maternelle* in Quebec).

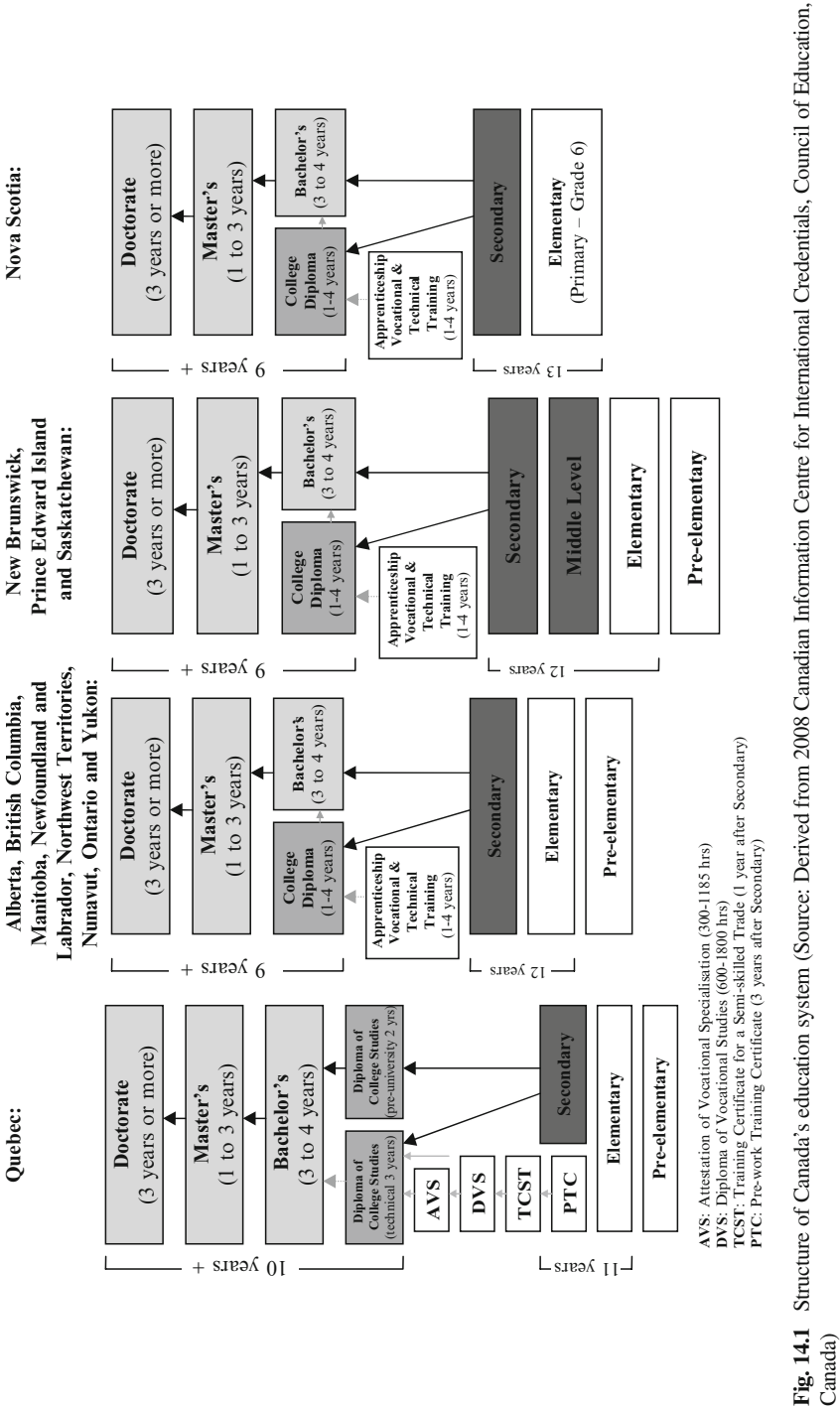


Fig. 14.1 Structure of Canada's education system (Source: Derived from 2008 Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, Council of Education, Canada)

age is 18. These extensions to the mandatory school leaving age are recent: since 2000 for New Brunswick, and since 2006 for Ontario.⁵

International comparisons highlight institutional differentiation (i.e., students following discrete academic, professional or vocational streams attend different schools) and segregation (i.e., students attend separate schools according to academic performance, religion, ethnicity or socioeconomic status) (Lamb, 2008). Public Canadian schools are largely comprehensive; that is, students following a range of academic, professional or vocational programs are found within the same school and segregation according to performance, religion or socioeconomic status is minimal.⁶ Segregation according to religion and language can be found in some jurisdictions such as Ontario and Quebec, respectively. Some segregation also exists with respect to entrance requirement for independent, private or special needs schools. Alternative schools cater to students with unique cognitive or behavioural challenges or offer a distinct curricular approach and give students more independence or provide additional instruction in language, arts or sports. However, the majority of programs that target special needs or high achievers (e.g., sports, dance, students with learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural disorders) are embedded within the mainstream secondary school curriculum.

It follows that the separation of students along academic lines occurs at the conclusion of secondary school, with the exception of Quebec. In Quebec, three different vocational programs are also offered as an alternative to an academic route. These programs last from 1 to 2 years and orient students either directly to the labour force or towards specialised technical and vocational education (TVE).⁷ Aside from Quebec, Canada can be generally classified with countries which postpone the point at which students choose a particular branch or type of schooling. While students who obtain a secondary school diploma may choose to enter directly into the labour market or pursue post-secondary training, the secondary system in Canada tends to espouse values suggesting that 'good students' seek university-type tertiary education. Indeed, this has been identified as a key issue in Canada's 'dropout problem' (de Broucker, 2005).

⁵Extending the compulsory school attendance is identified as having the potential to have positive effects for all young people, especially young women. Several Canadian policy researchers, however, believe that this policy requires other supporting system changes to enhance interest among students to remain in school and to deter employers from hiring youth who are required to be in school (Oreaopolous, 2005; de Broucker, 2005).

⁶While we use the term 'segregation' to facilitate international comparisons, we acknowledge that with the exception of Quebec and for private and independent schools, families choose to enrol their children into religious or language-specific schools, many of them – depending on the province – being fully publicly funded. This being said, if not enrolled in a private or independent school, students are often obligated to attend the school in their neighbourhood where the composition of that school typically reflects the socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood. Choice is, however, restricted in Quebec where Quebec-born and immigrant families are obligated by law to enrol their children in the French-language educational system, unless one of the parents attended an English-language school in Canada (for Canadian citizens) or in Quebec (for immigrants).

⁷In Quebec, 17% of secondary school students are enrolled in a TVE. Information regarding the proportion of secondary students enrolled in TVE in other jurisdictions is not available.

Post-Secondary Education

Public (and private) colleges, specialised institutes, community colleges, institutes of technology, etc., offer a range of vocation-oriented programs in a wide variety of professional and technical fields, including business, health, applied arts, technology and social services. In some jurisdictions, post-secondary programs can overlap with secondary education programs, whereby students obtain ‘dual-credits’ or participate in joint work/study programs. Universities and university colleges focus on degree programs but may also offer some professional diplomas and certificates which permit entry into a specialised skill or professional order.

Secondary school graduates choosing college or university rarely pass through a preparatory college to get to university. The exception is in Quebec, where the majority of university students (83%) transition through an institution known as CEGEP (Hango & de Broucker, 2007). CEGEP is a French acronym for *Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel*, meaning ‘College of General and Vocational Education’. The CEGEP was established in 1967 by the Quebec government with the purpose of improving access to post-secondary education. Training at the CEGEP level is either 2 or 3 years. Students wishing to pursue university attend a 2-year pre-university program, and those enrolled in specialised vocational training enrol in a 3-year program.

Alternative Pathways

Alternative pathways are provided to students who are either unable or uninterested in the typical high school education pathway leading to university or college (Lamb, 2008). As depicted in Fig. 14.1, Canadian secondary schools do indeed expect that the majority of students will transition directly from secondary school to a tertiary institution. Alternative pathways are typically followed by (1) students who want to focus upon TVE during their high school education, or (2) students who return to school to complete their formation, often in pursuit of a post-secondary program.

In Canada, the integration of alternative pathways into the regular secondary program is limited, with the exception of Quebec where TVE qualifications are part of the curriculum. Manitoba and Alberta also formally recognise a TVE specialisation – however in contrast to Quebec, no distinct qualification is offered. Apprenticeship and other TVE⁸ programs are in fact part of all Canadian jurisdictions; still,

⁸TVE programs can vary in length from less than 1 year to 3 years, and entrance requirements do not necessarily require students to have a secondary school diploma. These students may however be awarded a certificate of achievement, and in this case would not be considered dropouts. Alternatively, if a certificate is not awarded from the high school, but sufficient credits were acquired to pursue a TVE program, the student would not be counted as a secondary school graduate.

important variation can be found within and between jurisdictions regarding their development and elaboration. For example, the program in Saskatchewan focuses on developing skills in a practical context and articulating with apprenticeship programs where applicable, while in Ontario and British Columbia, formalised programs which combine post-secondary courses and/or apprenticeships allow students to begin earning income and/or credits toward a vocation while in secondary school. Variation between jurisdictions in terms of the availability of TVE secondary school programs can have an impact on graduation rate, whereby students who are not offered this option may drop out of school in pursuit of vocational aspirations. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the integration of TVE into normative curricula is a rapidly evolving theme in Canada.

A second form of alternative pathway corresponds more to an ‘external diversification strategy’ (Lamb, 2008). In Canada, this strategy is referred to as a ‘second chance’ program, also known as Continuing or Adult Education.⁹ The second chance program aims at the reintegration of students (typically in their adult years) who did not graduate. In principle, second chance programs emphasise flexible, student-focused learning and close relationships between students and teachers. School systems encourage the reintegration of older students by offering various alternative support programs as well as offering credits based on the accumulation of ‘life’ experiences, such as advancement in reading, travel and work. Quebec has legislated two sectors of education, a youth sector and an adult sector. After the age of 16, students may choose to go to a school in the adult sector. While this permits youth dropouts an interesting alternative, as discussed later, this also introduces challenges to the adult sector which may be less equipped to deal with the special needs of these students.

While, in theory, Continuing or Adult Education targets adults who return to school based on a specific objective, in practice this sector is responding to a growing proportion of young adults as a means to complete a high school diploma. In this regard, second chance programs risk encouraging students to leave their regular secondary school prior to completing a qualification (Lamb, 2008). When the second chance system is recognised among youth as being less authoritative and ‘controlling’ than the typical high school, students may leave high school with the intention of returning to school in the Adult Education sector. The ‘freedom’ and ‘flexibility’ provided in the Adult Education system may be well suited to some young adults, but nonetheless many students risk becoming ‘lost’ in the system, which tends to approach education from more of a ‘laissez-faire’ philosophy. As highlighted by Looker and Thiessen (2008), the Continuing or Adult Education system is not designed to motivate students who are struggling, but rather depends on students’ self-motivation and independence. While there appears to be a need for a program for students who do not complete high school within the typical timeframe, in

⁹Depending upon the jurisdiction, the sector of Continuing or Adult Education may or may not be located within the Ministry of Education. This sector has two aims: to increase access for adults who wish to upgrade their qualifications and also to provide a second chance to young adult dropouts.

reality, ‘...in Canada it is often the students who pursue their “second chance” rather than the system specifically giving them a second chance’ (Looker & Thiessen, 2008, p.7).

First-Nation Education Structure

Finally, attention must also be given to the small proportion of Canadian students who fall outside provincial jurisdiction, mainly Aboriginal students.¹⁰ In particular, while First Nation students represent a very small proportion of Canadian students (1.3%) this is the fastest growing population in Canada. Moreover, regions of Canada where the majority of First Nations peoples live are also those with the highest prevalence of dropout. Thus, the distinctiveness of Aboriginal education represents a significant part of the landscape in Canada. The educational experience has changed dramatically over the past few decades. In the not-so-distant past, Aboriginal children had to move away from their community into religious schools for assimilation purposes. In contrast, Aboriginal communities today enforce their self-governing rights. The overwhelming majority of Aboriginal schools are under First Nation management (98%), and First Nations peoples are developing diploma credentials, teacher certification programs and decision-making structures, all of which are independent of federal and provincial jurisdiction. Aboriginal children complete elementary education close to their homes, on their territorial land reserves. Overall, approximately 40% of Aboriginal students complete their secondary education off reserve in provincial schools; however, this rate goes up to 70% in densely populated jurisdictions such as Ontario, where reserves are often close to urban centres. Aboriginal students going on to post-secondary studies are supported for tuition, books and living allowances.

The High School Diploma in Canada: Forms and Requirements

The Minister of Education within each jurisdiction has the legal authority to define the form and requirements for secondary school graduation, and in so doing, maintains standards at a national level. The Minister delegates to local authorities (school boards/districts/divisions) power to administer (buildings, personnel, students’ enrolment and graduation diplomas), structure and implement curriculum,

¹⁰First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples constitute Canada’s Aboriginal population. First Nations is a term that refers to the Canadian Indian bands which are recognised as collectivities of Indians ‘for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Canadian Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act’ (<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/fn/index-eng.asp>).

and select from different programs or initiatives. Thus, jurisdictions differ among each other with respect to requirements and options provided to secondary school students toward completion of a high school diploma. Embedded into this variation, there is a range of solutions aiming to engage students in their educational experience and to validate this experience with legitimate credentials.

The only Canadian law that dictates jurisdictional functioning is the right of Canadian citizens to attend an institution of their maternal tongue (i.e., French or English). Northern territories are further mandated through national and territorial law to provide education in the Official Language.¹¹ Immersion programs provide students with instruction for the acquisition of two language proficiencies (typically in English and French, but can also include a Native language). Bilingualism is not a requirement in Canada.

Overall, the academic curriculum in Canada is prescribed; core subjects are required for all students to pass with a minimum grade. Core subjects are combined with optional (or elective) subjects (or credits) where the proportion of prescribed credits ranges from 50% to 80%, with the exception of New Brunswick (35%). Required credits tend to be based on building mathematics, language, social studies and science proficiencies. Several jurisdictions further prescribe physical activity (or health), art, career planning, life management and applied skills.

When students do not fulfil the requirements for a diploma they may graduate with a certificate of achievement. This qualification is clearly differentiated from the full diploma. In some jurisdictions, a certificate of achievement is uniquely given to students with special needs, whereas in others, its attribution is more flexible. In this latter circumstance, more decision-making latitude is attributed to districts and schools. This distinction can have an impact on the graduation rate, whereby jurisdictions with a more lenient approach to awarding certificates could be expected to have higher graduation rates.

Patterns of School Graduation and Dropout in Canada

The Canadian educational system's performance is ranked highly internationally, with respect to indicators of the overall educational attainment of the general population and the mathematics, reading and science capacities of youth (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2007; Bussière et al., 2007). Judging the performance of Canada's educational system (both internationally and nationally) with graduation or dropout rate indicators has been, and remains, a challenge. Certainly, the diversities among educational systems across Canada have an influence on the way jurisdictions calculate a graduation rate. The challenges experienced by Canada in obtaining a collective measure, together with the

¹¹There are 11 Official Languages in the North West Territories and the language of instruction is a decision which is taken at the level of the district and/or school. Here, when an Official Language other than English is the language of instruction, English as a language must be part of the education program.

development of a new survey methodology at the turn of the century, precluded the harmonisation of a Canadian statistic with that of the methodology used in the OECD *Education at a Glance* (EAG) Report. However more recent developments in this area have resulted in a Canadian statistic appearing in the 2008 EAG Report.

Calculating Canada's Graduation/Dropout Rate: What are the Challenges?

A key issue that has challenged the production of a national performance indicator for graduation rates is associated with change. Jurisdictions have been challenged to adjust performance indicators to capture a process which is continually adapting to local conditions, which themselves are unstable. An important adjustment in Ontario – namely the elimination of Grade 13 – resulted in data from Ontario (prior to 2008) also being inadmissible in calculating the overall Canadian graduation rate. Another change that has challenged the counting of graduates is the increasing number of students who pursue alternative pathways, such as Continuing or Adult Education or technical and vocational education (TVE). With the exception of Quebec, students who only take the courses required for TVE or alternative secondary school certificates have been excluded from the graduate count. This is why, up until now, data from Quebec have been excluded from the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program (PCEIP) (Canadian Education Studies Council [CESC], 2008).¹² The statistic harmonised to the EAG Report includes graduates from trade/vocational secondary programs as well as upgrading programs at the secondary level across all jurisdictions, including Quebec.

Jurisdictions prefer to use methods of calculating graduation/dropout rates which reflect the internal mechanisms and underlying philosophies of their system. For example, some regions monitor the graduation/dropout rates based on the follow-up of cohorts of students (i.e., British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario); others aggregate transversal annual data (i.e., Manitoba, Nova Scotia); and still others (i.e., New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Northern Territories) uniquely report the OECD graduation rate definition.

Canada's Graduation and Dropout Rates

Graduation Rate

The current overall graduation rate in Canada is estimated at 72.1% (see Table 14.1). Inter-jurisdictional rates range from a low of 28.4% in the northern territories to a high of 86.0% in the eastern Atlantic Provinces (Blouin, 2008). These rates are not

¹²The 2009 PCEIP report will provide a Canadian measure with the inclusion of data from Quebec.

Table 14.1 Canadian secondary school graduation rates, dropout rates and PISA reading and mathematics performance measures

	Graduation rate ^a 2005/2006	Dropout rate ^b 2007	PISA reading ^c 2006 Average (SE)	PISA Math ^d 2006 Average (SE)
OECD Average	(82.0) ⁺	(14.7) ^e	491 (0.6)	498 (0.5)
Canada	72.1	9.2	527 (2.4)	527 (2.0)
Newfoundland and Labrador	79.4	10.2	514 (3.2)	507 (2.5)
Prince Edward Island	86.0	10.0	497 (2.8)	501 (2.3)
Nova Scotia	82.3	11.1	505 (3.5)	506 (2.3)
New Brunswick	85.7	9.0	497 (2.3)	506 (2.1)
Quebec	76.4	11.4	522 (5.0)	540 (4.2)
Ontario	70.4	8.2	534 (4.6)	526 (3.7)
Manitoba	74.6	12.9	516 (3.5)	521 (3.3)
Saskatchewan	83.9	8.4	507 (4.2)	507 (3.3)
Alberta	67.9	9.8	535 (4.2)	530 (3.8)
British Columbia	73.9	6.7	528 (5.7)	523 (4.4)
Yukon	66.8	–	–	–
Northwest Territories	62.2	–	–	–
Nunuvut	28.4	–	–	–

^aGraduation Rate = Total secondary graduates/(total population 17 and 18 years of age/2). Includes first time graduates only, excludes private school graduates, excludes graduates of upgrading programs at post-secondary levels (Blouin, 2008)

^bDropout rate = Proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds reporting not to have completed high school and not to be in school completing a high school or post-secondary formation (Elias & de Broucker, 2008)

^cPISA performance measures <http://www.cmec.ca/pisa/2006/indexe.stm>

^dOECD Average graduation rate includes private schools whereas Canadian rates do not (OECD Education at a Glance 2007). Please note that the Canada rate includes an estimate for private schools and is harmonised with the OECD rate for the Education at a Glance 2008 Report

^eOECD Average dropout rate is based on reference year 2002 (Education at a Glance 2005)

directly comparable to the international OECD averages since the OECD figures include estimates for private and independent schools. When this key methodological adjustment is made (i.e., inclusion of graduates from private and independent schools) the overall Canadian average goes up to 80%¹³ (OECD, 2008).

Owing to methodological adaptations over time, interpreting inter-jurisdictional changes in graduation rates based on PCEIP estimates must be done with caution. That said, reported changes over the past decade are low (no more than 7%) in all jurisdictions with the exception of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, where improvements are noteworthy (24% and 36% respectively) (Blouin, 2008).

¹³Public schools represent 93% of all Canadian students. Overall, 12% of schools are private in Canada. The number of private school ranges across jurisdictions: in Quebec, British Columbia, Ontario and Manitoba rates are higher (22%, 19%, 14% and 14%, respectively) than in the rest of Canada where the number of private schools ranges from 0% to 5% (CESC, 2008).

When making international comparisons, it is noteworthy that Canada's graduates almost all complete programs designed to prepare students for direct entry to tertiary study (77%), and very few graduate from vocational-type programs (8%) (OECD, 2008). This is consistent with the characterisation of the Canadian secondary school diploma as offering little differentiation in formal qualifications.

High School Completion Rates Based on Cohorts

Following a cohort of students from secondary school entry to graduation represents the ideal approach to deriving comparable statistics on graduation/dropout rates. Statistics of this nature include students who do not complete high school within the typical timeframe (4 or 5 years) by following them over time (from 4 to 6 years). Reporting an overall Canadian completion rate is not possible as: (1) not all provinces collect these data; and (2) those that do, do not use the same methodology (e.g., jurisdictions may follow cohorts beginning anywhere between Grades 8 and 10 for a time period ranging from 4 to 6 years). With these caveats in mind, it can be seen from Table 14.2 that approximately 75–80% of Canadian students complete high school within 5 years, with the exception of Quebec (69%).

Dropout Rate

Distinct from graduation rate, the dropout rate has served as an important performance indicator in Canada since the beginning of the 1990s. The dropout rate is defined as the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds who have not successfully completed upper secondary school and who are not enrolled in education or in a work study program (OECD, 2005). Canadian policy researchers tend to prefer the dropout rate over the graduation rate, as the former captures the proportion of the population with limited job market prospects and compromised potential for long-term well-being (de Broucker, 2005). Moreover, the dropout rate takes into consideration that youth who do not graduate at the typical age of graduation may indeed return to school and graduate during young adulthood.

While some variation can be found in the definition of dropout¹⁴ a fairly consistent approach permits rates of dropout to be compared over time among Canadian provinces (data are not collected in the three northern territories) and internationally. Data are derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), a household survey querying

¹⁴This definition of dropout excludes individuals who, despite not having completed a secondary school diploma, completed a PSE diploma. When the definition of dropout is adjusted to include individuals 20–24 years of age who have a PSE diploma in the numerator, the estimated dropout rate is higher by approximately 2–3 percentage points (Raymond, 2008).

Table 14.2 Canadian high school completion rates (cohort rates) where available across jurisdictions

Province	Methodology	Year	Per cent
British Columbia			
	Six year high school completion rate	1996/97	77
	Calculated by following students for 6 years from the time they enrol in <i>Grade 8</i>	2000/01	79
Alberta			
	Five year high school completion rate	1998/99	75.2
	Calculated by following students for 5 years from the time they enrol in <i>Grade 10</i>	2002/03	79.5
Saskatchewan			
	Five year high school completion rate	1999/2000	80.3
	Percent of students in a cohort starting in <i>Grade 10</i> who complete <i>Grade 12</i> within 5 years	2001/02	79.8
Manitoba			
	Four year high school completion rate	June 2003	74.3
	Percent of students completing <i>Grade 12</i> as a percentage of <i>Grade 9</i> enrolments 4 years earlier	June 2006	77.1
Ontario			
	Five year high school completion rate	1999/2000	68
	Percentage of students who graduated within 5 years after starting <i>Grade 9</i>	2001/02	73
Quebec			
	Five year high school completion rate	2001/02	68
	Calculated by following students from the time they enrol in <i>Grade 7</i> , and before they get to the age of 20	2006/07	69
Nova Scotia			
	Four year high school completion rate	2002/03	81.6
	Percent of students completing <i>Grade 12</i> as a percentage of <i>Grade 9</i> enrolments 4 years earlier	2006/07	84.8

families¹⁵ on a range of employment and employability topics, including educational attainment and school attendance.

The overall dropout rate for Canada for 2007 is estimated at 9.2%¹⁶ (see Table 14.1; updates provided by Elias & de Broucker, Statistics Canada, 2008). Inter-jurisdictional ranges (excluding northern territories) are from a low of 6.7% in British Columbia to a high of 12.9% in Manitoba. The average dropout rate has

¹⁵Sampling consists of approximately 54,000 households at any point in time. Households are interviewed monthly for a 6-month period after which a new household is sampled in and similarly followed for 6 months.

¹⁶Rates for 2007 are calculated slightly differently from rates calculated for OECD reports. This slightly modified definition of dropout includes those who reported to be in school in a program defined as 'other'. Formerly, these individuals were considered to be in school and thus not to be dropouts.

improved over the last decade in Canada. Early in the 1990s, the estimated 3-year average was 15.7% (1990–91 to 1992–93). This rate fell to 10.1% for the 3-year estimate early in the current decade (2002–03 to 2004–05) (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002). There has been a good deal of fluctuation over time regarding the ranking of provinces; however, Quebec and Manitoba have maintained the highest (between 11.4% and 13.9%), and British Columbia the lowest (between 6.7% and 7.7%) dropout rates over the past 5 years (Elias & de Broucker, 2008). Dropout rates have not significantly changed in the eastern Maritime Provinces. Reductions in the dropout rate in Alberta are notable: the rate was among the highest in 2003 (13.9%) and declined to be just above the Canadian average (9.8%) in 2007.

Relations Between Graduation, Dropout Rates and Learning

Graduation and dropout rates must be analysed cautiously as indicators of the quality of Canadian educational systems. For example, using the data presented in Table 14.1, there is no correlation between the graduation rate (among the 17-year-old population) and the dropout rate (20- to 24-year-olds) ($r = 0.06$, $n = 10$). While this may be due in part to the bias that accompanies indicators derived from self-reported surveys (i.e., Labour Force Survey), it might also reflect important systematic difference across provinces in relation to the second-chance and alternative pathway programs. Moreover, when examining the relation between the provincial graduation and dropout rates, together with the average PISA scores of their students (see Table 14.1), there is an almost perfect *negative* association between PISA performance measures and the graduation rate ($r = -0.97$ (Reading) and $r = -0.81$ (Mathematics); $p < 0.001$, $n = 10$). While one might think that reflects a bias due to poor performers leaving the educational system early (i.e., prior to the age of 15 when the PISA is measured), this does not seem to be the case. There is no significant correlation between the dropout rates and PISA scores ($r = -0.21$ (Reading) and $r = 0.09$ (Mathematics); $p > 0.50$, $n = 10$) and this is consistent with the fact that dropout tends to occur closer to the senior years of high school (16–17 years old).

Rate of ‘Continuers’ Returning to School After Dropping Out

Canadian statistics also monitor the rate with which students who drop out then return to school (i.e., rate of ‘continuers’). Statistics derived from the Labour Force Survey reveal that the proportion of dropouts returning to school has increased over time. In 1990–91, 10% and 12% of men and women, respectively, between the ages of 20 and 24 years had returned to school after having dropped out of high school. This proportion increased to 16% for men and 22% for women in 2004–05 (Raymond, 2008). Nonetheless, an increasingly large proportion of young adults who return to school do not complete their high school diploma, but

instead choose to seek a post-secondary diploma or degree. This, as noted earlier, tends to overestimate the dropout rate as an indicator of education failure. During 2004–05, 36% of men and 31% of women returned to school to complete a high school diploma (these proportions were 57% and 44% in 1997–98) (Raymond, 2008). It must be further noted that a large proportion of students who return to school do not graduate. Overall, an estimated 40% of those who dropped out between the ages of 18 and 20 and who had returned to school, had left school again within 2 years without completing their certification (Raymond, 2008).

Quebec's educational system, distinct in Canada due to a separation of the adult and youth sector, is often referred to in terms of a 'strong' Canadian second-chance program, having the highest proportion of second-chance students (or continuers) in Canada. An estimated 14% of all Canadian 18- to 20-year-old dropouts return to complete their schooling within 2 years, while in Quebec this rate is 23% (Bushnick et al., 2004).¹⁷ A Quebec longitudinal study based on a 1986 cohort of kindergarten students found that while one third of students had not obtained a high school by the age of 20, roughly two thirds of them were enrolled in night courses or adult professional training. Further follow-up revealed that one third of these students had indeed obtained a diploma by the age of 23 (Vitaro et al., 2005).

Finally, it is worthwhile noting that youths who have left school for at least a full year (they must be aged 16 or over in Quebec, and 18 or 19 years of age or over in the other provinces) can pass a Canadian version of the General Educational Development (GED) test. This internationally recognised credential administered by the American Council on Education can be used as an 'equivalent' high school diploma for employers and, in some cases, may be accepted for entry into post-secondary institutions. Nevertheless, the use of GED in Canada is relatively recent and still of marginal use by adult learners (around 3% of adults learners in larger provinces like British Columbia or Ontario are estimated to participate in GED testing) (Myers & de Broucker, 2006). According to available information, GED results are not taken into consideration in the calculation of dropout and graduation rates in Canada.

Determinants of School Graduation and Dropout in Canada

No single theory dominates the Canadian literature on school dropout, but several conceptual frameworks are recognisable. First, most Canadian research on school dropout considers secondary school dropout as a complex phenomenon whereby multiple factors (individual, social, familial, institutional, community, cultural,

¹⁷Another example: the graduation rate will rise from 69% to 85% when students 20 years of age and above are considered (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport [MELS], 2008).

socioeconomic) exert their influence over time. Second, dropping out is also considered as the ultimate end to a gradual process of disengagement. This process can begin as early as school entry, whereby the significance of school diminishes over time and students lose interest in what school is offering (Audas & Willms, 2001; Janosz et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2005; Thiessen, 2007a, b). These views are developmental as well as ecosystemic and transactional (Sameroff et al., 2004). Beliefs that school disengagement results from a misfit between school expectations and students' needs are also recognisable within a stage-environment fit theoretical framework (Eccles, 2004). The decision to return to school among young adults has also been studied through the rational decision framework based on the benefits and costs of continuing school (Chaplin et al., 2003; Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999; Parent, 2006; Raymond, 2008). This framework pays particular attention to 'intentionally temporary' and involuntary dropouts, whereby school leavers are forced to leave due to circumstances or constraints perceived as being temporary.

Governmental reports and academic studies continually reconfirm the negative impacts of leaving secondary school before graduation on individual well-being (Janssen et al., 2006; Sawatzky, 2005; Shields & Shooshtari, 2001; Wilson et al., 2001) as well as on the human and social capital of the Canadian society (Kozyrskyj et al., 2002; Lafleur, 1992; Veugelers et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 2001). Parallel to this, Canadian research has also concentrated on the characteristics and predictors of school dropout. Conclusions of these investigations are mostly similar and consistent with findings reported in the scientific literature for the past 50 years (Tessener & Tessener 1958; Janosz et al., 1997; Rumberger, 2004). Also, while it has been argued that previous work on school dropout was oriented toward individual factors, whereby students were presented as being responsible for their misfortune (Maxwell, 2005), much of the present work recognises the complexity and multidimensionality of the problem (Ferguson et al., 2005; Janosz et al., 2008; Thiessen, 2007a, b). The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) adopts a perspective whereby the educational system is understood to have a clear responsibility to prevent permanent dropout among young adults (de Broucker, 2005; Raymond, 2008).

Our overview of determinants revisits this work by highlighting recurrent findings as well as those which bring a fresh regard to the process of dropping out, and at times, returning to school. This touches on the work of Canadian researchers situated in government agencies and universities. Many governmental researchers have studied school dropout determinants with a nationally representative longitudinal study of Canadian adolescents and young adults. The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) began in 2000 following two cohorts: 15-year-olds ($n = 29,330$) and 18- to 20-year-olds ($n = 23,592$). Youth were interviewed at baseline, and again after 2 years (sample sizes then were 26,544 for the younger and 18,800 for the older cohort), and 4 years later (when sample sizes were 22,403 for younger and 14,817 for older cohorts) (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Bushnik et al., 2004; Knighton & Bussière, 2006; Looker & Thiessen, 2008; Raymond, 2008).

Economic Factors

Several structural or ‘macro’-level determinants have been shown repeatedly to predict dropout. Parental income is clearly identified to predict dropout in Canada (Drolet, 2005; Pagani et al., 1999). Many government reports emphasise the importance of parental education and occupation over household income (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002), though some research has shown important reductions in the negative effects of low-household income once parental education was controlled (de Broucker, 2005; Janosz et al., 1997). Canadian students who work more than 20 hours per week or who do not work at all for pay are more likely to leave school early (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Hango & de Broucker, 2007; Looker & Thiessen, 2008; Parent, 2006). The association between the labour market and dropout is complex. While research and policy suggest that labour market opportunities provide a major incentive for students to leave school in pursuit of work (Hango & de Broucker, 2007; Looker & Thiessen, 2008; Parent, 2006), others discuss the possibility that students’ decision to leave school is also driven by wage premiums (Raymond, 2008).

Socio-Demographic Factors

Women are consistently less likely than men to drop out of school, more likely to return if they do drop out, and more likely to transition directly from secondary school to post-secondary education (Hango & de Broucker, 2007). Others find that gender differences disappear once school risk factors are taken into account (Janosz et al., 1997). Effects of race/ethnicity are less certain. Unlike most other countries with a sizeable immigrant population,¹⁸ Canada does not have a higher concentration of dropouts who are immigrants. In fact, immigrants have, in general, obtained higher levels of education than their Canadian-born counterparts. These different patterns are likely to be related to the role and characteristics of Canada’s immigration policies (de Broucker, 2005). For example, Canadian immigrants are required to have a high school diploma from their country of origin. On the other hand, Aboriginal youth have a much higher risk of dropping out than other Canadians, particularly Aboriginal men (Gingras et al., 2001). Among this group, the main risk factors for dropping out have been characterised as the interplay between social class, adult role taking (i.e., taking care of siblings or parents, becoming a parent), attendance and distance to relocate or travel to school (Ferguson et al., 2005).

Youth from urban areas are more likely to have completed at least a secondary school diploma prior to entering the labour force, compared to their rural counterparts

¹⁸One in eight of 20- to 24-year-olds was born outside Canada.

(Hango & de Broucker, 2007). The determinants specific to rural communities have been characterised as offering safety but also boredom, and caring but also harsh, passive discipline. The personnel and culture of the school has been found to have a particularly important place in the process of dropping out among youth in rural areas (Ferguson et al., 2005).

School Environment

Beyond the rural/urban settings, the role of the school's organisation, principal's leadership, school climate, quality of teachers' educational and pedagogical practices, and the quality of teacher-student relationships are considered to be important determinants of dropping out among all Canadian communities (Audas & Willms, 2001). While there is limited empirical evidence, researchers assert that after the effects of individual and family are taken into consideration, school effects are believed to account for between one third (Thiessen, 2007b) and one half (Audas & Willms, 2001) of the variation in dropout rates in Canadian schools. An important proportion of academic differentials between various regions and jurisdictions can be explained by the ability of the educational system in general, and the school 'climate' in particular.

Family Structure and Functioning

Family structures, in terms of living in a two parents home (two parents, and non-step) and having fewer siblings, are known factors which influence educational attainment (Hango & de Broucker, 2007; Janosz et al., 1997). Also, students who have a child of their own or who live with a partner are more likely to drop out (Bushnik, 2003). As a predictor of dropout, parental education (Janosz et al., 1997) is described as influencing students more through the value they place on education and the way they communicate this to their children, and less about parental ability which could be inherited by children (Oreopoulos, 2005). Indeed, positive educational attitudes and practices have steadily been related to school completion (high expectations, high values toward education, supporting behaviour, supervision and communication, involvement in school activities, etc.) (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Janosz et al., 1997; Bushnick et al., 2004; Ferguson et al., 2005).

Psycho-Social Adjustment

Several symptoms of psycho-social maladjustment have been found to predict school dropout in Canadian studies – these symptoms include aggressiveness,

hyperactivity-inattentiveness, oppositional behaviours, social isolation, peer rejection, association to unconventional peers, drug use and internalising problem behaviours (Audas & Willms, 2001; Janosz et al., 1997; Pagani et al., 2008; Vitaro et al., 2005; Vitaro et al., 2001).

Individual School Experience

Academic difficulties, as measured by grade retention and achievement scores, have been identified as some of the stronger predictors of dropout (Janosz et al., 1997; Pagani et al., 2001). Factors associated with academic failure, such as (poor) reading skills, negative perception of academic competencies, perception that school is irrelevant, weak school motivation and engagement, absenteeism and learning difficulties, are among other school factors to have been found to predict school dropout among Canadian students (Archambault et al., *in press*; Bushnik, 2003; Guay et al., 2004; Knighton & Bussière, 2006; Janosz et al., 1997, 2008; Vallerand et al., 1997).

The Heterogeneous Dropout

All factors identified above highlight the multidimensionality and complexity of the dropout phenomenon. Some Canadian researchers have tried to tackle this complexity more directly, trying to unveil the multiple pathways leading to school dropout, as well as trying to understand what prevents potential dropouts from leaving school. For example, Janosz et al. (2000), studying school dropout in two longitudinal samples of French-Canadian adolescents, demonstrated that students who abandon school greatly differ among themselves in their overall level of school engagement or social integration. They found that around 40% of students who dropped out of school were highly engaged in school (*quiet* dropouts). The latter also showed similar, and sometimes even better, behavioural and psychological profiles than the average graduate. Another 40% of dropouts experienced severe levels of school and psychosocial difficulties (*maladjusted* dropouts). The researchers also found two other intermediate sub-groups. A small group (10%) was strongly unmotivated in school while still able to generate average marks and show no signs of behaviour or psychosocial distress (*disengaged* dropouts). Finally, an equally small group was typically unmotivated, with a school experience of failure, while not showing externalising problem behaviours (*low achiever* dropouts). These findings illustrate three important issues: first, students who drop out do not seem to follow the same paths of disengagement; second, many students do not manifest apparent risk for dropping out yet they interrupt their schooling anyway; last, dropouts experience a multitude of the established risk factors at varying levels of intensity. A recent study on the different patterns of school engagement in high school leads to the same conclusions (Janosz et al., 2008).

Canadian researchers have also looked specifically at students who follow anomalous education trajectories and how social support and resilience interacts with these pathways (Pagani et al., 2008; Thiessen, 2007a, b). Findings show that students who persevere despite academic challenges are those with a trusting and advising adult, a parent and a network of friends who value education, caring attentive teachers, and a school that provides opportunities to learn about work and education (Thiessen, 2007a, b). The importance of these relationships is found to be maintained even once academic achievement (e.g., grade point average) and academic programs (e.g., selecting pre-university levels of mathematics) are taken into consideration.

Overall, Canadian studies on the characteristics and life experiences of students who leave school without a diploma call for a mixed approach of universal and selective prevention (all students and at-risk students), targeting simultaneously the student, the school, the peer group, the family and the community, from early childhood to late adolescence.

Policy and Programming to Prevent Dropout

Whatever differences exist among Canadian jurisdictions, they all share the vision that learning opportunities should be of the highest quality, accessible to everyone and throughout the lifespan (CMEC, 2008).¹⁹ In a recent joint declaration (Learn Canada 2020), all provincial and territorial ministers of education reaffirmed their commitment toward these goals and agreed on four pillars of lifelong learning:

1. *Early Childhood Learning and Development*: all children should have access to high quality early childhood education that ensures they arrive at school ready to learn.
2. *Elementary to High School System*: all children in the elementary to high school systems deserve teaching and learning opportunities that are inclusive and that provide them with world-class skills in literacy, numeracy and science.
3. *Post-secondary Education*: Canada must increase the number of students pursuing post-secondary education by increasing the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education.
4. *Adult Learning and Skills Development*: Canada must develop an accessible, diversified and integrated system of adult learning and skills development that delivers training when Canadians need it.

Secondary school dropout may not be identified here as a pan-Canadian priority but many provinces have recognised this issue as a priority by setting targets for

¹⁹The Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) is an intergovernmental instance composed of the ministers of education from the provinces and territories. Through CMEC, ministers share information and undertake projects in areas of mutual interest and concern.

improved graduation rates. Ontario, for example, in its Student Success Strategy has set a priority to increase the graduation rate from 75% to 85% by 2011 (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2005), whilst New Brunswick wants to reach a full graduation rate by 2013, according to the When Kids Come First plan (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2007).

Beyond setting targets, provincial governments have also implemented large-scale initiatives to prevent dropout. For example, Quebec recently invested more than \$150 million dollars in 200 high schools to increase school success of students from disadvantaged communities (The New Approaches New Solutions Strategy – NANS) (MELS, 2002).²⁰ Similarly, in 2005, the Ontario government initiated a major effort to improve high school graduation rates – the Student Success Strategy. The latter strategy has multiple elements involving changes in curriculum, the creation of leadership teams for student success in every school and district, the creation of ‘Student Success Teachers’ in every secondary school, and a variety of other elements (Levin, 2008a; see also www.edu.gov.on.ca/studentsuccess). The strategy is supported by an extensive infrastructure at the provincial level and in each school district. Since 2004, Ontario’s 5-year high school graduation rate has risen from 68% to 75%.

Three out of the four pillars described above (1, 2 and 4) can be considered as cornerstones of both a universal and selective approach to the prevention of school dropout. Indeed, many Canadian governmental initiatives, whether embedded in the official curriculum or presented as complementary measures, focus on school preparedness and early literacy, school improvement or alternative schooling and adult education. Furthermore, since school dropout is mainly conceived in Canada within a developmental, ecosystemic and transactional framework, most policies promote simultaneous actions at the individual, school and community levels. Despite the fact that education is a matter of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, several similarities can be found in the jurisdiction approaches toward the graduation/dropout issue, as highlighted later.²¹

Pre-Elementary and Pre-Kindergarten Education

As mentioned earlier, at least two Canadian provinces mandate pre-elementary education and others offer such educational opportunity to children considered at

²⁰In fact, it is so important that Quebec has created a special research fund (FQRSC) to foster research on student retention and academic success. Results from a large-scale, longitudinal, multi-site evaluation of the implementation and impact of NANS were to be available by the end of 2009.

²¹Since we have previously noted the importance of alternative and second chance programs as universal, selected or targeted dropout prevention strategies, discussion of these measures will not be repeated in this section.

risk of school failure, mainly those from disadvantaged families and communities. The importance, efficiency and added-value of early learning (literacy in particular) is thus clearly recognised by Canadian jurisdictions (Heckman, 2006), and initiatives emerge in various forms and settings, including sectors and partnerships external to the Minister of Education.

Focus on (Early) Literacy

Since literacy has been demonstrated to be a major determinant of school success, many jurisdictions have placed emphasis on literacy competencies, from early childhood to late adolescence, and even adulthood, in their general educational strategy (e.g., ReadNowBC in British Columbia, SaskSmart in Saskatchewan, and the Parenting and Family Literacy Centers in Ontario).

School Improvement

Described and articulated at various levels, almost all jurisdictions have implemented measures to improve the educational potential of their schools. At least two major types of (educational reform) actions have recently emerged in Canadian provinces. A first orientation is to focus on professional development, building new competencies among principals and teachers, implementing research-based practices and sharing promising initiatives. A second focus is on accountability through (1) school and school board strategic planning (identification of clear and measurable objectives chosen after going through systematic self-evaluation of local strengths and weaknesses; choice of promising interventions coherent with those objectives), and (2) monitoring of the implementation of their plan, as well as evaluation of its impacts. Although the theoretical elaboration of this approach is rooted within Ontario's experience (Fullan, 2009; Levin, 2008b), many provinces are following this path.²²

School Health and Safety (in) Schools

In Canada, schools are considered to be important not only for the academic development and preparation of the workforce, but also for socio-emotional development

²²For example: Alberta initiative for School Improvement; Leadership and Professional Learning in Ontario; The New Approach, New Strategy in Quebec; When Kids Come First in New Brunswick; School Development: A Continuing Challenge for Excellence in Newfoundland; Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together in Nova Scotia; New Teacher Induction in the Northwest Territories.

and the learning of healthy lifestyles. As in many other countries, education is considered to be a cornerstone of the quality of life, health and well-being in Canada (Canadian Association for School Health [CASH], 2008). In that respect, school dropout can be considered a public health issue (Freudenberg, 2007) and school violence can be considered to jeopardise the educational potential of schools (Janosz et al., 2008). Thus, the vast majority of jurisdictions subscribe to the school health movement (CASH, 2008), aiming to increase health literacy and providing a healthy and secure environment.²³

School-Family-Community Collaboration

Acknowledging the importance of family and community factors for school success, Canadian schools are actively trying to integrate parents into the daily life of school and provide them with support, as well as to coordinate their actions with other governmental and community services (i.e., health and social services). Although not an easy task, almost all Canadian jurisdictions have programs towards this end (e.g., StrongStartBC in British Columbia; KidsFirst in Saskatchewan; When Kids Come First in New Brunswick; The New Approach, New Strategy in Quebec).

Conclusion

This brief analysis of the graduation and dropout rates in Canada unveils the socio-geographical diversity of the phenomenon and the methodological challenges associated with its measurement. Like other confederated countries, Canada's educational system is a mosaic of autonomous systems, sharing fundamental values but each choosing to express these values somewhat distinctively. Unsurprisingly, graduation rates vary between jurisdictions. Not counting the Territories, these rates reach 85% in less populated provinces, but drop to the lower 70% in the largest jurisdictions such as Ontario and Quebec. Interestingly, variations are smaller when analysing dropout rates (between 7% and 13%). It is noteworthy that the capacity to compare Canadian jurisdictions on these issues is fairly recent. As the quality of comparable indicators grows, we will be better able to explain the observed variations within the Canadian provinces and territories in terms of graduation and dropout rates.

²³For example: Healthy Schools in British Columbia, Ontario; Schools in Shape and Health in Quebec; Alberta's Bullying Prevention Strategy; Safe School in Manitoba and Ontario; Healthy and Safe schools in New Brunswick; Safe and Caring schools in Newfoundland; Healthy Children Initiative and Mental Health Task Force in Nunavut.

Another important conclusion relates to the fact that graduation and dropout rates express different aspects of the ‘performance’ of an educational system. As reported, no correlation was found between the two indicators. This is understandable since they measure students’ trajectories at different stages of development (17 versus 24 years old) and because opportunities for obtaining some school certifications depend on the structural opportunities (e.g., second chance programs) provided by local and provincial educational authorities. Moreover, and perhaps the most fascinating finding of this paper: Canadian indicators of school graduation and dropout are not related to the quality of the learning experience. Higher graduation rates are not synonymous with better learning competencies. In fact, the contrary appears to be the case. Higher graduation rates are associated with lower average scores on PISA. One hypothesis could be that keeping at-risk students in school will necessarily affect the average performance of the school population. Alternatively, is this higher retention rate the result of schools doing a better job at supporting lower achievers to complete high school, or is it the consequences of a less challenging educational environment? Indeed, we also reported that the better scores on PISA by the provinces with the lower graduation rates could not be explained by attrition of low-achieving students. Thus, having more dropouts in an educational system does not suggest that the system is producing poorer learners. One explanation could be that educational systems with lower dropout rates are very stimulating and demanding, but may be too challenging for a proportion of students who cannot keep up with the demands, who will fail to ‘pass the test’, and who eventually disengage from school (albeit with the same level of competency that would have helped them graduate in a different system). Clearly, these issues call for a deeper investigation. It would also be important to verify to what extent these observations are unique to Canada.

In any case, the Canadian educational systems are collectively facing the same challenges: providing the best educational environment to every child, adolescent or adult. Defining and measuring the performance of the schooling system is still, however, a challenge for both policy makers and researchers (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). A better understanding of how and why the multiple indicators across Canadian jurisdictions are related is needed, in order to increase capacity to measure and monitor the quality of the educational system.

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Chapter 15

School Dropout and Completion in Australia

Stephen Lamb

In 2008, the newly elected federal government in Australia announced a national target of a 90% Year 12 (final school year) completion rate to be achieved by the year 2020, later brought forward to 2015 (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009).¹ This announcement follows the commitment of federal and state governments over recent years to a new National Reform Agenda, which includes the goal to significantly improve the proportion of young people making a smooth transition from school to further study and work (COAG, 2006). Increasing the rates of Year 12 completion is viewed as one of the main ways of improving the chances of young Australians making a smooth transition from school to work.

Achieving the goal of 90% Year 12 completion will not be an easy task. An estimate from the 2006 *Census of Population and Housing* suggests that the national rate is currently at about 68%, only a little higher than that recorded in the previous census 5 years earlier (Lamb & Mason, 2008). The rates vary markedly across states and territories, and by race, gender and social background. Among indigenous Australians, the rate is as low as 47%, while the rate for children from poor backgrounds (taken as those in the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status based on the student population) is at about 55% (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2008a; Lamb & Mason, 2008). The rate for males is ten points below that for females.

There are many aspects of schooling and post-compulsory provision that will need to be considered in the development of policy if the new target is to be achieved. There is considerable diversity across states and territories in populations, economies and school and program provision. Australia is a federated system and there are different approaches, qualifications and completion requirements across jurisdictions. An important initial step will be to look at the current features of school organisation and program provision, how they vary across states and

¹The target is for 90% completion of Year 12 or equivalent qualifications which includes vocational certificates treated as equivalent to Year 12 school certificates. References to Year 12 completion in the chapter are taken to include 'equivalent' qualifications.

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territories, how patterns have changed over time, what contributes to differences in rates of graduation and dropout, and from previous evidence what sorts of programs, policies and practices are likely to help raise completion rates. This chapter will look at each of these matters in turn.

Main Features of Post-Compulsory Provision

Programs

In Australia, as in other federal systems, the states and territories have constitutional responsibility for school education, including primary and secondary schooling, student enrolment policies, curriculum, course accreditation and certification procedures, and methods of student assessment. The qualification arrangements related to school education are under state jurisdiction. There are mechanisms through which national coordination of school education across state and territory jurisdictions is achieved. These mechanisms centre around the agreements achieved through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), which involves all relevant state, territory and federal government Ministers of Education.

Secondary education in all states and territories is based on a model of general education through to the end of the compulsory phase (usually Year 10), followed by a 2-year upper secondary program culminating in a senior school certificate. In the past, access to upper secondary education in most states was through an examination-based (intermediate) certificate at the end of compulsory schooling. These arrangements have almost entirely disappeared.² Every state and territory offers a senior school certificate, except for the state of Victoria, which offers two: the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The school certificates are developed, accredited and awarded by state or territory curriculum and assessment authorities. The majority of young people enter a certificate program at the end of compulsory education, though dropout rates at the end of Year 10 (before children enter post-compulsory or senior certificate programs) vary across jurisdictions and can be as high as 24% (the national rate is 11%). To qualify for a certificate (to graduate), generally students must successfully complete a sequence of elective units of study or subjects. English is the only prescribed study, in some states.

Teese & Helme (2007) note that in the design of senior certificates across Australia, certain key concepts recur:

- Curriculum authorities use the concept of a *study pattern* (New South Wales Higher School Certificate, Queensland Certificate of Education), *student program* (VCE), *package of studies* (Australian Capital Territory Year 12) or *learning program* (VCAL) to refer to the set of ‘studies’, ‘subjects’ or ‘courses’ taken by a student.
- Each ‘subject’, ‘course’ or ‘study’ has a syllabus or study design.

²Only the state of New South Wales maintains a certificate at the end of the compulsory phase of schooling.

- ‘Subjects’ or ‘courses’ or ‘studies’ are generally organised as semester Units, though their load in instructional hours may vary, depending on the certificate and the nature of the study.
- Successful student learning involves reaching certain standards or achieving pre-defined outcomes.
- Success generates credits, which accumulate.
- Satisfactory completion occurs when graduation requirements are met.

These key concepts are shared, even while the descriptive terminology varies.

But there are also differences in how certificates are designed. In one certificate – the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) – subjects have different levels of complexity or cognitive demand, and students therefore become ‘banded’ into skill levels. In another certificate – the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) – the focus is on the learning needs of students who would otherwise not complete school. The emphasis is on personal growth, student interests, applied learning and multiple contexts of learning, making it clear that the studies leading to this certificate are practical in nature, and that the standard being sought through the way the certificate is designed is intended to have this character. It is designed as a pathway to work.

In most certificates (apart from VCAL), there are three broad types of study or programs provided. The first comprises traditional academic subjects such as English, literature, physics, chemistry, mathematics, languages, humanities and art.

The second includes studies that have become known as vocational education and training in school (VETiS). While VETiS options are provided in all certificates, there are real differences in how this is done and in how VETiS counts towards completion of the senior certificate. For example, there are differences in the number of VETiS subjects that can be counted for university admission and also in the use of graded assessments. VETiS is mainly provided as separate subject or study options, equivalent to any other subject or study, except for a small number of school-based apprenticeships which provide a much more structured program of study. One feature of VETiS is that, as well as contributing to a senior school certificate (and university entry), depending on the state they are in, students enrolled in many VETiS courses can also obtain a separate certificate for their VETiS study, effectively providing a dual qualification. School VETiS programs can consist of stand-alone, nationally recognised industry-specific courses based on industry training packages, which are also accredited for the senior school certificate, though integration varies across states. Some of the VETiS programs contain structured workplace learning with expected competency-based learning outcomes included in assessment. In 2001, at a national level, about 21% of Year 12 students enrolled in at least one VETiS subject or course (Lamb & Vickers, 2006).

The third type of study available in several certificates is a range of options which are neither academic nor vocational, but aim to provide students with a range of broad work-preparation and life skills, such as the options *Learning from the Community* and *Work Education*.

The different types of study or programs orient students towards different post-school outcomes. Students who enrol in and complete mainly academic study qualify more often for university entry, whereas those who undertake and complete

mainly vocational education are more likely to enter other forms of tertiary education or go directly into the labour market at the end of secondary school. Students mainly taking the third type of program are more likely to pursue work or basic levels of further education.

Schools

The structure of primary and secondary schooling in Australia varies between states and territories. There are two basic patterns evident in formal schooling in Australia, as illustrated in Fig. 15.1.

In New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, primary education comprises a Preparatory or Pre-Year 1 grade followed by Years 1–6. Secondary education comprises Years 7–12.

In Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, primary education comprises a Preparatory or Pre-Year 1 grade followed by Years 1–7. Secondary education comprises Years 8–12.

Australia, in the main, has an integrated ('comprehensive') institutional structure for the delivery of school-based post-compulsory programs. Students tend not to be separated into different schools on the basis of the post-compulsory programs or qualifications in which they enrol. Most secondary schools offer courses leading to the senior school certificate provided in their state or territory. Separation of students often occurs within schools through subject, course and certificate choices, and many schools do not offer the full range of accredited subjects or courses, with availability of options often dependent on student demand and school size.

Grade	New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory	Queensland, Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia
Year 12	Secondary	Secondary
Year 11		
Year 10		
Year 9		
Year 8		
Year 7		
Year 6	Primary	Primary
Year 5		
Year 4		
Year 3		
Year 2		
Year 1		
Prep (Pre-Year 1)		

Fig. 15.1 Schooling structures across Australia (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a)

Despite the appearance, when it comes to students (rather than programs), schooling in Australia is not based on a ‘comprehensive’ model. It is a highly divided, almost segregated system. Private schools accounted for 40.4% of all post-compulsory school enrolments in 2006 (students in Years 11 and 12), with 21.8% in Catholic schools and 18.6% in non-Catholic private schools (ABS, 2007). Enrolments in private schools have grown markedly over the past 3 decades thanks in part to large increases in unconditional recurrent funding from Australian governments. Some private schools have almost 90% of their funding met by government, without any conditions applied to the use of funds. Private schools contribute to social divisions in schooling. About 32% of students in Catholic schools and 51% in non-Catholic private schools are from high socioeconomic status backgrounds (taken as those in the highest quartile of socioeconomic status [SES] based on the student population) compared to only 17% of students in government schools (Lamb et al., 2006).

Government schools also divide students. Apart from the effects of residential segregation, most states also have ‘selective-entry’ schools which select students on the basis of academic aptitude, measured through achievement tests. In Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland, the numbers are small, accounting for less than 2% of all Year 12 students, though the number of such schools in Victoria is about to double (Lamb, 2008). In New South Wales, almost 1 in 11 of all secondary students is enrolled in a ‘selective-entry’ school. The schools contribute to academic and social divisions in schooling. In 2004, 55.2% of students in selective-entry schools in New South Wales were from high SES backgrounds (taken as those in the highest quartile of SES based on the student population) compared to 25% in remaining schools.³ These selective-entry schools focus almost exclusively on the academic curriculum and university entry (see Lamb & Teese, 2005). Academic selection can also take place in mainstream government schools. Many secondary schools in Victoria, for example, have introduced Selective Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) programs and ‘high achievers’ programs, which identify high achieving students and group them together for all of their classes (streaming). Similarly, in Tasmanian secondary schools, until recently, students from Year 9 were grouped for subjects based on skill level, a form of streaming which contributed to social stratification (Lamb et al., 2001).

Other features of school organisation are also important to note. In two jurisdictions – Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory – post-compulsory schooling is largely provided in senior colleges (Years 11 and 12). In most other states and territories, secondary schooling is delivered in schools that offer classes from Year 7 to Year 12 or from Year 8 to Year 12. There is considerable diversity, though. Increasingly, senior colleges and variations on a senior college model are being implemented to allow regions to concentrate student numbers in order for schools to offer a broader range of programs. In many rural areas of Australia, schools are often small, operate as Preparatory to Year 12 schools (combined primary and secondary grades in a single school), and struggle to deliver program breadth in the senior years.

³Figures derived by Stephen Lamb from data provided by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

Patterns of Year 12 Completion

Measures

Graduation rates are not provided or published in Australia. The traditional indicator of school completion has been the ‘apparent retention rate’. The Year 12 apparent retention rate is measured as the number of full-time students in Year 12 in a given calendar year divided by the number of students who were in the first year of secondary school when that Year 12 cohort commenced secondary school (either Year 7 or 8, depending on the state). Retention rates have been used by school systems in Australia as a measure of system performance, treating the rates as a measure of completion. However, the rates are not a measure of graduation; they are based on school census enrolments taken in August of every year, and they take no account of whether students successfully meet the graduation requirements. Other factors also affect the retention rate as an accurate measure of completion, for instance, the measure takes no account of population changes, inclusion of mature-age students, grade repeating or the availability of part-time school study options, all of which can inflate or depress the rates from ‘real’ levels of completion or graduation.

It is possible to adjust retention rates to arrive at a more accurate measure of completion. This has been done in several studies (see Lamb et al., 2004). Adjustments for measurement issues associated with population and related factors generally reduce the retention rate by up to 4 percentage points, depending on the year. To take account of students who are in Year 12 in August, but do not graduate, would require further adjustments of up to 5 percentage points (Lamb et al., 2004). The gap between the 2006 published retention rate and the rate of Year 12 senior school certificate attainment derived from the 2006 national *Census of Population and Housing* suggests that the apparent retention rate is about 8 percentage points above what might be considered a graduation rate (see Lamb & Mason, 2008; ABS, 2007).

The patterns presented in the following discussion are largely based on ‘retention’ rates, which are described using the term ‘completion’, though the limitations just mentioned need to be kept in mind.

Trends in Completion

The long-term trends in Year 12 school completion are displayed in Fig. 15.2. Since 1967, the proportion of young people completing school in Australia has more than trebled. In 2008, it was at 74.5%, about three points down on its peak of 77.1% reached in 1992. The trend shows a series of phases: (1) the steady growth from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, fuelled by a buoyant economy and rising social aspirations; (2) the 1970s downturn, associated with a faltering economy and rising youth unemployment; (3) the upsurge in completion during the 1980s, initially spurred by the 1982–83 recession and falling teenage employment, reaching a peak in 1992; and

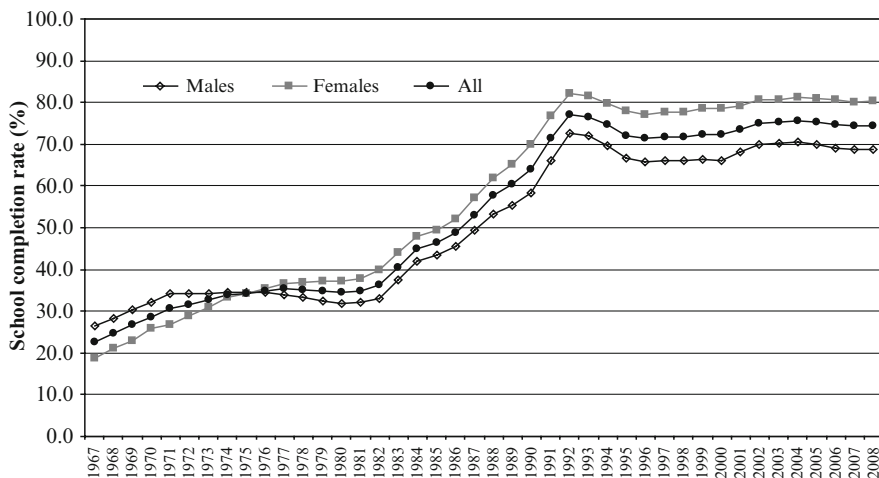


Fig. 15.2 School completion rates (Year 7/8–Year 12), Australia: 1967–2008 (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools Australia*, various years, Cat no. 4221.0 (ABS, 2008a))

(4) the stagnant years beginning in the 1990s when completion rates dipped and then plateaued (for elaboration on these phases, see Teese, 2002; Lamb, 1998; Lamb et al., 2004).

The most dramatic period of growth occurred in the 1980s. In the early 1980s, more than 60% of all secondary school students left school before Year 12. However, by the end of the decade, the vast majority were continuing through to Year 12. Rates of Year 12 completion, as low as 36% only 10 years earlier, reached a peak of 77.1% in 1992. At that time, optimistic predictions were made of almost universal completion by the end of the decade (Taskforce On Pathways In Education and Training, 1992; Centre for Skill Formation Research and Development, 1993). Many factors contributed to the growth over this period. Accelerated by falling teenage employment, sharp increases were recorded following the 1982–83 recession. Other factors were also influential, including increased government financial assistance (study allowances) for young people in families of low income, and the abolition of unemployment benefits for 16- to 17-year-olds. Important also were changes in school programs; in several states, major changes were made to the provision of the senior secondary school curriculum to accommodate a broader range of students. Together these changes supported a decade of great expansion in senior schooling, a decade in which Australian states moved rapidly and impressively towards developing mass systems of secondary education.

The downturn in the years after 1992 indicated that this phase of building stalled. Despite the remarkable period of expansion during the 1980s, the growth in school completion came to an end. Over a 5-year period from 1992, the rates of Year 12 completion fell by almost 6 percentage points. By 1997, according to apparent retention rates, non-completion of school again affected close to 30% of all students. Therefore, rather than having become a marginal consideration towards the close of

the decade – affecting only a small residual group – non-completion of school involved a large number of young Australians and remained an important issue.

Since 1999, there has been some recovery, with completion rates pushing back up to the heights reached in the early 1990s. Even so, across Australia, one in every four secondary school entrants drops out of school before Year 12.

National completion rates tend to conceal differences across states and territories. Variations in economies, in labour market opportunities, in senior school program development, in institutional reforms, as well as in populations can affect school completion rates. During the period of growth in school completion rates in the 1980s, states displayed similar patterns of improvement, though the amount of growth varied. The states which began the 1980s with the weakest levels of completion – Tasmania and New South Wales – experienced weaker rates of growth compared to other states (see Lamb, 1998). This tended to widen the gaps over the decade: whereas in 1981, less than 15 percentage points separated the six states in the rates of completion, in 1992 over 30 points separated them. For the two largest systems (Victoria and New South Wales), there was only a 1 percentage point gap in the rate of completion in 1981; by 1991, this gap had increased to 12 percentage points. Differences between states grew until the early 1990s. Differential downturn in rates of completion from 1992 led to some convergence across the states and territories in rates of school completion, returning to the patterns of the early 1980s. In 2008, about 20 percentage points separated the states and territories, with the highest rate of 86% in the Australian Capital Territory and the lowest of 66% in the Northern Territory.

Demographic Patterns of School Completion

National and state completion rates mask large variations by gender, region, social group, school sector, ethnicity and indigenous background.

Girls complete school more frequently than boys do. In 2008, the national completion rate for girls was 80.5% as against 68.8% for boys (ABS, 2008a). Girls have not always completed school in greater numbers (see Fig. 15.2). The trend became established in the mid-1970s and reflected a number of major changes in the social and economic environment – the long-term loss of full-time jobs in the teenage labour market which disproportionately affected girls, the growth of employment in the services sector (a sector with high levels of female employment) requiring higher qualifications, the continuing relative lack of access to trade apprenticeships for girls, rising entry-levels to key professions (especially nursing), and improved career aspirations for girls as compared to 35 years ago (Sweet, 1995; Lamb et al., 2004).

Completion rates also vary by school type. Published rates in 2008 show that students attending non-Catholic private schools have the highest rates of completion (93.9%), followed by students attending Catholic schools (78.3%), and then students attending government schools (68.3%) (ABS, 2008a). Much of the gap

between private and government schools is due to differences in the SES backgrounds of children attending the different types of schools. Private schools, particularly non-Catholic private schools, have much higher concentrations of children from high SES origins (Lamb et al., 2004).

There are wide variations in Year 12 completion based on social background. Children from high SES families – families in which parents are often university-educated and tend to have professional or managerial occupations and higher levels of cultural resources in the home such as books and computers – are far more likely to complete school compared to children from low SES backgrounds. One estimate suggests that by age 24, about 64% of Australians from low SES families have completed Year 12, while the rate for those from high SES families is 86% (Lamb & Mason, 2008).

Completing school is also related to where families live (see, for example, Teese, 2002). Reflecting a long-term pattern, children of families living in rural areas, where schools are often smaller and less able to offer a comprehensive range of curriculum options and families tend to have lower incomes, less often complete school by comparison with children living in urban areas. According to a recent study using 2006 Census data, the gaps between children living in rural areas and those living in urban areas can be as high as 20 percentage points (ABS, 2008b).

Studies also suggest that the language background of families is linked to levels of completion. Young people whose language background is not English (i.e., those from families in which the main language spoken at home is not English) are more likely to complete school compared to those whose main language at home is English. The difference is about 8 percentage points, according to a recent national study (Lamb et al., 2004). This finding is in line with research which has shown that even though the average educational attainment of parents in non-English speaking families is lower than their native English-speaking peers, they have higher educational aspirations for their children and place a premium on completing Year 12 as a way of enhancing their children's future prospects (Miller & Volker, 1989).

Indigenous students have low rates of school completion. The gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students in 2008 was almost 30 percentage points – 46.5% for indigenous students compared to 75.6% for non-indigenous students (ABS, 2008a). The last decade has seen improvement in the rates for the indigenous population, rising by over 10 percentage points, but still more than one in two indigenous children drops out of school before the final year (ABS, 2008a).

Factors Influencing Year 12 Completion

A considerable amount of research has been conducted into the reasons why young people complete school or drop out. Previous work suggests that there are several important groups of factors to consider. One group relates to *political and economic context* and includes such things as economy and labour market (employment and unemployment, apprenticeships, industry, recession and growth, teenage labour

market opportunities) and government policies (school funding, resources, targets, initiatives). A second is linked to what might be called *school and system context* and covers such things as school organisation (sector, selective-entry schools, rural provision, school type), school-level policies and practices (pathways and careers education, intake, interventions), teachers and teaching (teacher quality, pedagogy, teaching styles, assessment) and curriculum and certification (breadth of offerings, VET in schools, senior school certificate requirements, alternative programs, university entry requirements). A third group is related to *student context* and includes such things as social and demographic factors (gender, region, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, race), personal factors (finances, physical and mental health, disability, psychology, pregnancy, drug use, transport, family obligations, family breakdown, homelessness) and prior student achievement (early school achievement and academic progress).

Political and Economic Context

Historically, in Australia, one strand of analysis on the factors influencing Year 12 completion has focused on the alternatives open to 15- to 19-year-olds. These include labour market factors as well as changes in the provision of education and training (such as post-school education and training programs). The state of the economy, particularly the youth labour market, has figured strongly in explanations of dropout and completion. For example, a report by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission in the early 1980s argued that change in labour demand associated with recession was the underlying cause of fluctuating completion rates in the 1970s (CTEC, 1982).

Measured over the long term, there is a fairly weak relationship between school completion rates and the state of the youth labour market. As Fig. 15.3 illustrates, the recession in the early 1980s (1981–83) and the early 1990s (1990–92) produced

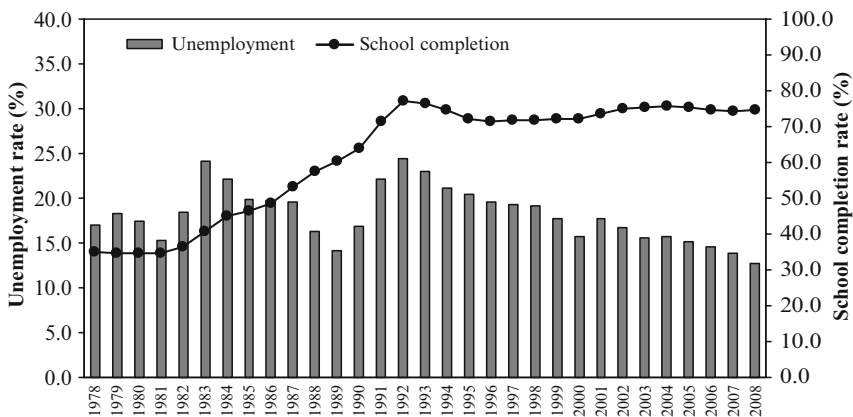


Fig. 15.3 Unemployment rates for 15- to 19-year-olds and school completion rates: Australia, 1978–2008 (Sources: Unemployment rates derived from Labour Force Australia (Cat. No. 6202.0) (ABS, 2009); School completion rates derived from Schools Australia (Cat. No. 4221.0) (ABS, 2008a))

rises in youth unemployment. The deterioration of the youth labour market, measured in terms of increases in youth unemployment, tended to be matched by growth in Year 12 completion rates. As jobs dried up, young people tended to remain longer at school. The relationship, though, is not consistent. Improvements in employment can occur without changes in completion trends (for example, as in the late 1980s and from 2001).

Despite the inconsistent relationship between school completion and unemployment, economic conditions may well affect the availability of employment and also the school leaving plans of students. Several major changes have taken place in the Australian labour market that have affected the opportunities for young people to find full-time work.

One of the changes has been a long-term fall in full-time teenage job opportunities. Structural changes to the Australian economy over the last 25 years have gradually, but dramatically, changed the number of jobs available to young people. The analyses of the youth labour market by Sweet (1992), Freeland (1996), Lewis and McLean (1998) and Wooden (1999) have drawn attention to the long-term fall in full-time job opportunities for teenagers. Between the early 1980s and 2006, for example, the proportion of 15- to 19-year-olds in full-time work fell from 39% to 15% and 'between May 1988 and May 1999, the number of full-time jobs held by teenagers aged 15–19 years fell by 49%' (Dusselldorp Skills Forum, 1999, p. 5). Accompanying the fall in full-time work has been a substantial growth in the numbers of part-time jobs. These have been focused largely in the retail and service areas, which overwhelmingly employ young people still in the education system (Wooden, 1999).

The relationship between economic trends and school completion suggest that the conditions of the teenage labour market – and the availability of jobs as an alternative to schooling – may influence students' decisions to stay on at school. Other labour market and government policy factors that have been identified as influences on school completion rates include policies on income support, and state and federal government policies on alternative forms of post-compulsory education and training, such as apprenticeships and adult education (Teese et al., 2000; Department of Family and Community Services, 2002). For example, alternative forms of education and training provided outside of school can work to reduce rates of school completion. Some states and territories have changed their legislation around school leaving ages to recognise alternative activities as equivalent to being in school. The policy, known as 'earning and learning', accepts full-time work or full-time study in school, or training or study outside of school, as fulfilling the legal requirement (see, for example, Rann, 2007). Work and alternative forms of study can function to draw students away from school and reduce Year 12 completion rates.

Student and School Contexts

Several studies have attempted to identify the most influential factors shaping school completion in Australia using a variety of statistical techniques such as multivariate logistic regression (see, for example, Long et al., 1999). Most highlight the influence of attributes associated with individuals and their family and school contexts.

A major study undertaken in 2004 using a large national sample of students participating in a longitudinal survey found that in terms of individual student characteristics, gender, indigenous status and having a disability or not have significant independent influences on completion (Lamb et al., 2004). All else equal, girls are much more likely to remain to Year 12 than boys. Also, indigenous Australians are far less likely to complete school than students from non-indigenous backgrounds. This is also true for students with disabilities or health problems who are less likely to remain to Year 12 than those without a disability.

Family background variables – SES, language background, family size and parental aspirations – all have strong independent effects on school completion. Students from higher rather than lower SES families, those from a non-English-speaking rather than English-speaking family, those from smaller rather than larger families, and those in families where the parents have tertiary education ambitions for their children, are significantly more likely to complete Year 12.

School setting is also important. The social and academic intakes of schools, measured through mean SES of schools and mean student achievement, are significantly related to the likelihood of students graduating from school. Other things equal, schools with a higher mean SES or achievement intake have significantly higher rates of completion.

School type has an important independent effect on completion. Other things equal, students attending Catholic schools are more likely to complete school than to drop out. This does not always apply to other independent schools, suggesting that the much higher completion rates for non-Catholic independent schools are linked to intake rather than any additional effect.

Other school factors reported as exerting an influence on completion include quality of teaching and learning: schools with more teachers who are perceived by students as having strong content knowledge of the subjects they teach, those who are perceived as having expertise in teaching, and those who display strong interest in students, are associated with higher levels of completion (Lamb et al., 2004).

Academic achievement and aspirations, as they form and are formed in school in conjunction with the influence of family, are major predictors of completion. Young people who achieve well in school tend to complete school far more often than those who are not achieving well. Similarly, academic motivation as measured by the number of hours of homework undertaken and the incidence of doing extra homework (beyond what is set) have independent effects on completion (Lamb et al., 2004).

Policies to Raise Completion Rates

System-Level Initiatives

Relatively little Australian research exists on the strategies school systems and schools use to improve student engagement and increase Year 12 completion. However, the past decade has seen the implementation of a number of completion

initiatives in various parts of Australia. At a national level, changes to income support were introduced in 1998 to encourage students from poor backgrounds to remain in school or other forms of education and training. Youth Allowance (YA), the main income support program, is a means-tested payment made to students from poor backgrounds who are 16 years of age or older and in formal education and training, or looking for work. One important criterion for receiving YA is the requirement that young people under 18 years of age be in full-time education or training to receive payment. There is some evidence to suggest that this initiative has helped increase school completion (Department of Family and Community Services, 2002).

At a state or system level, a key initiative to help raise school completion rates has been to increase the compulsory leaving age. The government of South Australia, for example, increased its school leaving age from 15 years to 16 years in 2003, and has more recently extended it to 17 (in 2009). Similar changes have been made in Victoria and Western Australia. The school leaving age in Tasmania has been set at 16 for a considerable number of years, but there is a new requirement that after Year 10 young people need to continue in education or training for 2 years or until they turn 17. Governments have introduced these changes largely because of the view that it will lead to increases in school completion. As reported by one jurisdiction, 'the government decided to raise the school leaving age to 16 to require students to stay at school or participate in an approved course of instruction [because] research shows that where students complete 12 years of education their long-term prospects of employment increase' (Government of South Australia, 2009).

The main program initiative at a system level to raise rates of school completion has been the implementation and development of Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS). As in other countries, VETiS has developed as an alternative to traditional academic programs to enable an increasing number of young people, with a wider range of abilities, to participate in upper secondary courses and obtain relevant qualifications. At the post-compulsory level, students can generally undertake as many VETiS subjects as part of their senior school certificate as they wish. However, while most do, not all schools offer VETiS. Students enrolled in VETiS courses can often obtain a separate certificate for their VETiS study, effectively providing a dual qualification.

There is some evidence to suggest that the availability of VETiS courses can improve the likelihood of school completion. A longitudinal study of students in Year 9 who reported plans to drop out of school before Year 12 more often graduated if they entered VETiS courses rather than academic or general programs (Lamb & Vickers, 2006). This is consistent with some overseas studies suggesting that, all else equal, the more VETiS classes students take, the less likely they are to drop out (Mertens et al., 1982, for example), and with findings based on studies of the effects of work-based learning programs, where similar evidence emerges concerning the positive effects on student engagement that result from participation in work-based learning (Hughes et al., 2001; Steinberg, 1998).

Another key initiative has been the introduction of pathways planning programs. In Victoria, for example, there has been the implementation in government secondary schools of the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program and the recent development of the Student Mapping Tool to help schools identify students at risk of

disengagement and dropout (see Lamb & Rice, 2008). MIPs is a scheme which offers all students aged 15 and over individual assistance to develop pathways plans. It is based on a case management model and provides a framework for schools to develop individualised pathways plans and provide targeted careers counselling. A review of the scheme found that MIPs had, across many schools, improved student engagement and staff–student relations, increased the responsiveness of school staff to the needs of all students and helped raise Year 12 completion (Asquith Group, 2005).

School-Level Policies

Schools can also employ at a local level targeted approaches to improve Year 12 completion rates. A recent study of schools effective in raising Year 12 completion rates for at-risk students identified a number of school-level practices or strategies. What emerged as central to improving school engagement and completion for at-risk students was a series of targeted interventions and programs underpinned by a supportive school culture or climate. The elements of school culture central to maximising student engagement and completion included a shared vision across the school community, high expectations of students, flexibility and responsiveness to individual student needs, a commitment to success for all students and a drive for continuous improvement (Lamb & Rice, 2008).

The targeted initiatives included student-focused strategies such as mentoring, early and more intensive pathways and careers planning, fine-grained coordination of welfare needs, family outreach, programs to improve students' social skills, tutoring and peer tutoring, targeted financial support, case management and targeted assistance for skill development among low achievers.

They also included school-wide strategies, for example familial-based forms of organisation such as mini-schools, team-based approaches to teaching, learning and pastoral care, early intervention to support literacy and numeracy skill growth, project-based and applied approaches to learning, strategic use of teachers and teaching resources, initiatives to improve connections with parents, priority professional development and high expectations on attendance and behaviour.

The schools with the greatest success in improving completion rates combined a range of these strategies, working to develop whole-of-staff commitment to engaging students, and constantly refining approaches as student and parent needs shift.

Pathways for Dropouts

There are opportunities in Australia for young people who do drop out of school to complete an upper secondary school certificate or equivalent. These alternative pathways come in various forms depending on the state or territory.

One pathway is to return to study to complete a senior school certificate. Some states, such as South Australia and Queensland, provide adult re-entry schools established as second chance schools to provide dropouts with the opportunity to complete school and graduate with a senior school certificate. Study for an upper secondary school certificate is also possible at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, or, in some states, through adult education providers such as the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) or a range of Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers. Accurate estimates of the numbers of students who return to complete a senior school certificate at a national level are not available. While a number of studies have examined the role and characteristics of re-entry schools (see, for example, Goldman & Bradley, 1996, 1997), they do not provide reliable estimates of the numbers who participate or complete. Data from one source suggest that at any one time up to 4% of dropouts aged 15–19 are enrolled in study for a senior school certificate at a TAFE or ACE provider in the state of Victoria, and about 3% in New South Wales.⁴ National estimates, using longitudinal data, of enrolments of dropouts in a senior school certificate at a TAFE institution, ACE provider or by returning to school suggest that the rates are less than 3% (McMillan & Marks, 2003). Completion figures, though, are not available.

The main alternative pathway pursued by dropouts involves study or training for ‘senior school certificate equivalent’ qualifications, usually undertaken at a TAFE institution or private provider. The most popular of these are apprenticeships and traineeships. Apprenticeships generally involve an indenture or contractual agreement with an employer where a young person is expected to undertake a period of formal training in a classroom setting, sometimes referred to as *block release*, as well as on-the-job experience. The formal training component is generally provided by TAFE Colleges, private providers or group training schemes (though small numbers of school-based apprenticeships are available). Traditionally, apprenticeships involve a 4-year indenture in a traditional craft or trade area such as electrical trades, plumbing, carpentry and automotive trades. However, recent reforms have expanded the areas of training and the length of training. One variation has been the introduction of traineeships which provide training in a range of fields including white-collar occupations, such as clerical work. Traineeships are usually for 12 months rather than 4 years. Apprenticeships and traineeships often appeal to young people who drop out of school because they provide a wage while learning. They also involve the acquisition of skills through applied learning in workplaces, again often appealing to dropouts who have become disengaged from formal classroom learning in school settings, providing an alternative for young people not attracted by full-time school.

The importance of apprenticeships and traineeships to dropouts is highlighted in Table 15.1, which shows the patterns of take-up and completion over a 7-year period after leaving school. The estimates are from a national longitudinal study of over 13,000 students who were in Year 9 in 1995 and surveyed annually. The patterns show that almost 45% of dropouts had entered an apprenticeship or traineeship.

⁴Figures derived by Anne Walstab from the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard for 2004.

Table 15.1 Pathways and completion of school-certificate equivalent qualifications for dropouts across seven post-school years

Pathways beyond school	Percentage
Education and training	70.6
<i>Completed a senior secondary certificate equivalent qualification (39.9)</i>	
High-level vocational qualification (AQF Level 4 or above)	5.5
Apprenticeship	23.9
Traineeship	10.5
<i>Completed a lower-level certificate (10.8)</i>	
Other forms of education and training (AQF Level 3 or below)	10.8
<i>Enrolled in study but did not complete (19.9)</i>	
High-level vocational qualification (AQF Level 4 or above)	6.3
Apprenticeship	5.9
Traineeship	4.4
Other forms of education and training (AQF Level 3 or below)	3.3
No further education and training	29.4
Total	100.0

Source: Figures derived from the Y95 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY).

About one quarter did not complete their training. After seven post-school years, 23.9% of dropouts had successfully completed an apprenticeship. A further 10.5% had completed a traineeship.

In addition to apprenticeships and traineeships, a small number of dropouts study and complete high-level VET qualifications, also considered to be school certificate equivalent qualifications. This level of qualification can be used as an avenue to university. Table 15.1 reports a rate of completion for dropouts of 5.5% over the first seven post-school years.

Using estimates based on the results from the national longitudinal survey of young people reported in Table 15.1, it can be seen that high school equivalent qualifications are gained by roughly 40% of dropouts. When combined with data on the rates of school completion it suggests that currently about 81% of young Australians gain a school certificate or equivalent qualification – 68% successfully graduating from school and a further 13% gaining qualifications through alternative post-school pathways.

Conclusion

As the brief analysis presented in this chapter indicates, it will not be easy for the Australian government to achieve its ambitious goal to have 90% of young people attaining an upper secondary school qualification or equivalent by 2015. Rates of school completion reached a peak in the early 1990s and since that time have been stubbornly resistant to further growth. Unless there is a sustained labour market crisis, a recipe for completion growth in the past, it is difficult to see how further growth will occur. While completion, according to the last Census of Population and

Housing, was at 68%, nationally, and completion of school equivalent qualifications by dropouts adds a further 10–13 percentage points, the remaining growth that is needed will be difficult to achieve given the profile of dropouts. High levels of additional need (welfare and personal), low levels of achievement, higher absenteeism, negative views of school, low aspirations, disadvantage associated with low SES family backgrounds characterise many of those who fail to complete. Without targeted and effective interventions, without widespread reform to the curriculum to make it more meaningful and yet rigorous, and without attempts at improving the quality of teaching and learning, it is not easy to see how schools can deliver what is needed.

This leaves aside maybe a more important issue. Achieving high levels of completion by itself, without regard to the quality of completion, may have little real benefit to young people, the labour force or the community. If gains in completion are achieved simply by expanding the criteria of ‘equivalent’ qualifications and multiplying the number of alternatives without regard to the quality of learning and consistency in the standards of skills achieved by school leavers, there may be little gained even if the target for completion is achieved. It is of little use providing alternatives if they promote stratification, leading to inequality in outcomes, as effectively as if the alternatives did not exist. There is a need in moving forward to ensure that all programs at upper secondary level provide a similar foundation of learning and deliver access to the full range of further education and work opportunities for all. That will make achieving the national target truly meaningful.

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Part III
Programs, Equity and Policy

Chapter 16

Vocational Education and Training in France and Germany: Friend or Foe of the Educationally Disadvantaged?

Richard Teese

Introduction

The modern history of education systems in the developed world shows two striking trends which are related – the mass use of secondary education and widening vulnerability to failure at school. The more that young people have stayed on at school, the wider the net that school has thrown over the population and the greater the exposure of weaker groups to the demands of school. In the early decades after the Second World War, the majority of children from working-class backgrounds did not attempt extended secondary schooling. Many were considered to be under-achievers. They repeated grades and were not admitted to academic secondary schools, or if they were admitted, they were placed in terminal courses. Thus failure came early and was definitive. Massification came later – though national chronologies vary – and, along with this, insecurity at a higher level of schooling. The children who had once completed only compulsory schooling (if that) and who had found refuge of sorts in the labour market progressively surrendered this protection which the stagnating economies of the late 1970s had greatly undermined. They were now trapped between the failure of economic institutions – to deliver more growth, especially in accessible areas of employment – and the failure that educational institutions could and would visit upon them.

Governments of the late 1970s and 1980s implemented both education and labour market policies to reduce continuing high levels of youth unemployment. Education policies are of particular importance because they were intended to tackle underlying structural problems, whereas labour market programs – typically more diverse and transitory – could at best soften the effects of cyclical downturn. The root problem was the widening gap between industry change in the economy and the educational levels of new generations entering the workforce. Large groups of young people were treated by school systems as if the jobs they would have

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entered before the first oil shock still existed. Recovery in the mid-1980s exposed these young people to the contradictory demands of an economy looking forward and a school system looking backwards – on an economic and a social past.

Structural unemployment underlines the distinctive nature of the response of governments of the time – reforming the curriculum of secondary schools, particularly through vocational education. The objectives of this reform have been conceived in broader or narrower terms, depending on the country. In some, perhaps most cases, vocational education has been seen as adding provision of a different kind, without changing a predominantly academic or university-preparatory curriculum. In other cases, a more expansive and radical approach has been taken in which the whole of the upper secondary curriculum has been renovated to blur the boundaries between academic and vocational (for an international overview of approaches in the context of school dropout, see Lamb, 2008). But in all cases vocational education has supplied the key material to reconstruct the secondary school curriculum, partly or wholly, and to adjust the trajectories of young people to the directions of occupational and employment change.

It could be argued that reliance on diversification of the upper secondary curriculum through vocational education represents a conservative strategy which protects both the academic core and its beneficiaries, while supporting growth in areas that pose no threat to the established social pattern of outcomes (Shavit & Müller, 2000). The beneficiaries of this strategy are both social and professional – both parents and teachers. For by confining growth to low-prestige areas of the curriculum, educational policy creates a means of relegating difficult and unsuccessful students to a ‘reserve space’ and insulating more academic students and their teachers from this group. In effect, the use of vocational studies to expand educational participation without trespassing on high-prestige programs operates as a form of social engineering for the benefit of the most academically minded parents, their children and the teachers of their children.

While this argument is a familiar one, the implications are not always fully drawn out. The most important result of this conservative expansionary strategy is the failure to effectively tackle the roots of under-achievement in school. Indeed the very policy of operating a hierarchical structure of programs in upper secondary education helps ensure that low achievement has a rightful place, that is, a set of lower level opportunities are provided, access to which compensates for the inability of school to correct early and cumulative social disadvantage. Traditionally represented as a friend of the working class, vocational education could thus be considered its enemy. But everything depends on the specific ways in which vocational education has been used to reform curricula, the framework of opportunities that is created – both curriculum structure and school provision – and the extent to which under-achievement is tackled in the compulsory years of school. Vocational education is neither friend nor foe, except in the wider context of school system and education policy.

To demonstrate this and to draw out the implications, we examine two contrasting examples of how vocational education has been used to expand educational participation, but in each case has failed to protect young people from the effects of academic selection. The contrast we have chosen is between a predominantly

school-based approach to using vocational education (France) and a predominantly *employment-based* approach to doing so (Germany). There is some overlap in these two approaches as, on the one hand, France also uses apprenticeship, while on the other hand Germany also runs full-time vocational schools. Neither of these two national models is an example of fundamental reform, and each retains a high degree of social selectivity through academic programs and differentiated provision. However, each provides insights into the more general way in which reform through vocational provision is checked and how failure accumulates in school systems in the course of educational expansion. Long-term improvement, including through the implementation of more inclusive approaches to upper secondary education, hinges on showing how more conservative approaches fail to deliver, not only on the equity front, but on the human capital front as well.

France

The use of vocational courses to increase participation in school is a longstanding feature of education policy in France. For example, in the early 1960s nearly half of all secondary school students were enrolled in vocational courses (Delion, 1973, pp. 89, 99). Many also began pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship courses when they were 14–15 years old. School-based vocational courses were upgraded from the mid-1960s and continued to enrol a high proportion of secondary school students (41% in 1972–73) (Delion, 1973, p. 99). That vocational courses enrolled academically weaker children is evident from rates of grade-repeating and also, more problematically, from dropout rates – nearly one in five commencing students in short-cycle courses (CAP, *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*, and BEP, *brevet d'études professionnelles*) (Delion, 1973, p. 93). The rejection of school by dropping out was not economically fatal in these years just before the first oil shock, but the individual and social costs of leaving school without a qualification became unsustainable with the onset of high youth unemployment. The introduction of a technological baccalaureat in the late 1960s – which today contributes half as many baccalaureat graduates as the academic or 'general' award (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale [MEN], 2007, p. 235) – and the development of short-cycle higher education programs, including in senior high school itself, reflect a determination to open schooling to an economy generating opportunities at a higher skill level and condemning unqualified school leavers to prolonged unemployment. But to lay the foundation for higher levels of training, access to vocational courses from early in secondary school was curtailed, the courses were revamped, and in theory they were restricted to students who completed at least 4 years of secondary school (Prost, 1992, pp. 73–88; Rault, 1994, pp. 9–24). As more and more young people stayed on at school – in the absence of full-time work or a broader system of apprenticeship – further reforms were made. In the mid-1980s, the vocational baccalaureat was introduced to enable students to earn a qualification of equivalent status to the general and technological baccalaureats once they had successfully

completed a 2-year basic vocational course (the BEP) (Agulhon, 2000, pp. 46–47). In recent decades, the *bac pro* (vocational baccalaureat) has played a major role in expanding participation in upper secondary education, and over the most recent decade has been the only baccalaureat to register growth (MEN, 2007, p. 235).

If policy-makers in France have returned again and again to vocational training as a vehicle of educational reform, this does not mean that mainstream academic programs have been neglected. On the contrary, there is an equally long history of attempting to create a common lower secondary school curriculum, accessible to all, with no early tracking or streaming. The objective has been to raise achievement for children from all social backgrounds. Were this objective to succeed, it would have major implications for the nature of the 2-year basic vocational courses in upper secondary education (CAP, BEP). For these are filled through the processes of academic selection which continue to operate in the common junior high school (*collège*), an institution that is regarded as much as a factory of failure as success (see, for example, *Le Monde de l'Éducation*, no. 311, Février, 2003). The fact that students do have access to vocational courses in upper secondary school arguably relieves the pressure both on curriculum and on teachers to reduce under-achievement in lower secondary school (and earlier). In effect, this is to subordinate the objectives of common schooling to the 'needs' of hierarchical, differentiated schooling.

Policy-makers have endeavoured to reduce early selection and tracking, not only in lower secondary education, but also in mainstream academic programs in upper secondary school. Early specialisation in these 3-year programs has been curtailed in favour of a core with relatively few options in the first year, and more options in the second year. But running parallel to the general and technological baccalaureats, there continue to be the short-cycle vocational courses which represent a 'refuge' from under-achievement in the *collège* (Establet, 2005, p. 150).

This hasty sketch would be quite incomplete if we omitted to discuss a key factor in the production of failure itself: differences in the quality of the learning environments between junior high schools serving different communities (van Zanten, 2001). Put generally, failure comes about because the cognitive and cultural demands made by school grow more difficult the higher the level of schooling, while the home and school resources of poor families become more inadequate. But the widening gap between the demands of school and the cultural and pedagogical resources available to meet them is not experienced uniformly across a school system (for an overview, see Teese, 2007). In France, as in other OECD countries, there are major differences in school environments and these are associated with performance differences. The *collège unique* (common junior high school) is, in practice, not common, but highly differentiated by location, intake and achievement. The marked differences in achievement which are observed at the end of the 4-year program are linked to socioeconomic status (SES), gender and ethnicity. But pooling of multiple 'at-risk' groups of students intensifies the likelihood of failure. Even after controlling for individual characteristics, achievement is significantly lower in the most segregated schools than in others (Felouzis et al., 2005, pp. 56–57). The scope for segregation is becoming wider, thanks to measures to end zoning (*la carte scolaire*) and to free parents to choose (Terrail, 1997, p. 34; van Zanten & Obin,

2008; 'Carte scolaire', 2009). Thus, if the hierarchy of academic and vocational courses in upper secondary education dulls the pedagogical incentive to improve standards for lower SES children – and gives teachers the tools to select (e.g., the class guidance committee, *conseil de classe*) – the social conditions under which these children are educated frustrates and discourages teachers and lower their expectations (Dubet & Duru-Bellat, 2000, pp. 30–35). Access to vocational studies becomes a critical, compensating factor which relieves the stress of pedagogical failure. Parents themselves frequently accept decisions about stream placement (and grade repeating), as if these decisions help them, too, in managing the needs of their failing children. But the children themselves cannot escape the perception of failure and loss of respect which occurs through relegation to the vocational track.

From this perspective, vocational studies are called on to solve not only the problem of individual failure, but of group failure linked to school provision and inferior learning environments. Not only is the status of vocational studies affected by this task, but so too is the effectiveness with which courses work as judged by outcomes – who graduates, who gets a job, what kind of job, what the career prospects are, who continues in study or training, how successful they are. As an illustration, holders of basic vocational awards (CAP, BEP) were the only group of young people exiting the education system in 2004 whose unemployment rate after 3 years was greater than for the cohort of 2001 (around 17%). Those who undertook training for jobs in the services sector had an unemployment rate after 3 years of 22% (BREF, 2008, p. 248).

The French experience illustrates how vocational training has been used to expand educational participation in school without on the other hand protecting vulnerable populations from scholastic failure. A crucial aspect of this experience has been the clear separation between 'academic' and 'vocational'. These concepts have been used to distinguish between programs and to create streams in an ordered hierarchy which can also operate – and in practice do operate – as social streams. Instead of changing the quality of programs in teaching and learning terms, academic and vocational remain separate program structures, but pushed further up to the senior years, delaying choice rather than changing the range and nature of the choices or indeed merging them in more pedagogically inclusive programs. Massification has not brought about reforms based on how children learn, for example, shifting the emphasis from teacher-centred, formal instructional practice to more student-centred approaches. In short, the policy has been not only to put off student choice until later – which in fact does not delay their exposure to the most conservative teaching approaches and expectations – but to put off indefinitely curriculum reform of a more fundamental kind.

Germany

It might be thought that the weaknesses associated with school-based vocational training, as in France, are avoided in countries where apprenticeship plays a very large, even preponderant role. The Dual System in Germany is seen as having kept

youth unemployment low over the long term and also, notably, during the recent world economic crisis. ‘That Germany – like Austria and the Netherlands – records such a low rate of youth unemployment’, writes the *Frankfurter Allgemeiner* (Arbeitslose Jugendliche, 2010), ‘is linked to the dual training system’. The strength of this system in securing access to skilled, well-paid jobs for a majority of young people involves positive perceptions on the part of young people themselves, their parents and employers. Apprenticeship is not seen as compensation for failure at school, but as a source of security in a labour market that penalises the unqualified. Moreover, the big role that apprenticeship plays not only underpins a high overall level of participation by young people in education and training, but has protected them up to a point from structural change in the economy and resulting high levels of unemployment. By reducing young people’s reliance on formal schooling, the German education system, it could be argued, also reduces their exposure to the scholastic failure evident in countries like France, whose school systems have become ‘massified’. In this context, vocational training plays a crucial role, but it does so because it is employment-based and not annexed to schooling.

This argument draws support from comparative unemployment statistics and from adaptability over the long term to changes in industry and occupational patterns in the German economy, at least until fairly recently (Anweiler, 1996, p. 43). However, it ignores important features, both of the school system itself and of the Dual System as an evolving (and only partial) approach to vocational training.

Over time, the Dual System has shown increasing signs of stress and lack of adaptation to labour market changes. Long viewed as socially integrative – compensating for under-achievement at school or for lack of social promotion for low SES children through educational success – the Dual System today recruits from a higher level of schooling than in the past. Young trainees are, on average, graduates of intermediate secondary school (*Realschule*), when in earlier decades they came predominantly from basic secondary school (*Hauptschule*) (Baethge, 2008, p. 568). Increasing numbers of entrants to the Dual System have completed academic schooling and are qualified to enter higher education. The rising qualification level of trainees implies that success at school is playing an increasing role, and conversely that failure to reach higher levels of schooling is growing more important.

While the Dual System remains the most employment-effective sector of vocational training in Germany, it is declining in relative size when compared with other sectors as well as becoming more educationally selective. The other sectors in which young people undertake vocational training include vocational schools and the ‘transition system’ (*Übergangssystem*). Full-time vocational schooling is provided by intermediate vocational schools (*Berufsfachschulen*) and technical secondary schools (*Fachoberschulen*), from which students can progress to technical higher education. The full-time school sector of vocational training is fairly small in Germany – in contrast, for example, to France – and its share of commencing students in the vocational training system as a whole has remained stable over the last decade at about 17% (Baethge, 2008, p. 556). The ‘transition system’ covers a mix of different programs which act as bridges for school leavers, but do not themselves lead to a qualification. This diverse bridging sector accounts for almost as

many new entrants to vocational training as the Dual System, and its share has been growing (from 32% in 1995 to 40% in 2004). Given the stability of shares in the full-time school sector of vocational training in Germany, this implies that the 'transition system' has grown at the expense of the Dual System (whose share of new entrants fell from 51% to 43% over the same period) (Baethge, 2008, p. 556).

The declining relative importance of the Dual System is symptomatic, not only of problems in adjusting to shifts in industry and employment patterns associated, for example, with the growth of the knowledge economy, but of a growing pattern of exclusion of poorly qualified school leavers. In other words, failure at school increasingly follows the under-achiever into the training market where he or she experiences what could be called 'secondary relegation' (i.e., relegation following a first phase represented by dropout or exclusion from school). The weakest learners, if they do undertake vocational training, more frequently enter the non-qualifying sector – the 'transition system' – in the hope of improving their competitiveness in the labour market, including obtaining an apprenticeship in the Dual System, direct access to which is progressively closing to them. This pattern suggests that the principle of academic selection which delivers low achievers to the labour market both earlier and at a lower level has extended into the operation of the training market. The employment-rich sector of the Dual System and the award-bearing courses offered by full-time vocational courses are becoming less accessible to low achievers, whose academic past haunts them. If the training system does continue to offer a 'safety net', this appears to have many holes, and these have been punctured by the school system. This is apparent, not only from trends in the Dual System – exclusive attention to which gives a distorted picture – but above all in the scale of activity in the 'transition system'. As Baethge observes, 'the critical outcome of structural shift in the vocational training system is the drastic increase in insecurity and the risk of failure at the start of (young people's) working lives which ties them to an expanding transition system' (2008, p. 558).

While, within the training system as a whole, the Dual System is shrinking and also becoming more educationally 'gentrified', it is losing ground to academic schooling and higher education in terms of transition across the whole education system. Between 1992 and 2004, new entrants to the Dual System fell by around 20 percentage points, while the number of commencing students in higher education grew by about 10 percentage points (Baethge, 2008, pp. 554, 555). This confirms the wider trend in OECD countries towards higher levels of participation in upper secondary education – in academic or general programs as distinct from vocational and employment-based training. But it also points to the second trend we noted at the start of this chapter – the widening exposure of the population to scholastic failure. The greater the social emphasis on higher education – as marked by enrolment trends – the more the population as a whole relies on gaining access to the paths of academic promotion in the school system and also on successful passage along these paths.

Social access to academic schooling is markedly unequal in Germany, thanks to early selection, the tripartite division of schools, and the processes of institutional social selection as well as cultural self-selection which this discriminating framework supports (Geißler, 2008, pp. 77–78; Müller & Pollak, 2008, p. 308). These are

persistent, though changing features of German education. In the 1960s, only about 15% of 14-year-olds attended grammar school (*Gymnasium*). Social gaps were very large. Working-class children made up only 10% of Grade 10 students (though their fathers represented 45% of the workforce), while the children of civil servants (who made up only 9% of the workforce) took 25% of places (Arbeitsgruppe Bildungsbericht, 1994, p. 507). While these sharp disparities have been significantly reduced, they continue to be very marked. Children from high SES families are three times more likely than low SES children to enrol in a *Gymnasium* (Maaz et al., 2008, p. 205). Many children from less-educated families who do enrol leave at the end of Grade 10 (Rosner, 2006, p. 17), so that the low SES share of Grade 13 classes falls to 14% (compared to a workforce representation of 40%). Teacher judgement and parental perceptions and priorities contribute to early selection, even among children of similar measured ability. In one study it was found, for example, that low SES children had to achieve at about 50% higher than high SES children to gain a recommendation from primary school to go to a *Gymnasium* (cited in Rosner, 2006, p. 12).

Early selection into different types of secondary school varies by region (federal state) in Germany, but in general produces a set of secondary consequences which extend and deepen social disadvantage (Müller & Pollak, 2008, pp. 308–313). The lowest ranking type of school (the *Hauptschule*) has undergone a process of residualisation which has made it at once the socially most homogeneous type of school and the one in which multiple disadvantages of poverty, gender and ethnicity are concentrated (Solga & Wagner, 2008; Geißler, 2008, pp. 74–75). Social and academic filtering of intakes creates different learning environments which either promote achievement or weaken it, and which involve higher or lower expectations on the part of teachers. Differentiation of opportunity on the basis of early selection creates conditions in which both advantage and disadvantage are multiplied, and it is not surprising that large differences in competencies are recorded in PISA tests, both within and between different types of school (PISA-Konsortium, 2004, pp. 243–247).

Progress over time thus presents a mixed picture. If anything, the most vulnerable social groups – immigrant children from poorly educated backgrounds – are worse off today because the schools in which they are disproportionately concentrated have been residualised. On the other hand, access to intermediate secondary education through the *Realschule* has improved to the point where social chances now converge (Geißler, 2008, pp. 74–75; PISA-Konsortium, 2004, p. 244). This is significant because graduating from this type of school improves access to the Dual System, while also opening the door to technical higher education. But progress beyond intermediate secondary education – in the *Gymnasium* and in higher education as a whole, including university – has been much more limited or non-existent. As reflected in the distribution of 15-year-olds, the share of *Gymnasium* places held by young people from the lowest SES quartile is only about 6% (PISA-Konsortium, 2004, p. 244). Poorer relative achievement of low SES students and the comparative economic security represented by the Dual System are factors which keep this share low and prevent more equitable growth in university participation. More of the ‘talented poor’ steer away. Over the last 20 years, there has been practically no improvement in relative

social access to university, with the children of manual workers representing about 17% of students (as against a workforce share of about 40%) (Mayer, 2008, p. 624).

The tripartite organisation of the German school system, while weakening in its rigidity through the declining role of the *Hauptschule* in a number of federal states, thus remains a structure of social exclusion, guarding and multiplying the advantages of the most well-educated families in Germany, and limiting more severely than in most other developed nations the chances of low SES children (Dravenau & Groh-Samberg, 2008, p. 103). This conservative role is compatible with educational expansion (Maaz et al., 2008, p. 214), but depends on flexibility in the sectors of education and training that are not 'high stakes', are able to absorb growth and can dissipate social tension through access to relative benefits. The Dual System does offer these benefits, but its pattern of social use is changing and its relative importance as measured by shares of new entrants to the training system as a whole is declining.

Young people in Germany are increasingly dependent on extended secondary schooling, and as a consequence their exposure to scholastic failure has widened. In the past, children from poorer families were protected from this by the Dual System. But this protection has weakened as the role of qualifications intensifies. To quote Baethge (2008, p. 568), 'A clear qualifications-based segmentation of the German vocational training system is evident in which the fully qualifying channels of training are occupied in the main by teenagers and young adults with intermediate or higher qualifications from school, while the transition system enrolls mainly the poorly qualified'. Today failure at school in the form of holding no qualification or only a leaving certificate from a basic secondary school (*Hauptschulabschluss*) increasingly operates to *prevent* entrance to apprenticeship. The devaluation of the basic certificate and economic uncertainty resulting from this constrain young people to make greater use of school or to take refuge in the vocational 'transition system', which itself is a sector of uncertainty, issuing no qualifications and offering only limited and delayed access to apprenticeship. The vocational training system only 'solves' failure by creating a subordinate sector which is uncompetitive and disarmed and made all too accessible through lack of award-bearing courses. It is difficult to escape the impression that social advantage is being protected through the creation of multiple 'buffer zones', both within the school system itself and on its fringes in the vocational training system. The institutional site which shows the least social perturbation, the *Gymnasium*, is guarded on all sides – by lower-level schools, early selection and a hierarchy of vocational options. As the vocational compensations for scholastic failure decline, the dependence of the whole system on the early and largely irreversible production of failure becomes more overt.

Different Systems, Common Functions

Both the French and German systems display an increasing use of extended secondary schooling accompanied by a widening vulnerability of the population to scholastic failure. Vocational training provides only limited compensation for the

continuing marked patterns of social selection and exclusion which operate through scholastic failure. Moreover if, as in France, training is provided mainly through schools, trainees are exposed to the logic of preparation for further study within a hierarchy of qualifications as compared to preparation for work. A most telling illustration of this concerns the evolution of the largest basic vocational certificate in France, the BEP (*brevet d'études professionnelles*). As Prost observes (1992, p. 202), by making the BEP a preparatory step to the vocational baccalaureat, policy-makers constrained teachers to prepare students for higher-level studies and to shift the emphasis away from preparation for work, with the resulting risk of reinstalling academic discrimination into a stream of study already fed by failure.

Although the French and German models of vocational training differ sharply, the same underlying functions of absorbing failure and channelling under-achievers into the lower reaches of the labour market are performed. Historically the German vocational training system can claim much lower rates of youth unemployment, and the Dual System in particular has proved adaptable, if to a declining degree. In contrast, vocational training in France has been engineered in the main through the school system. New and higher-level qualifications, based on a broader industry as opposed to a craft orientation, have been deployed. But youth unemployment has remained high, the period leading up to effective insertion into the employed workforce has lengthened, and the system appears to offer little protection against cyclical downturn. However, these differences from a labour market perspective in the performance of the vocational sectors of education systems mask underlying commonalities in institutional functions. These are of great interest from an equity perspective and also in the long run from a human capital angle.

Both the German and the French vocational training systems are constrained by how their school systems work. These display a remarkable historical contrast which is real enough in terms of chronologies, but deceptive as regards function. The tripartite system in Germany has clear parallels with the segmented system of post-primary schooling which existed in France on the eve of the great reforms of the late 1950s and 1960s. French policy-makers could pride themselves on having dismantled this system which, on the contrary, was retained in Germany, despite a major push for reform during the same period and the successful creation of a comprehensive model in the *Gesamtschule*. Germany retained early selection from around the age of 10 to support its segmented system, while France progressively abandoned it, having embraced a comprehensive model. But in fact selection went 'underground' in the *collège unique*. It continues to operate informally through options (like German and Latin), through guidance procedures, but above all through a still strongly teacher-centred academic curriculum working in sharply different and increasingly segregated social settings. Early selection in Germany has not spared socially disadvantaged populations from the demoralisation and relegation they experience in French schools. Indeed, as we have seen, tripartite organisation in Germany, even while evolving towards a more integrated system, has allowed adverse conditions to accumulate at the lowest point in the hierarchy (the *Hauptschule*) and this has worsened educational chances. Again if failure has delayed formal selection until the end of the 4-year junior high school program in

France, the complex hierarchical structure of the upper secondary curriculum and the operation of different types of school at this level (*lycée général et technologique, lycée professionnel*) create an environment of reference which shapes teacher behaviour and student perceptions in the officially unstreamed *collège* (Dubet & Duru-Bellat, 2000, pp. 30–35). There selection starts just as early, but is internalised in teaching and assessment rather than formalised in recommendations at the end of primary school.

Differences of form thus conceal commonalities of function. It is these that influence how well vocational training works and for whom. The function of academic selection operates through different structures, but discriminates through essentially the same cultural organs – school subjects. The consolidation of particular cognitive and generic cultural demands in academic subjects which have an enduring identity and a legal status requires specialisation of teaching effort, a filtering of classes and bureaucratic organisation to deliver competitive results. If Germany achieves this through the *Gymnasium*, France has its *lycées*, and each depends on a subject hierarchy which is more or less structured to marshal the discriminating demands that are made on students. Access to the ‘hard’ subjects which dominate the hierarchy of the curriculum ensures that social advantage can be converted into academic distinction. It is the preservation of this curriculum hierarchy, albeit in different national forms, which has ensured that progressive expansion of upper secondary education has been accompanied by widening social exposure to failure.

Going Forward

Seen in the perspective of how school systems work, vocational training can be regarded both as the friend that offers protection *and* the foe that delays reform. The broad implications for reform are clear. On the one hand, every effort must be made to close the achievement gap in the early years of school (and indeed poor cognitive growth before then) (Leschinsky, 2008, p. 387). This is borne out by international research on the long-term and cumulative impact of socio-cultural disadvantage (e.g., Feinstein et al., 2004). But, on the other hand, unless intervention in the early years is sustained into higher levels of schooling and backed by consequential structural reforms, the efforts made in the early years risk being wasted. On the premise that a substantial and sustainable raising of achievement amongst low SES and minority children is achieved, where would this leave the hierarchical school systems of Germany and France? What place would there be for a vertical hierarchy of curriculum served by a differentiated school system, if large achievement gaps between rich and poor were drastically reduced? But then it must be asked would it even be possible to compress these gaps if the institutions of academic differentiation in secondary school remained in place? For so long as *Hauptschule, Realschule* and *Gymnasium* exist, so long as *lycée professionnel* subserves *lycée général*, even small relative differences in achievement in primary

school will continue to matter and the external signs that mark social origin will suggest that small test scores are even bigger than they are and of wider import.

In a context in which the use of extended secondary school is rising and with it the range of the population exposed to failure, reforming the curriculum of secondary schools cannot consist simply of adding vocational streams, as if what was required was a sanctuary or asylum free of academic scrutiny. The German example shows that hierarchies develop *within training systems*, that the most valuable locations are increasingly reserved for better qualified candidates. Furthermore, a larger and larger system is required to compensate for the relative lack of training places, while being prevented, on the other hand, from challenging the ‘gold standard’ of regulated apprenticeship by issuing its own awards. Generations of young people experience discrimination through this system which, at the same time, lowers their productivity as workers over the long term, increases the risk of anti-social behaviour, and drives up the social costs associated with unemployment, disability, welfare dependency and criminal justice.

The French example of relying on vocational options in school to support rising levels of educational attainment shows how vulnerability operates through the way in which preparation for higher study overrules preparation for work, thus refusing escape from academic discrimination, even for low achievers. Moreover, the French experience brings out even more forcefully the sense of injustice associated with relegation – as manifest in street violence and car burnings – and driven home by persistent, sometimes astronomic levels of youth unemployment. Over the last 20 years, the unemployment rate for 15- to 24-year-olds has never fallen below 18% (Goux & Nouveau, 2007, p. 84). But it also reveals injustice at the high end of a hierarchical system. For there, the pursuit of academic excellence leads to a virtual social monopoly at the most lucrative sites of the education system, and these consume resources on a scale incompatible with raising achievement in the schools of the poor. Expenditure per student in the preparatory classes of the *grandes écoles* is 1.75 times higher than expenditure on pupils in junior high school (MEN, 2007: 333), while within higher education there are even larger gaps between elite and mass sectors (Maurin, 2007, pp. 235–236; Renaut, 2002, p. 81).

If, in France, the dismantling of the structures of academic selection in junior high school has been checked by re-erecting them in senior high school (and beyond), this is because segregating more academic pupils – first by type of school and then by stream – also creates a culture of teaching and learning and a veneration of theoretical and abstract studies which marginalises innovation and reform in the sectors or in the schools deserted by the elite. The insights into student learning which have been gained through years of experience in comprehensive schooling and in vocational education and training can gain no foothold in academic schooling. There the aim is to distinguish between children through the most conservative means of teaching and assessment. Writing of the policy of building bridges between academic and vocational streams in France, Rault observes: ‘Instead of being enriched by teaching and learning in vocational and technical training, secondary education has been content to open a few doors to a few deserters from an inferior stream...and to enhance the prestige of the ‘noble’ and much

coveted stream by creating bridges. In this way, not only are vocational studies condemned, but academic schooling is impoverished' (1994, p. 15).

Applied, collaborative and problem-based learning – which might summarise the philosophy of vocational education and training – should extend into the territory of the most academically demanding subjects so that they become interesting and manageable thanks to the manner in which they are taught rather than endured as part of the 'craft' of students for the economic value they deliver. It requires not only a blurring of the boundaries between 'academic' and 'vocational' in the formal frameworks of curriculum – as, for example, in some Nordic models of upper secondary education – but a pedagogical transformation which operates across all strands to ensure that young people from all social backgrounds can be exposed to high cognitive demands, but properly supported. This assumes that the top-down pressure for selection which acts through a hierarchy of 'noble' and 'base' streams of higher education is relieved. But does that not also require basic reform, not only of structures, but of processes of teaching and learning in higher education itself?

In the end, the solution to equity lies in *raising demands* on young people, not lowering them through less challenging streams, including vocational options. If this is followed through consistently, there can be no question of retaining structures which allow the socially most advantaged families to exploit the narrowest academic means of preserving status under the guise of achievement – in effect *lowering demands on their children* – while systematically removing challenge and value from the educational experience of the poor.

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Chapter 17

Pathways to Completion for School Dropouts

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Introduction

What opportunities are provided for young people who drop out of school to re-engage in study and obtain upper secondary qualifications? Mass secondary schooling has brought about significant change in the kinds of learners entering upper secondary education. Once primarily focused on university entry, school systems have had to diversify their curriculum offerings to cater for the needs of a broader range of learners whose aspirations include vocational training and direct entry to the labour market, as well as university. These demands have exerted considerable pressure on schools, on their curricula and on the upper secondary qualifications that they offer. School systems have had variable success in meeting these demands and in some countries large numbers of young people still drop out of school and need to rely on alternative pathways – mostly outside of the school system – to obtain upper secondary qualifications. These pathways can include vocational education courses and apprenticeships, equivalent credentials, as well as the more traditional academic upper secondary qualifications. Sites of provision include further education colleges, technical and vocational education institutions, community colleges, adult schools, and, in some countries, even secondary schools offering ‘second chance’ or ‘re-entry’ programs for dropouts.

The aim of this chapter is to examine some of the opportunities provided in different countries for obtaining upper secondary qualifications for young people who have dropped out of school. This will exclude discussion of the traditional or school-based pathways to completion such as school-based vocational education and apprenticeships, even if that activity occurs in designated or separate secondary schools. Vocational programs in many European systems are located within the framework of upper secondary schooling, rather than within a framework of adult

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or further education. Instead, this chapter will focus on the range of activity outside of secondary schools – by and large in adult and community education centres and further education colleges, although not exclusively so – involving education and training leading to upper secondary qualifications for dropouts. To discuss the main forms of provision for dropouts in these alternative settings, the chapter is divided into two main sections: (1) vocational education, and (2) adult and community education.

Vocational Education Pathways

This section focuses on vocational education delivered outside secondary schools in what is described in some systems as the adult or further education sector. The prevalence and strength of this sector varies considerably across countries and this, in turn, affects the capacity for dropouts in some nations to use it as a pathway to gain an upper secondary qualification or equivalent.

In Australia, there is an extensive vocational education and training sector, predominantly comprised of publicly funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, though private providers increasingly have become important players. This sector offers the principal pathway for dropouts seeking initial qualifications. Faced with stubbornly low rates of school completion, Australian policy-makers have recently established a range of school completion targets that include recognition of the role of TAFE institutes and other providers in delivery of upper secondary qualifications (whether an upper secondary school certificate or its ‘equivalent’). While only a small proportion of school-aged young people in Australia use TAFE in this way – the vast majority of 16- and 17-year-olds who are in full-time education are in schools – quite a large number of school dropouts do, with many entering apprenticeships or traineeships and other forms of vocational education leading to upper secondary-equivalent qualifications (for estimates see Lamb & Mason, 2008; Robinson & Lamb, 2009; Lamb, 2010). Wyn et al. (2004) argue that these programs and settings may be effective pathways for dropouts, although not in all cases. Data from a 2007 school leaver survey in the Australian state of Victoria (Teese et al., 2007) suggest that non-apprenticeship vocational education provides a pathway to completion for a relatively small proportion of dropouts – 12.6% of males and 21.9% of females. If, however, transition to apprenticeships and to traineeships is added, these proportions increase (to 45.2% of males and 22.5% of females).

In England, too, there is a strong post-school vocational education and training system. However, the concept of a recovery mechanism, of education and training programs being available for school dropouts to re-engage in education and obtain upper secondary qualifications, is somewhat more difficult to apply. Post-16, vocational education and training is considered a legitimate pathway for those who fail to achieve the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) benchmarks of five A* to C grade passes including mathematics and English. The provision of vocational education, for the most part in the Further Education colleges, therefore

might be regarded as a school-equivalent pathway. Certainly, in the formulation of national targets for school completion or its equivalent, they are seen to play a major role, with full-time education, work-based learning and part-time education or training all satisfying the requirements for meeting these targets (Sullivan & Unwin, 2010). Some now predominantly cater for a youth market, although most began serving mainly adults and now play an expanded role in dealing with school-aged young people. They are not vocational secondary schools, as might be found in the continental systems, and most young people do not attend these settings to obtain 'A levels' (senior secondary completion qualifications), although some may. However, while Further Education colleges are clearly not schools and have origins firmly rooted in the tradition of adult provision, they have come to represent a pathway for some young people who would be defined as dropouts in other countries. Wong et al. (2006) argue for the efficacy of these programs in giving young people opportunities for success, although Sullivan and Unwin (2010) note that it is the students who want to continue their schooling but fail to reach the GCSE benchmark who enter these programs in Further Education colleges. This in turn results in an intake dominated by disadvantaged students, who are further disadvantaged by the fact that colleges are funded at a lower rate than schools.

In Scotland, where the Youth Guarantee is designed to ensure that all 16- to 17-year-olds not in education or training are entitled to work-based vocational training (Raffe, 2010), vocational education and training provision external to secondary schools also plays a role for this age group. Apprenticeships offer a further pathway but are dependent on supply and subject to variations in quality.

Other nations included as case studies in this book – Iceland, Poland and Finland among them – also include programs for dropouts in their more traditional adult vocational education provision, although, given the strength of school-based vocational education in these nations, such programs do not play the role to the same extent as seen in the English context (Blondal et al., 2010; Mikiewicz, 2010; Rinne & Jarvinen, 2010). There are both public and private institutions which run courses designed to provide young people with vocational skills and qualifications. They include, for example, the Institutions of Professional Training in Poland, which cater for both adult and school-aged students. These deal with a broad range of age groups and consist of education centres for youth and adults at the post-lower secondary level, and training centres offering courses, seminars and workshops and delivering practical vocational skills. They include within their scope the provision of basic skills, vocational qualifications and the upgrading of existing skills and qualifications. These programs may in some cases play a broader role than simply education and training, also delivering services relating to harm prevention and rehabilitation as well as assisting youth at risk of unemployment, and youth requiring special support or mentoring. In Finland, the programs may target both dropouts and those at risk of dropout. They are designed to provide young people with a basic or vocational school certificate as an equivalent to the traditional school leaving certificate and activities include a significant amount of time in workplace learning which is competency-assessed. The programs, which can be costly, are supported financially by the European Union (EU). A similar EU initiative in France also targets early

leavers with a program combining vocational education and basic literacy and numeracy, although its reach is limited and it does not deliver certificates or qualifications that can be considered upper secondary equivalent (Blanchard, 2010). Limited reach, lack of funding and lack of continuity characterise similar programs offered at the national and regional level in Spain (Merino et al., 2010).

In other systems, where alternative provision of vocational education has a much lower profile, there are fewer options for dropouts and the opportunities for a pathway to upper secondary completion are negligible. In Norway, for example, vocational programs are offered within the context of secondary schooling only and no other providers deal with this age group. In fact, Markussen et al. (2010) argue that the *Follow-Up Service*, a program designed to assist dropouts re-enter education and training, was hampered by the fact that the only option it had was to advise dropouts to re-enter the same schooling system which they had dropped out of. The authors argue that another option within schools, *competence at a lower level* – a certificate provided to students who do not qualify for university or do not receive a vocational qualification – provides young people at risk of dropping out with a way of recognising their upper secondary participation. They argue that this option is rarely considered as a planned initial strategy, but rather is awarded as a default ‘certificate’, acting more as a euphemism for failure. The qualification is not equivalent to other upper secondary qualifications because it does not provide access to tertiary study, it is not standards-based in the same way as the mainstream qualifications and it carries very little ‘value’ in the labour market.

In Germany and Switzerland, school completion is defined broadly, with the Dual System (apprenticeship) pathway included among the mainstream school pathways, as are school-based vocational (non-apprenticeship) pathways. Outside these school-based tracks, there are few opportunities for school dropouts to gain upper secondary qualifications. In Switzerland, an exception is the transitional programs, provided as a pathway for young people who cannot obtain an apprenticeship due to labour market conditions and lack of opportunities provided by employers. Transitional programs are designed to channel young people back into school or into an apprenticeship, a result which is achieved for approximately two thirds to three quarters of the young people in this situation (Pagnossin, 2010). Similarly, in Germany, ‘transition system’ programs provide a basic preparation for dropouts from school to enable them to enter award-bearing vocational education – but this need not lead to completion.

The United States context is not unlike the United Kingdom or Australia in terms of the role of its tertiary adult sector (mainly comprising community colleges) in delivering vocational education and training. However, in the United States, the community colleges play a negligible role in providing pathways to completion for high school dropouts. This may in part relate to the fact that there is little consistency in skill standards and qualifications across the states (Office for Official Publications of the European Communities [OOPEC], 2002). Exceptions include initiatives such as the *Gateway Program*, which partners a school and a community college in the delivery of the traditional high school diploma (Hyslop, 2007). The inclusion of the school in the partnership is mandated by legislation which disallows community colleges from delivering the high school diploma. However, this

type of program is rare and is, moreover, concerned with the mainstream high school diploma rather than an equivalent.

In the American context, while there is little discussion of alternative provision, there is an alternative *certificate* – based on General Educational Development (GED) test results. Murnane et al. (2000) and Bracey (1995) have both found longer term labour market and higher earnings benefits as a result of completing the GED. However, the latter notes that alternative instructional settings might be preferable for young people who fail to achieve a high school diploma in traditional settings. Recovery programs may also be offered in alternative settings and Rumberger (2010) notes that a number of factors are associated with effective programs, including a non-threatening learning environment, caring, committed and responsible staff, positive culture and a low student-teacher ratio. However problems were also identified in the delivery of these programs, including a perception of them as symbolising failure, and uncertain and inconsistent funding.

There has been little comparative evaluation of the relevance and success of vocational education pathways for completion of initial qualifications. Little is known, for example, of the relative success of different programs and the features associated with what works best and why, particularly when viewed from a cross-national perspective. The area is relatively under-researched and under-theorised. There has been a lot of work in each country on the reasons why young people become disengaged and drop out of school and therefore what tertiary education institutions may need to address in attempting to re-engage dropouts, such as the need for imaginative teaching approaches and motivated teachers who enjoy working with young people, effective pastoral care, attention to individual needs, adult settings in which young people are treated with respect, and small class sizes.

Wyn et al. (2004) note that while these features may be vital to successful pathways they are often missing from the existing programs in the adult and further education sector and that a more consistent approach is necessary when addressing the particular needs of school dropouts. Other studies (e.g., Polesel et al., 2004) have also suggested that the range of programs and background and experience of vocational education and training sector staff may not always provide the best experiences for this group. The evidence indicates that while more institutions may become increasingly involved in the provision of programs for dropouts, their role is not a large one, their effectiveness is uneven and they may not be appropriate for the majority of young people in this situation.

Adult and Community Education Pathways

Dropouts in Schools for Adults

In many countries, adult education systems offer opportunities to help re-engage students who have dropped out of school. Generally speaking, it can be said that adult education covers three areas of education: general, vocational and life skills

(personal, cultural and social). This section of the chapter concentrates on the general area, that which enables participants, first, to complete an upper secondary qualification, and, second, to access further stages of education. These two 'benefits' are also available to younger students, who for various reasons have dropped out of school and re-commence their learning in the adult education sector. There is, inevitably, some overlap with some of the courses described in the previous section, as many adult learning classes integrate aspects of vocational education in their approaches. As in the previous section, the analysis here is based on relevant data provided in the country chapters and on the authors' own research and experience in this field.

Adult education consists of education organised by various central (national government and ministry of education) organisations, non-governmental educational initiatives (societies, foundations, etc.) and by employers, depending on the country. Financing for these forms of education comes from public funds (government), non-government or private sources (sponsors, employers and students). All of these different forms (in terms of organisation and funding) of adult education appear in the country analyses in this book. In the majority, adult education is also made available to non-traditional students, that is, young people who have dropped out of school.

Most of the education systems presented in this book adopt strategies that involve the inclusion of school dropouts in existing forms of adult education. In Canada, adult sector providers run courses which are available both to adults returning to study and to school leavers aged 16 or older seeking an alternative learning setting. Janosz et al. (2010) note that the adult sector is becoming increasingly attractive to dropouts seeking a less authoritarian learning environment than that provided in schools. However, the authors also note that the less structured style of adult learning may not provide the support and motivation needed by dropouts.

In Scotland, too, school-aged students may enter adult vocational colleges, which, however, are not always equipped to deal with the needs of disaffected youth (Raffe, 2010). In Spain, courses for dropouts are offered in adult institutions originally designed to combat illiteracy and the problems of unemployment in the adult population. Data suggest that 40% of students enrolled in these schools in order to obtain the Secondary Education Certificate are under the age of 20 (Merino & Garcia, 2010).

Two main organisational approaches are adopted in the provision of these kinds of courses. In some cases, evening classes for adults are organised at secondary schools but are delivered in 'senior' classes and departments. For dropouts who participate in these classes, this carries the advantage that it does not force them to leave the school they attended prior to dropping out (e.g., Iceland, Poland). Most of the country analyses, however, describe programs in which school dropouts have access to and participate in programs which were designed around the needs of adult learners (e.g., Canada, United States). Frequently, these institutions offer not only general education (as in *second chance* education leading to an upper secondary qualification or equivalent), but also other forms of vocational

education and scope for the development of life skills. Some examples of such institutions are lifelong learning centres in Iceland, and Adult and Community Education providers in Australia. It might also be noted that there are small numbers of adult re-entry schools in some states in Australia which dropouts access, schools which aim to deliver secondary school qualifications (Lamb, 2010). Focusing on dropouts wishing to re-engage in a mainstream senior secondary school certificate, they are often co-located in existing upper secondary schools (Polesel, 2002).

What Happens to Dropouts in Adult Education Settings?

There has been some research examining the suitability of adult education settings for school dropouts. It points to the discord between the needs and backgrounds of dropouts and the outlooks and goals of adult learners, those for whom the sector was originally designed. Dropouts leave school for a range of reasons, many having become disaffected learners with high levels of personal and social support needs. It is not apparent that there are many adult education settings geared to address these particular needs and issues. Adult education theorists sometimes take the view that the processes of adult and non-adult teaching and learning significantly differ from one another and require different skills of teachers. These differences have not only a psychological dimension (needs, motivations, attitudes and the scope of experiences), as defined by Knowles et al. (2005), but also a social and cultural one, which results from the personal and professional context of the everyday life of adult and non-adult students. This means that adult education settings may not always meet the needs of school dropouts, because of the conflicting role that must be served in addressing the needs and dispositions of their more traditional adult users. There is also the issue of the context of learners' age and motivation, with young people, particularly dropouts, often seeking initial qualifications and acquisition of education and training skills that will assist in accessing further study and entry to the labour market, while adults are often looking to achieve life goals in many other areas of life, including social, professional or family ones (Illeris, 2002).

Dropouts bring to the adult setting educational experiences often different from those which are characteristic of adult students. They are frequently burdened with long-term scholastic failure, have become disengaged from learning and suffer from various personal and social issues which contributed to their dropping out of school. They are often educationally neglected, have low self-esteem and lack faith in their own capacities (Nizińska, 2008). These issues require particular support in educational settings if they are to be addressed successfully, meaning that adult education providers have to play a socio- and psycho-therapeutic role for dropouts as well as an educational one. This tendency can alter the focus of adult education.

One of the main reasons dropouts enter adult education is the organisational culture and climate of these settings and programs. The features that are particularly relevant

and appreciated by dropouts include: being treated as an adult (which is symbolised by the word 'adult' in the name of the institution), alternative ways of working, freedom, independence and learner responsibility (see Nizińska & Kurantowicz, 2008). In a way, the rituals of adult sector institutions and the philosophy of adult education support the process of recovering school dropouts, offering them a quick 'promotion' to the adult world. Optimistically, this means that in these settings, dropouts gain the chance for recognition in being treated as an adult in their education and, through it, in social and public life. This recognition reduces the sense of social exclusion that dropouts feel due to their failed secondary school experiences.

Conclusion

A key issue for the success of pathways to completing initial qualifications for dropouts is the ability for relevant institutions and programs to meet the needs of this group. This message emerges strongly from the two sections in this chapter. The research evidence on the success in meeting these needs is mixed. Some institutions delivering vocational education question their own track record in meeting the needs of dropouts, while adult schools face the same question when they attempt to cater to the needs of both younger and older students in the same settings.

On the one hand, the pathways for dropouts outside of secondary schools have been shown to offer an important second chance for many dropouts. Vocational education programs delivered in such settings as further education or community colleges may provide more mature learning environments for young people alienated by the discipline and authority structures of schools, not to mention more effective pathways to the labour market. On the other hand, there is evidence that such settings can struggle when confronted with the pastoral care needs of school dropouts.

Similarly, adult education providers, dealing with students scarred by the experience of school, may find themselves having to play a quasi-therapeutic role, re-socialising and re-integrating young people into learning environments leading to recognised qualifications, as well as re-establishing pathways for them into the labour market and lifelong learning. But here too, problems emerge. Adult education is often a system of institutions designed for adult learners and is poorly equipped to meet the substantial needs of young people who have failed to have their needs addressed adequately in the secondary school system. Many school dropouts present with a complex and demanding set of problems and specific needs, such as lack of training and work experience, learning difficulties, lack of family support, difficult social backgrounds, premature parenthood and a general need for counselling and guidance. Programs in the tertiary and adult education sectors can be attractive for this group, as they offer a more adult learning environment and are designed to improve employability by providing market relevant education and training through the attainment of upper secondary qualifications. Several factors should be considered in developing policies to assist school dropouts in the tertiary and adult education sectors. Among the most important considerations are: early action, precise targeting, designing

programs relevant to local or national labour market needs, integrating and combining services into a 'comprehensive package', and extensive involvement of all social partners and public authorities (Martin & Grubb, 2001; Quintini et al., 2007).

It may also be important to remember the origins of dropout and why there is a need for recovery at all. It is essential that efforts in all systems focus on prevention, that is, prevention of dropout from school. Te Riele (2006) has suggested that focusing on the attributes and characteristics of dropouts as the source of the problem allows us to deflect attention away from what is wrong with our secondary schools. Privileging alternative approaches to delivery of upper secondary school programs in tertiary or adult education settings may well do the same thing. Building up alternative pathways for dropouts can lead us into the trap of failing to address the deep-seated problems within schools themselves. Moreover, the availability of alternatives in itself is no guarantee of more effective processes of choice. As Lund (2008) argues in the Swedish context there is evidence that increased 'choice' in that country has disadvantaged lower socioeconomic status students.

The evidence from the chapters in this book suggests that pathways to completion for school dropouts provided through adult and further education institutions can play a role in increasing the numbers of young people who gain upper secondary qualifications, though the size and nature of this role varies across countries depending on institutional arrangements and programs. Polesel et al. (2004) suggest that many adult-sector teachers dealing with school-aged students question their own ability to meet the duty of care and pastoral needs of this age group, not to mention their ability to provide the range of programs (both general and vocational) required to cater for the diverse needs of this group. The mixed picture presented in this chapter of the role played by alternative pathways for dropouts indicates that such pathways will continue to offer important opportunities for some dropouts to gain initial qualifications, but will struggle to meet the needs of all.

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Chapter 18

School Dropout and Inequality

Stephen Lamb

Introduction

Educational inequality is a persistent and common feature of all nations. Levels of educational attainment and academic success vary by family background, race and location in every system suggesting that there are commonalities of process that wealthy nations share. Yet, the extent of inequality and its impact can be stronger or weaker depending on the form and architecture of institutional and program arrangements. This point is made clear in the work of Douglas Willms who has reported in his comparative studies of educational performance that the relationship between home background and school outcomes can be more or less severe: while inequality is quite strong in some nations, others achieve both above-average levels of student achievement and weaker effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on educational success leading to greater equality of educational opportunity (Willms, 2004, 2006; OECD, 2001, Chap 8). In some nations, the social gaps in student performance are weaker and the chances of success for the poor are stronger. To what extent does this apply to dropout and completion rates and what arrangements and features support higher completion rates and weaker social differences?

This chapter explores some of these issues. It draws on the national case studies to examine patterns of inequality in relation to dropout and completion. It begins by looking at research from each country on the patterns of dropout and completion and the factors that influence them. This is used to develop a conceptual model of the commonalities in process. Attention then turns to an examination of the effects of social background and how this varies across nations. The final section develops an explanation for international differences in dropout and completion and in the levels of inequality.

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Influences on Dropout and Completion

The national case studies presented in this book all highlight similar sets of factors influencing the rates of dropout and completion. Despite international variations in rates, key research studies from each country provide similar profiles of the characteristics of those who complete and those who drop out. Most point to features of family background (such as SES, family structure and parental education), demographic factors (such as gender, race, ethnicity and location), individual attributes (such as disability, health and self esteem), and experiences in school (such as academic achievement, attitudes towards school and grade repetition or retention) as important. They also point to the impact of school context as well as community and economic settings.

Table 18.1 summarises the factors examined in representative research studies from each of the 13 contributing countries. A single key study from each country is listed. Most of the studies base their analyses on data from large-scale cohort studies (mostly longitudinal). They are certainly not exhaustive of the many studies on dropout and completion that have been undertaken in each country. However, they are representative of studies looking at different aspects of the process, often incorporating different groups of variables.

Certain difficulties arise in comparing the studies. Sometimes the outcome – completion or dropout – is defined in different ways. In some studies dropout is defined in terms of young people of an age group (e.g., 20–24 years of age) who are no longer in school and did not attain a post-compulsory school certificate; in other studies, as proportions of commencing secondary school students who did not remain at school to the final year; and for yet other studies, as the numbers of those who did not fulfil the requirements for graduation before leaving school. In some countries the research tends to focus on completion or dropout only at the upper secondary level (such as Markussen et al., 2008, in Norway), while in other countries the research estimates cover dropout in the lower as well as upper secondary years (for example, Janosz et al., 1997, in Canada). A second problem when comparing research studies is that they differ in terms of the methods of analysis used and the format in which the results are presented. For example, Jónasson and Blöndal (2002) in their study of patterns in Iceland provide cohort estimates of the percentages of students with certain background characteristics who completed upper secondary school by the age of 24. Rumberger (1995), examining patterns in the USA, used a multi-level statistical procedure and presented eight models, each including additional variables, so that the apparent effects of background variables (such as ethnicity) were measured as other factors (such as self-esteem and aspirations) were added to the model.

Many of the studies include a fairly comprehensive set of variables in the research design and use some form of multiple regression technique to estimate the relative importance of each variable in explaining the outcome. Some studies are more descriptive and less inferential, focusing more on describing the attributes of completers and dropouts by highlighting rates for different groups of students based on who they are, their backgrounds, their early school careers, and the post-compulsory programs they enter.

Table 18.1 Selected country studies on dropout and completion

Study	Student	Family	School	Peer	Community	State
United Kingdom Payne (2001) Longitudinal data	Academic achievement* Gender* Ethnicity* Truancy* Suspensions* Part-time work* Attitudes to school*	Parent education* Household tenure*	Courses*		Region*	Maintenance allowance*
Canada Janosz et al. (1997) Longitudinal data	Gender* Grade repeating* Academic achievement* Commitment* Beliefs Leisure*	Family structure* Parent education* Supervision Rules* Punishment SES*		Number of friends Interaction* Deviancy		
United States Rumberger (1995) Longitudinal data	Gender* Race* Place of birth Achievement* Repeating* Mobility* Expectations* Attitudes to teachers* Self concept Self efficacy Absenteeism* Homework Engagement Behaviour*	Family structure* Language Parental supervision Expectations* Academic support SES*	SES comp.* Grade repeating Race comp.* Sector* Size Student/teacher ratio Homework Fair discipline*	Interaction* Assist		
Australia Lamb et al. (2004) Longitudinal data	Gender* Disability* Achievement* Education plans* School attitudes* Self concept* Race* Ethnicity* Motivation to learn* Views on teachers* Homework*	SES* Family size* Family structure* Parent aspirations*	SES* Sector* Type Size Teacher skills* Academic climate	Educational plans* Reading habits Attitudes to school Self esteem Hours of TV*	Economy* Region* Race* SES*	State* Income support*
Norway Markussen et al. (2008) Longitudinal data	Gender* Ethnicity* Academic achievement* Disability* Behaviour* Aspirations* Interests* Pastimes*	Work status* Family structure* SES* Parent education* Cultural capital	Program* Classroom Pedagogy		Region*	

(continued)

Table 18.1 (continued)

Study	Student	Family	School	Peer	Community	State
Iceland Jónasson and Blöndal (2002)	Gender* Ethnicity* Academic achievement* Disability* Educational plans*	Work status* Family structure* SES* Parent education* Views on school	Type of Program* Program structure School type		Region* Economy	
Finland Jarvinen and Vantaja (2001)	Gender Academic achievement* Ethnicity* Migrant status* Disability*	SES* Work status* Parent education* Income*	Program*		Region	
Longitudinal data						
Germany Weiss (2002)	Gender* Ethnicity* Attitudes Achievement*	SES*	School type* Program*		Region*	
Longitudinal data						
Switzerland Eckmann-Saillant et al. (1994)	Gender Ethnicity*	Father's education* Mother's education* Family structure SES* Cultural	Program*		Region Economy*	Canton*
Spain Merino and Garcia (2008)	Gender* Ethnicity*	Parents education* Work status* SES*	Program*		Economy* Region*	
France Blanchard and Sinthon (2010)	Gender Grade repetition*	Father's occupation* Parent education*	Program*		Region*	
Longitudinal data						
Scotland Howieson (2003)	Gender* Academic achievement*	Father's education* Father's occupation* Attitudes to school* Truancy*	School SES* Location*			
Poland Mikiewicz (2010)	Aspirations Gender	SES	School type		Region	

* Significant at least at the 5% level

Despite these differences, the studies are fairly similar in the factors that they identify as influential. A summary of the studies presented in Table 18.1 shows that ‘effects’ on the decision to drop out of school may come from a variety of sources. They can be categorised in the following way:

- *Individual student effects*: factors such as gender, race, absenteeism and school attendance, academic performance, health, engagement in academic and school activities, and participation in anti-social behaviour
- *Family effects*: SES, parental education, parenting styles, household composition, and parents’ participation in school activities
- *School effects*: quality of teaching and resources, school size, effectiveness and equity of school policies and practices, school type, intake, school climate and engagement of teachers
- *Peer effects*: the role of young people’s friends, norms and values, peer culture and behaviour
- *Community effects*: The extent to which young people are affected by the neighbourhoods in which they live, and the broader effects of the social, economic and historical features of their neighbourhoods and communities. An important subset of community factors is the role local labour market conditions play in encouraging or discouraging early exit from school
- *Province/state/nation effects*: populations, institutional arrangements, the organisation of school systems, resource allocation, school management and policies linked to curriculum, qualifications and graduation

Across the studies, the factors have different rankings based on their estimated impact on dropout and completion. The Canadian study by Janosz et al. (1997), for example, combined multiple predictors of dropout relating to families, peers, schools and performance. They ranked grade retention, disrespect of authority and participation in passive activities as the most important predictors of dropout, and concluded that family and school factors were influential though not strong independent predictors. The study by Rumberger (1995) in the USA identified a range of factors across several dimensions (student, family, school and peer) and ranks individual and family context as important, but school as also having large significant effects. The study by Payne (2001) in the United Kingdom ranks social and family factors the highest. The Australian study by Lamb et al. (2004) used a sequence of models to measure the influence of a range of factors linked to student, family, school, peer and community. They show that the different sets of factors have an impact, though family background factors – SES, ethnicity, parental aspirations, family size – are the most influential along with school background and engagement factors such as academic achievement, educational plans and views on school, learning and teachers.

The results of the various studies portray similar processes occurring in each country, though the studies suggest differences in the size of influence exerted by various factors. Differences in national contexts as well as in model specifications and approaches to profiling the characteristics of school completers and dropouts may contribute to some of the different results. Yet, based on the results of these

studies, there tends to be greater similarity than difference across nations in the sorts of factors identified as leading to completion or dropout.

Conceptual Model of Dropout and Completion

Taken together, the research on dropout and completion from each country provides a consistent picture of influences or drivers. The studies suggest that dropping out of school is the cumulative result of many factors that reach back a considerable distance into a student's life – predictive factors can emerge very early on in primary school and even before. Recent thinking about the process of disengagement and early leaving points to the process beginning early and involving disengagement over a long period. Some have described understanding the process as needing a 'life course perspective', which moves the focus away from the final decision to drop out and towards the major precursors, such as emerging academic achievement, behaviour and engagement (see Audas & Willms, 2001). They suggest that the very final decision to drop out of school is much less important as a subject to study than the gradual withdrawal from school that most early leavers tend to exhibit long before the actual decision to leave is made. This points to a need to understand the origins and development of low achievement, risk-taking behaviour and disengagement from school that tend to occur at different phases of a child's schooling and are sometimes evident quite early.

Life course theories emphasise the interrelated effects of various levels of influence, including the family, school, system and broader economic and political settings. Figure 18.1 presents a conceptual model of school dropout and completion based on the empirical literature. It shows four separate dimensions related to the process of completion or dropout: (1) *individual attributes*, which relate to the background characteristics of individual students, such as gender, race and health; (2) *institutional context*, which represents the institutional and policy-setting contexts, such as family, peer, community and system, as well as state and nation policy settings that actively and continuously operate to shape and modify the influence of student characteristics and the academic and work dispositions leading to completion or dropout; (3) *dispositions*, which reflect the attitudes, behaviours and achievements of students through particular concepts – school engagement, academic engagement, education and work aspirations and academic achievement; and (4) *outcome*, which is the decision by young people to complete or drop out and the rate at which young people do so.

The model is meant to represent the dropout and completion process as dynamic rather than static. Several theories have been developed in recent years that suggest completion or dropping out of school is but the final stage in a dynamic and cumulative process of engagement or withdrawal that impacts on the dispositions towards school and work (Rumberger, 1995; Janosz et al., 1997; Teese, 2000). Although there are some differences among these theories, they suggest that there are four dimensions that form dispositions: school engagement, academic engagement

with the goals of school (school engagement), because they want to leave to get a job rather than be at school (work and education aspirations) or because of an established record of scholastic failure (academic achievement).

The framework also suggests that the four dimensions of dispositions are inter-related. For example, students who lose interest in school (school engagement) and learning (academic engagement) are less likely to do well (academic achievement) and develop a stronger desire to obtain employment rather than remain at school (education and work aspirations). Similarly, histories of academic success and reward in school may promote stronger engagement in school activities, positive relationships with teachers, and further education plans promoting completion.

The framework also holds that the dispositions towards school are continuously shaped and influenced by the contexts in which students are located. Different family, peer group, community and school settings work to shape student characteristics and modify the dispositions that young people develop. The settings – viewed as interconnected and overlapping rather than separate and isolated – work to shape the outlooks students bring to school, including their educational aspirations and skills. As young people progress through school, these contexts can modify the impact of individual and demographic patterns of dispositions shaped by state and territory and national educational, economic and social policy frameworks. For example, young people living in remote and isolated communities with limited provision of schools and tertiary education may develop different dispositions toward school and work compared to those located in large urban centres with better provision. Similarly, schools serving largely low SES communities that attempt to address issues of disengagement through provision of a wider range of senior school course options, stronger student-centred approaches and enhanced pastoral care may promote stronger engagement in school and learning and higher rates of completion than schools that retain only a limited range of academic programs and pastoral care services.

This is the sort of model that would be developed based on the processes that research in different countries suggests are important influences on dropout and completion. From a comparative perspective the model reflects both general and local processes that influence student outcomes. It may not be particularly useful for identifying in a single analysis the magnitude of importance of different factors (particularly given the long list of variables grouped under each dimension). Rather, it is more useful in displaying the relationships among the various influences on dropout and completion given different national context and policy frameworks, as portrayed in studies on dropout and completion from different countries.

SES Differences and Inequality Across Nations

While general patterns of inequality evident in rates of dropout and completion may be consistent across countries, the extent of inequality is more likely to vary. This is in part because the challenges each country faces in promoting high levels of completion are different, at least based on the size and diversity of populations.

One measure of the distinctive challenges different countries face can be shown by comparing the educational and occupational profiles of populations.

Figure 18.2 displays the percentages of the 15-year-old population in each country in the bottom and top quintiles of SES according to OECD estimates. The comparison is based on an internationally calibrated scale that uses an equivalent measure of SES composition. The estimates are derived from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) which was created using several variables: the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI); the highest level of education of the student's parents, converted into years of schooling; the PISA index of family wealth; the PISA index of home educational resources; and the PISA index of possessions related to 'classical' culture in the family home. The International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) used in the ESCS index was based on the occupational status of the 15-year-old student's mother or father (whichever parent had the higher occupational status), with parental occupation reported by the student. Parental occupations were translated into socioeconomic index scores. For example, whereas a low index score (i.e., between 16 and 34 points) corresponds with a parental occupation requiring a minimal level of education and skill (e.g., taxi driver, waiter/waitress), a high index score (i.e., between 71 and 90 points) corresponds with a parental occupation requiring a high level of education and skill

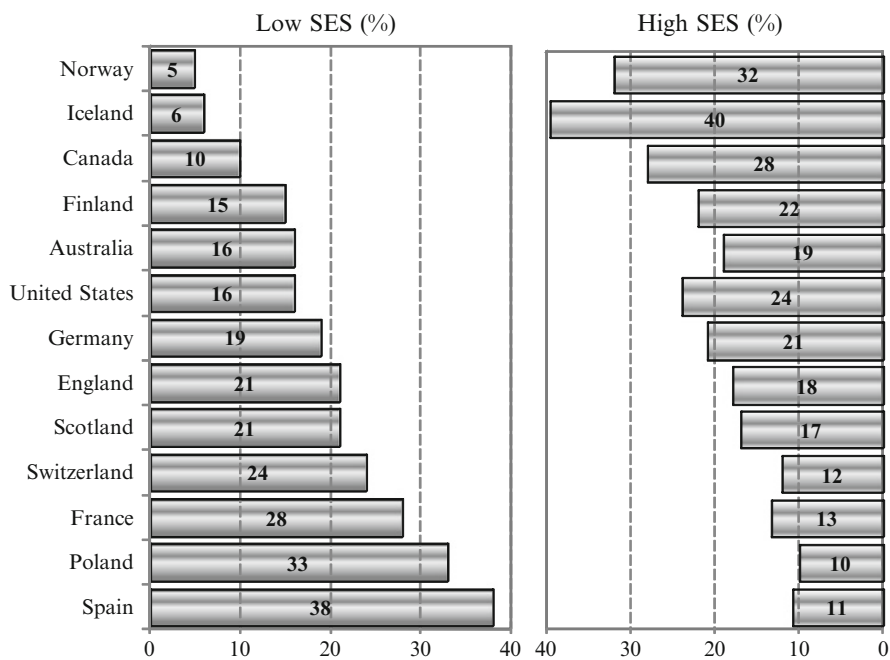


Fig. 18.2 Percentage of the 15-year-old student population in the lowest and highest quintiles of SES, by nation: 2003 (Source: Derived from 2003 PISA data)

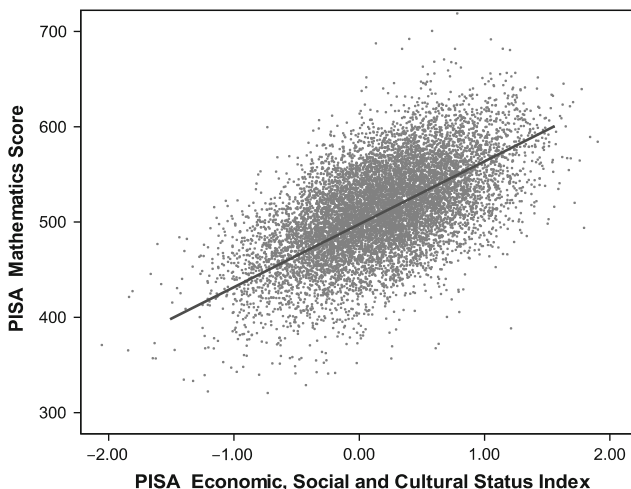
(e.g., medical doctor). Similar types of scaling were used for the other components of the ESCS index.

The results show that in 2003, Norway and Iceland had the smallest proportionate shares of low SES students (those in the bottom quintile) – 5%. Both countries also had the largest proportionate shares of high SES students (those in the highest quintile of SES based on the ECSC scale). Conversely, Spain and Poland had the largest shares of student populations with low SES backgrounds – 38% and 33%, respectively. The effects of these sorts of population differences are likely to be marked. Research studies in every country show that the chances of success at school are heavily influenced by circumstances at home and, in particular, by parental education, occupation, economic status and cultural resources. Families in which parents are more highly educated and work in higher status occupations, families that provide supportive material and cultural resources at home such as books, computers, internet access and separate study areas and families that hold positive dispositions towards learning and attainment, provide their children with a major advantage in negotiating the academic demands that schools, teaching and the curriculum place on learning (see Lareau, 2003, for further discussion on this point). The greater gulf between these formal demands placed on learning and the circumstances of poorer families, who are far more dependent on school to deliver success, makes successful school outcomes for their children much less certain. Countries with much higher proportions of families with lower levels of economic, social and cultural resources such as Spain and Poland, therefore, face a much harder task in delivering strong educational outcomes for all. These problems are likely to be compounded if total population sizes are also large.

The importance of the population differences is fairly apparent when examining the relationship between achievement levels of 15-year-olds and social background. Achievement levels are a relevant indicator when thinking about the consequences for dropout and completion because in nearly every country individual student academic performance is frequently reported as the strongest predictor of dropout and completion. This is true for most of the different country studies listed in Table 18.1.

Figure 18.3 shows the relationship between social background and mathematics achievement scores in PISA 2003. The results of 101,259 15-year-olds in 12 case study countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and USA) are plotted against OECD PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) scores. Despite some scatter, the pattern indicates that as ESCS increases so does mathematics achievement. The slope of the regression line that summarises the relationship is quite steep, indicating that increased social advantage, in general, pays off with a considerable increase in educational performance. The correlation between the ESCS score and mathematics achievement for students across all countries is 0.425, confirming a fairly strong relationship between achievement and the economic, social and cultural backgrounds of students.

The effects of social background can be measured in other ways. When students are grouped into quintiles based on the ESCS index, there is a marked difference in achievement scores. Specifically, on average, students in the top quintile of the ESCS



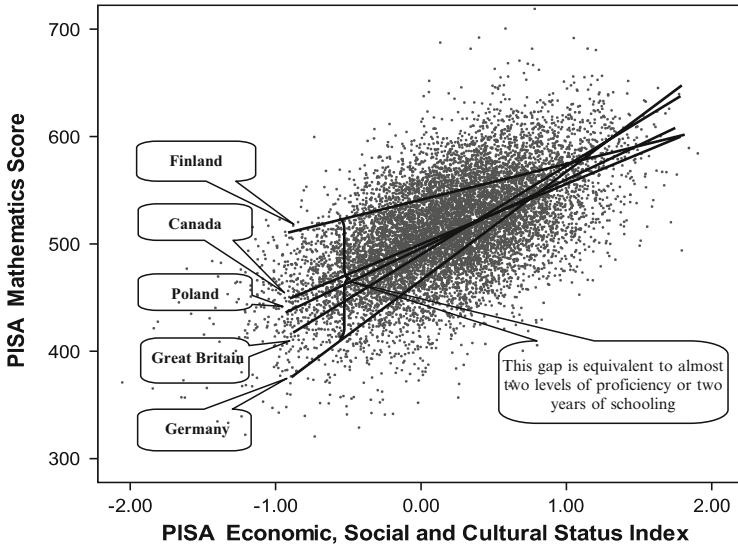
Note: Each dot represents 10 students

Fig. 18.3 Social background and mathematics performance: 15-year-olds in 12 countries, 2003 (Source: Derived from the 2003 PISA survey of 15-year-olds)

index scored much higher on the PISA mathematics scale than students in the bottom quintile of the index. The gap between top and bottom quintiles was 112 points, equivalent to almost two proficiency skill levels.¹ Average achievement increased by about 28 points with each rise in ESCS quintile. Another way to evaluate the relationship between social background and mathematics achievement is to examine the specific change in score on the mathematics scale in response to a one-standard-deviation increase in the ESCS score. Across selected case study countries, an increase of one standard deviation on the index was associated with an average performance increase of 41.7 score points.

The social patterns in mathematics achievement are consistent with long established research findings reported in many individual countries. Social background is a key influence on how well young people do in school. However, despite the

¹A difference of 62 points represents one proficiency level on the PISA mathematics scales. According to OECD reports, this can be considered a comparatively large difference in student performance in substantive terms: each rise in level of proficiency represents a major increase in skill requirements for successful completion of tasks (OECD, 2004). For example, Level 1 (bottom proficiency level skills) requires rudimentary computational and reasoning skills, while Level 2 requires a capacity to recognise, apply and interpret basic formulas and make use of direct inferences. Students proficient at Level 6 can identify and combine multiple pieces of information to solve complex problems in the context of unfamiliar real-world situations. In order to reach a particular proficiency level, a student must have been able to correctly answer a majority of items at that level. Students at each succeeding level are capable of solving mathematical problems of increasing complexity. For a discussion on proficiency skill levels, see OECD (2004, 2005a).



Note: Each dot represents 10 students

Fig. 18.4 Country variations in the relationship between social background and mathematics performance: 15-year-olds in 12 countries, 2003 (Source: Derived from the 2003 PISA survey of 15-year-olds)

strong overall relationship there are important differences in the strength of the relationship across national systems. This is portrayed in Fig. 18.4.

Figure 18.4 reports the same students as in Fig. 18.3; however separate regression slopes are provided for 5 of the 12 countries. Differences in the steepness of the slopes reveal marked differences among countries in the relationship between social background and mathematics achievement. Flatter slopes suggest a weaker relationship, meaning that there is greater equity in achievement across students from different social backgrounds. Steeper slopes suggest the opposite, that there is a higher level of social inequality in achievement, that is, achievement is more dependent on social background. The line for Finland is far less steep than for the other countries. There is less of a rise in mathematics achievement as the ESCS scale increases, implying that there is greater equity in mathematics achievement compared to the other countries. Students in Finland differ in achievement but not in a way that is so substantially related to their social background. The lines for Germany and Great Britain are both much steeper. In both of these countries, achievement in mathematics is much more dependent on students' social background.

Other points are worth noting. The results suggest that, in terms of the gaps in achievement levels for students from poorer backgrounds, how well they do may depend on which country they live in. The differences between the five lines at the lower end of the ESCS scale are substantial. The gap in mathematics achievement between students in the bottom quintile of SES in Finland and equivalent low SES

students in Germany represents over 2 years of schooling or almost 2 levels of skill proficiency. Students from the same social background and of the same age have very different skill levels in mathematics depending on the country they live in. Low SES students in Canada, Poland and Great Britain fall between the high levels in Finland and the low levels in Germany.

While students from poorer backgrounds in Germany may not do as well relative to their peers in other countries, on average, high SES students in Germany tend to outperform their counterparts in other countries, accentuating the extent of inequality in that country across students from different social backgrounds. Despite the superior achievement levels of high-status students from Germany, there is less variation in achievement across countries for high-status students. Figure 18.5 presents the mean achievement levels by social status quintile and country. It shows that overall achievement rises by quintile: bottom quintile countries, 442; lower middle, 475; middle, 496; upper middle, 519 and top quintile, 554. But while mean achievement levels increase with each rise in ESCS quintile group, the gaps in achievement across countries tend to narrow. In the bottom quintile, the spread of mean achievement levels is about 83 points. In the top quintile the spread is less than 50 points. Hence, the range of achievement levels across countries narrows as social status increases. What this means is that if you are from a wealthier background, mathematics achievement becomes less dependent on the country you live in – high-status students tend to do well irrespective of country. All national systems tend to support high achievement levels for students from wealthier backgrounds. But, this is not the case if you are poor.

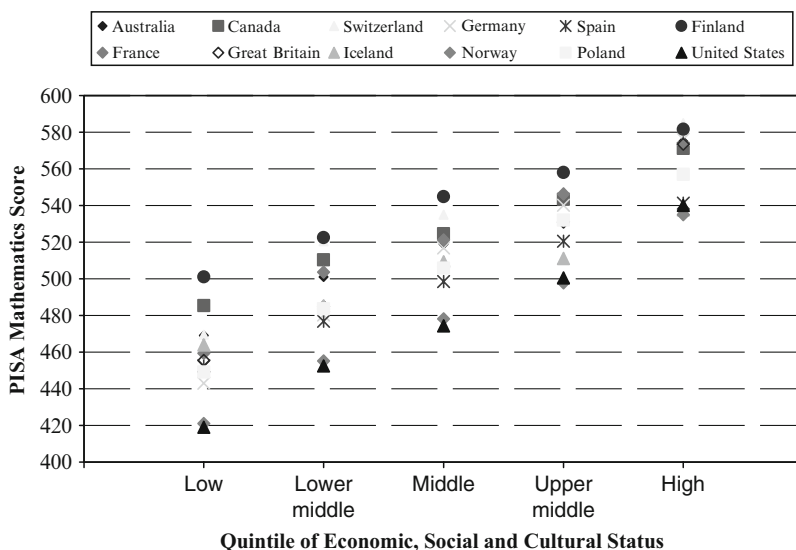


Fig. 18.5 Mean PISA mathematics achievement scores, by quintile of economic, social and cultural status and country: 15-year-olds, 2003 (Source: Derived from the 2003 PISA survey data for 15-year-olds)

Dropout and Completion

Educational inequality linked to achievement is a feature of all systems, but the severity or extent of inequality varies across nations. It is not possible using existing data to undertake the same type of analysis for dropout and completion rates. There is no comparable data that permit analysis of within and between country variations in attainment and relationships with social background. However, as with the achievement data, much research shows that levels of attainment in each country are strongly linked to family background (see the list of studies in Table 18.1). This research also points to achievement as being one of the strongest predictors of completion or dropout. Therefore, it is worth looking at the relationship between achievement and attainment.

Figure 18.6 shows that there is a broad relationship between PISA mathematics achievement levels and upper secondary attainment rates. The attainment rates are based on the OECD reported estimates of 18- to 24-year-olds who had completed an upper secondary qualification (OECD, 2007). The rates are for the year 2004. It is important to note that the rates include alternative qualifications that young people may complete outside of school. For example, the United States rate includes those young people who complete a General Educational Development (GED) qualification. This may involve up to 14% of 18- to 24-year-olds. The Canadian rate also includes GED qualifiers. Similarly, the Australian rate includes young people who complete apprenticeships which are most often undertaken outside the school system. The same is true for the United Kingdom. PISA mathematics

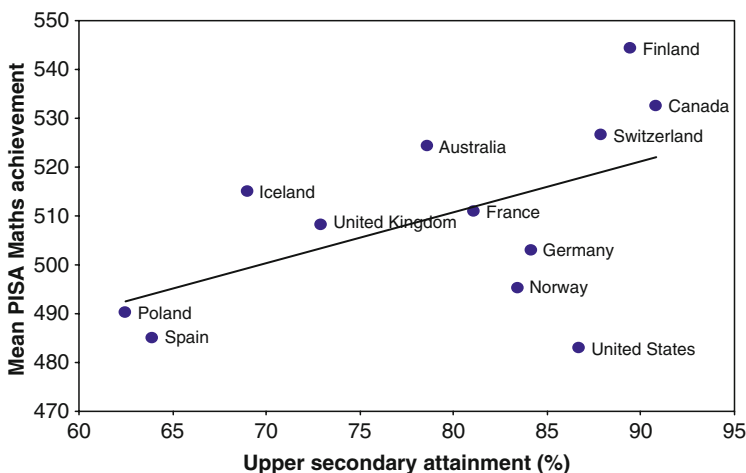


Fig. 18.6 Mean PISA mathematics achievement scores, by upper secondary attainment and country (Sources: PISA figures derived from the 2003 PISA survey data for 15-year-olds. Attainment figures from OECD, 2007)

achievement is the mean country achievement recorded among the 2003 samples of 15-year-olds.

In general, countries that do well on one measure also do well on the other. Canada, for example, has high mean mathematics achievement levels and high attainment levels: the second highest mean achievement score (532) and a 90% attainment rate. Conversely, Poland and Spain have mean mathematics achievement levels well below the OECD average (490 and 485, respectively) and low attainment rates (62% and 64%), together ranking lowest on the attainment indicator and last on achievement. The slope of the line summarising the relationship between achievement and attainment across countries suggests that there is a moderately strong relationship between countries on attainment and achievement. Even so, the association is far from being one to one. The USA, for example, does far better on attainment than on achievement as measured by mathematics in PISA. Norway and Germany, as well, tend to do better on attainment than on achievement. If these three countries were excluded, however, the relationship between achievement and attainment across the other countries would be quite strong.

While it is not possible to examine the levels of internal differentiation associated with social background and attainment in each country, it is possible to look at the general relationships between attainment and social differences in populations across countries. Figure 18.7 displays upper secondary attainment rates for 18- to 24-year-olds against the percentage of the population of 15-year-olds from low SES backgrounds in each country. The SES percentage represents the proportionate share in each country of young people from low SES backgrounds measured using an equivalent scale (as also seen in Fig. 18.2).

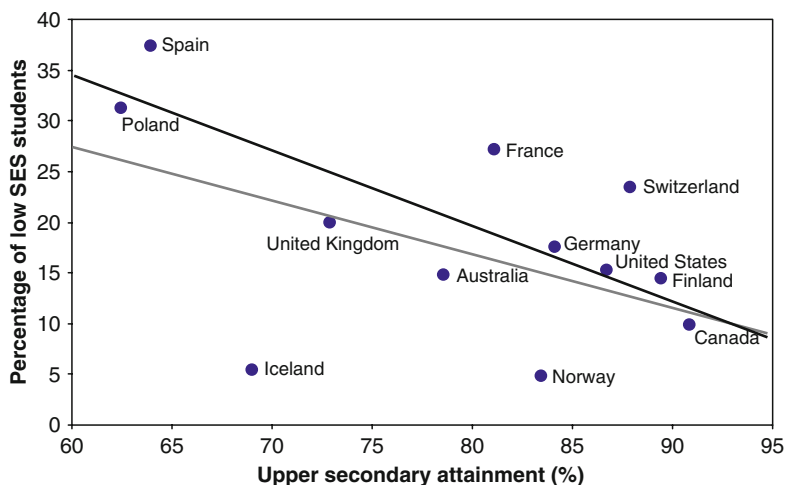


Fig. 18.7 Percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, by upper secondary attainment and country (Sources: SES figures derived from the 2003 PISA survey data for 15-year-olds. Attainment figures from OECD, 2007)

The patterns show that in broad terms as the percentage of low SES students falls, the level of upper secondary attainment rises. Canada, for example, has a high level of attainment and a relatively small proportion of students from low SES backgrounds, while at the other ends of the scales, Poland and Spain have high proportions of low SES students and comparatively low attainment rates. There is some variation from this general pattern. Iceland is the clear example where there are few students from poor backgrounds but relatively low attainment levels. There are two slopes that summarise the relationships, one which includes and one which excludes Iceland. The steeper slope excludes Iceland and reveals a fairly strong relationship between attainment and the shares of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

If achievement is a guide, the extent of internal differentiation linked to social background is likely to vary across countries when it comes to dropout and completion. Whereas all of the countries have research showing that home background influences children's educational outcomes, cross-national data for achievement suggest that the extent of that influence varies considerably between countries. Inequality exists in all systems, but its size and severity can be influenced by the approaches systems take to the organisation of institutions and the policies that systems adopt.

Explaining International Differences

Cross-national differences in dropout and completion rates and in the levels of inequality are shaped by the institutional arrangements within each system as well as structural features linked to economy, government and population. Figure 18.8 attempts to summarise these elements using a conceptual model of factors shaping national differences in dropout and completion. The proportion of students who move into post-compulsory education and complete an upper secondary qualification varies between nations. Difference in dropout and completion can be attributed to both institutional arrangements and structural influences. The model shows both sets of influences and their interactions.

Existing research indicates that potential system influences on rates of dropout and completion are linked to *institutional arrangements* and include the following:

1. Program provision and accreditation including the availability of academic and vocational options, certification, assessment practices and graduation requirements
2. School organisation such as comprehensive or more selective schools, early or delayed selection, private schooling, stages of schooling, governance, location and size
3. Schooling policies on issues such as age of entry, compulsory leaving ages, grade repetition, teacher training and recruitment
4. Resources including student/staff ratios, class sizes, educational maintenance allowances and facilities

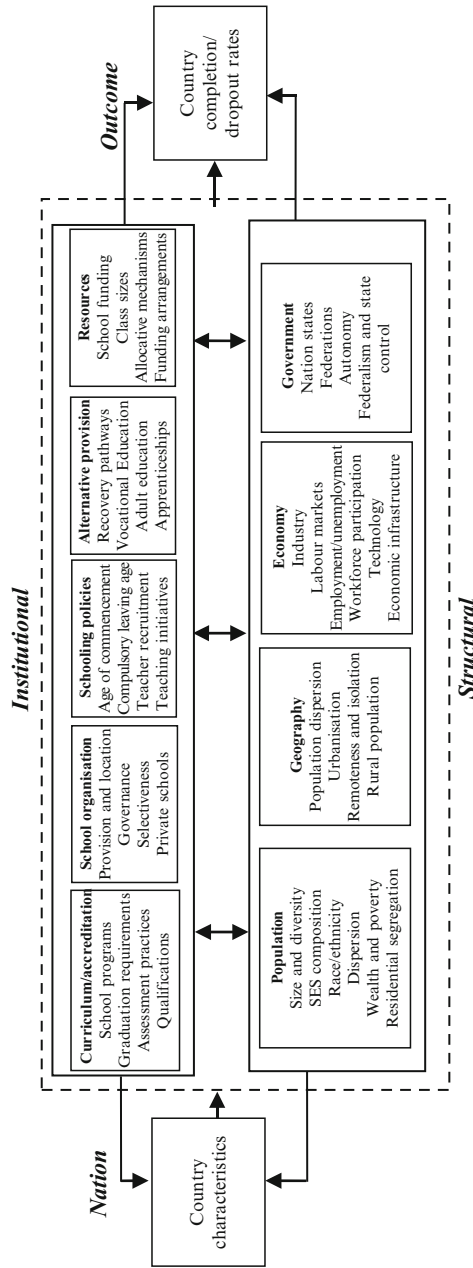


Fig. 18.8 Conceptual model of factors influencing international differences in dropout and completion rates

5. Broad education and training provision including tertiary education policies, pathways between schools and tertiary providers, adult education, post-school vocational education and university selection
6. State and national education policies such as income support for students, target setting, apprenticeship and employment programs

Structural features relate to population differences as well as economic development, geography and government. They include:

1. Population differences related to SES composition, race and ethnic diversity, migration, dispersion of the population, poverty and welfare, and residential segregation
2. Economic differences including those related to industry mix, occupational structure, employment and unemployment levels, workforce participation and labour markets
3. Geography including levels of urbanisation, residential segregation, population dispersion and rurality
4. Government including federalism and state control, centralisation and autonomy

The framework suggests ongoing and dynamic interaction between the sets of institutional and structural factors. For example, policies in curriculum, school organisation, resources and welfare can be developed in response to population needs and economic circumstances. The relationships between factors can change over time – for instance, economic trends and migration can lead to changes in the demand for education and training provision as well as the demand for resources. Together the sets of factors provide a framework for understanding what shapes opportunities and differences in completion rates and levels of attainment.

This general model of structural inequality in school systems can be used to help interpret social differences in systems over time or at one point in time.

Within the model institutional arrangements are key. Secondary school systems portrayed in the national case study chapters reveal a range of different models of practice and organisation. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this book, the organisation and provision of schooling varies across two broad dimensions. The first is the level of *program diversification* or the variety of programs that are offered. This can include differently focused tracks or streams such as academic courses, professional and technical courses and vocational education. Students are offered different types of educational programs, the major distinction being between general and vocational programs. The different programs orient students toward different post-school outcomes. In many countries students who enter and complete academic study qualify more often for university entry, whereas those who undertake and complete vocational education are more likely to enter other forms of tertiary education or go directly into the labour market after secondary education. The programs can be delivered as separate certificates or as separate strands or options within the architecture of a single certificate.

Tied to program diversification is the role of graduation requirements. For academic programs, graduation (sometimes referred to as matriculation, or '*matura*') in most countries requires successful completion of a minimum number of subjects. In many systems the requirement is to achieve minimum grades in at least five subjects including a set number of compulsory subjects covering different key learning areas (such as mathematics and native language). An overall score, the equivalent of a grade point average derived from a minimum number of subjects, is sometimes used to set a threshold or standard for the successful completion of the award. But the requirements for graduation can vary by program and by country, as well as across jurisdictions within countries. Graduation requirements are usually far more variable in vocational and technical programs and certificates, though this too varies considerably by country, state and region.

The second broad dimension of schooling provision is the extent of *institutional diversification* or the extent to which young people are separated into different schools or streams and tracks on the basis of the programs or qualifications in which they enrol. In some systems, students remain in the same institution irrespective of the program they take since in these countries institutions offer both vocational programs and general programs. However, in other systems, institutions often specialise in a certain type of educational program and therefore differentiation by program separates children by school as well. This may influence the quality and standards of learning, and future chances, based on the workings of school-intake effects reported in the studies of Willms (2006) and the OECD (2005b). In some systems selection into different schools can occur early and extend well back into lower secondary or even primary school. In Germany, for example, it is common at the end of the primary school years for many students to be separated into different schools based on their interests and aptitudes. Alternatively, in other systems, such as in the USA, Canada and Australia, students tend to remain in the same type of school through both the lower and upper secondary years, able to pursue a variety of programs or courses within the one institution.

Associated with institutional differentiation is the role of residential segregation and private schooling. Residential segregation can produce marked divisions in some systems, separating students on the basis of where they live and their racial and social backgrounds. Regional or residential segregation can create sharp differences between schools in terms of intake, separating students almost as effectively as selective schooling. It also has a marked impact on student progress and outcomes, at least according to a range of school performance studies (see, for example, Willms, 2006). Various studies have shown that mean SES intake can have an effect on student achievement, dropout rates and other outcomes thanks to the impact of composition on school climate and performance. In systems that have encouraged decentralisation, parental choice, vouchers, school-based management and other market-based principles of school organisation the effects of residential segregation and stratification can be intensified (see Lamb, 2007). Also, in some systems the effects of residential segregation are modified by the role of private schools. The use of private schools can be a key strategy of the wealthy in some countries in their conversion strategies seeking to translate their material and cultural status into

educational success for their children. Through parents buying access to socially selected student populations, thanks to fees, private schools provide high SES enclaves, often highly resourced, which support academic success. Governments in some countries, such as Australia, actively support these endeavours by providing public funding to private schools that can expand the share and size of the private school sector, though not necessarily democratise its intake (Lamb, 2007). In such systems, private schools promote segregation in schooling and contribute to inequality in outcomes.

Institutional segregation and program diversification work together in producing patterns of social stratification. The extent of social differentiation varies across nations depending in part on the stages of selection and the range of alternatives. Countries that leave until much later the point at which students have to choose a particular branch or type of schooling (countries with no or low percentages of students who, in their compulsory years, are enrolled in programs that track to upper secondary vocational courses) tend to encourage more students from a wider range of backgrounds into academic programs leading to higher education. Access to university and careers in the professions is shared more democratically in such systems, though these systems do not necessarily have the highest school completion rates.

Conversely, systems that are more formally selective and group students into different schools and programs at earlier ages can achieve high rates of completion and low dropout rates. Such systems are able to accommodate most of their population through program and institutional diversification even with very early points of selection or differentiation. This is the case with systems such as Germany and Switzerland, where students at the end of primary school can be separated into different schools and programs based on interests, aptitudes and formal selection. While only a minority of students (around 20%) may pursue academic study in a *Gymnasium*, the majority of remaining students pursue and complete technical training or vocational qualifications helping deliver high rates of overall completion (over 85% of young people). High rates of completion are achieved, but this occurs in a context of large social inequalities in program participation and access to university and the professions.

In summary, we have seen that social gaps in dropout and completion can vary across nations depending on the structure of curriculum, programs and qualifications, and the differentiation of schools along social and administrative lines. The result is unequal access to learning and the curriculum within and across nations. Inequality is generated in all secondary school systems even though there are quite different architectures, but the dimensions of that inequality vary depending on how the different school systems work. In some countries, early academic selection contributes to a high level of social inequality in access to upper secondary school, as in the cases of Germany and Switzerland, despite widespread participation (Müller & Pollak, 2008, p. 311). In other countries, selection is delayed and most children undertake a common program of lower secondary education before entering academic or vocational tracks at upper secondary level (as in France, Norway, Finland and Spain). Within either approach, global participation and completion can be achieved, but this does not mean that equality of opportunity is achieved.

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Chapter 19

Policies to Reduce School Dropout and Increase Completion

Eifred Markussen and Nina Sandberg

Introduction

Despite major differences across nations in approaches to the measurement of school dropout and completion, and hence of their dimensions, there is an ongoing struggle, internationally, to reduce dropout and increase completion rates. In each of the country case study chapters in this book, the reported number of students who do not participate in or do not complete upper secondary education is viewed as a serious concern by researchers and by the governments and education agencies in each nation. The issue is treated so seriously in some systems that ambitious goals and targets for improvement have been established. In Switzerland, for example, there is now a target completion rate of 95%, while Australia has established a target of 90% completion to be achieved by 2015. To bring about improvements, some systems have implemented major policy reforms and introduced a range of policy measures, though the scale, nature and effects of these measures vary.

This chapter examines the array of policies that have been used in different countries to reduce dropout and improve school completion. The discussion focuses on the various policies adopted by the 13 OECD countries presented as case studies in this book. National policies to reduce dropout and raise completion are essential parts of each country case study chapter. The case studies include, though to varying degrees, accounts of major policy measures introduced to improve school completion rates and reduce rates of dropout, and their success as measured by evidence-based assessments of impact. The aim in this chapter is to draw on and discuss the material presented in the case studies in order to get a sense of the use and role of policies on dropout and completion in an international comparative context – it provides an opportunity to elucidate and discuss the variety of national policies, and the range of policy effects.

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Types of Policies

When discussing and contrasting national differences in policies on dropout and completion, defining concepts is a necessary starting point. For the purposes of this chapter, policy will be taken to mean *a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s)*. This can include broad courses or frameworks of action across whole systems designed to guide and/or shape decisions, strategies, programs and behaviours, as well as more specific or localised actions and decisions, devised or implemented in order to reduce dropout and increase completion.

The task of making sense of the diverse policies described in the country chapters requires some way to classify policies. There are different typologies that can be used to classify and examine policies, such as by the theoretical paradigms that influence the types of strategies, or by scale (comprehensive or specific), or by dualistic schemes such as substantive versus procedural, or as distributive, regulatory, self-regulatory or redistributive (Anderson, 1997, p. 12). Whatever way is used, typologies emphasise some aspects and overlook others. In the current case, the need is to compare differences in national policies developed to reduce dropout and raise completion, so as to gain a better understanding of the role and relative value of different policies and policy approaches. Different schemes are used in different case study chapters of this book. Three examples are worth noting here. The chapter on Scotland distinguishes between policies that are framed by rational, cultural and developmental arguments or theories. The chapter on Iceland uses the distinction between preventive (designed to prevent dropout) and remedial (designed to re-engage dropouts) policy initiatives. And the chapter on the United States distinguishes between programmatic, institutional and systemic reform strategies. The reader will find these outlined in more detail in the different country chapters.

For the purposes of this chapter, in deciding on a framework to compare and consider policies, it is assumed that the traditional cycles or stages of policy formation are similar across countries (the policy circle idea), and that, in general, policy-makers work in a similar way to form ideas about policy tools, and to decide to whom or what the tools will apply (target group and level), and when they will take effect (Sidney, 2007, p. 79). Policy formation is likely to be shared, or at least similar, as a process, so the focus needs to be on schemes, not process. For this reason, this chapter uses a simple but potentially useful classification scheme: categorisation according to the level – individual, school or system – at which policy on dropout and completion is targeted.

As discussed in the chapter on Scotland, differing theoretical notions or conceptions may guide different policy strategies. Within social sciences in general as well as in the sociology of education, the question of the influence of structure and agency on behaviour is central (see, for instance, Bourdieu, 1977a; Giddens & Sutton, 2009). Attempts to explain and predict behaviour repeatedly centre around either individually or structurally oriented understandings. This will be taken as a starting point and the policies presented in the country chapters in this book will be grouped according to three different levels of targeting policy: the individual level (e.g., students and apprentices),

the institutional level (e.g., schools and firms) and the system level (e.g., systems of schools such as secondary schools, whole systems). The national descriptions depict policies attempting to improve completion by targeting individual-level need (strategies that address the needs of those most at risk through case management or mentoring, for example), school-level practice (such as school organisation, the use of mini-schools, teacher allocation) and system-wide reform (such as comprehensive reforms and development of national or state-level upper secondary programs).

As the previous chapters demonstrate, dropout and completion are complex phenomena with multiple and varied causes, calling for a combination of diverse strategies and measures. Further, it is evident that dropout and completion need to be interpreted and understood in the larger social and economic context, because in addition to education systems, labour markets, culture and history contribute to dropout and completion patterns. Thus, there is reason to believe that policies at a system level are necessary to make significant changes affecting the largest numbers of individuals. The focus of the following discussion is therefore mainly on system-level reforms or strategies, after some briefer paragraphs about policies targeting change at an individual and at a school level.

Individual and School-Level Policies

Many of the chapters in this book demonstrate that variation in dropout and completion is often explained using individual background attributes such as social background, indigenous or migrant background, parental education level, gender, grade point average from compulsory education and the individual's (dis)engagement with schooling. These are considered key attributes of individuals that influence the likelihood of dropout or completion. Such findings may lead to a search for strategies to counter these attributes attached to the individual, but, as indicated in the chapter on Spain: 'The fact that working class young people or those who have illiterate mothers have a higher probability of failing in school tells us little about what could be done, for neither their class nor their mothers can be changed'. This may in a sense be true for those who are students at present, but it is no argument against a policy to address differences in need, or against work to diminish social inequalities in society. Even if measures targeting individual need or the needs of groups of individuals may have limited impact on solving the dropout problem, as such, these measures are still of utmost importance to some students. As Raffe argues in the chapter on Scotland:

Developmentalist strategies focus on the most vulnerable young people and on those who drop out, or are at risk of dropping out, because of specific developmental and social problems. Young people who drop out, and especially those who become NEET, are disproportionately likely to have low self-esteem and self-efficacy, low social, personal and cognitive skills, family problems, and/or a history of offending, alcohol and drug use or teenage pregnancy. Not all these problems are strictly described as 'developmental', but they all invite responses which focus primarily on the individual and his or her problems, rather than on the education system and its cultures and opportunity structures.

The country chapters present and discuss various individual-level measures – efforts that aim to target students or groups of students with particular needs, such as welfare needs. The measures are usually not designed to target all students, but mainly those with specific issues such as those who are low achievers, or from poor backgrounds, migrant or indigenous students, or those with integration needs. The measures, such as mentoring, welfare support, tutoring and targeted assistance for skill development among low achievers, may not work to solve dropout problems across a system, but may work very effectively and be very important for the individuals whom the measures attempt to target. In the following, there is no attempt to go further into the individual-level measures, but instead the reader is referred to the different country chapters.

School-level measures are those implemented by single schools, or by clusters of schools working in cooperation, or even whole systems of schools, in order to solve or reduce dropout and improve completion. The idea behind these reforms, as described in the chapter on the United States, is to reform existing schools on the assumption that they do not perform adequately for their students. To continue with the United States example, one approach is ‘whole school reform’, which refers to the use of a comprehensive or whole of school program designed to transform all aspects of a school – curriculum, student management, teaching – in an effort to improve the performance of all students leading to reductions in dropout. This approach involves multiple strategies to alter all facets of a school and is built on the premise that unified, coherent and integrated strategies for improvement, knitted together into a comprehensive design, will work better than the same strategies implemented in isolation from each other. Such reforms have been used by schools or groups of schools seeking improvements in student outcomes. Reviews of their success are mixed (see the chapter on the United States for further details).

Examples of school-level measures in other countries are less comprehensive or wholistic in their design, tending instead to target specific aspects or features of school. These include things such as expanding program offerings, introducing programs to counter low achievement, organising teaching and resources to support early intervention, initiatives to improve connections with parents and families, smaller class sizes, using mini-schools to promote better student-teacher relations, and employing team-based approaches to teaching and pastoral care. As with measures targeting need at an individual level, school-level measures are unlikely to produce system-wide improvements, but they have the potential to reduce dropout and increase completion in some of the most affected schools. Such measures may be of great importance to the specific schools and the communities they serve, as well as making a contribution to reducing the overall dropout rate.

System-Level Policies

Some of the country chapters report that systemic or system-wide policies (i.e., policies to reduce dropout and increase completion through implementing change at a system level affecting all schools and students) have not been usual in their

country. According to the chapter on France, dropout in that country did not stand out as much of a concern for the authorities until the mid-1990s. Even if large proportions of student cohorts did not complete upper secondary education, this was not seen as a problem as long as the labour market could absorb unskilled labour. The same may be said about Norway, and it was only when entrance into upper secondary education was made a statutory right through a reform in 1994, when attending upper secondary education became the norm and everybody between 16 and 19 was expected to be in upper secondary education, that dropout really stood out as a problem which called for systemic reform. In Finland, dropout has been viewed as a more local, individual issue, and partly as a result of this, system-wide reforms designed specifically to reduce dropout or improve completion have not been evident. In Poland, implemented measures have tended to target individual-level needs rather than systemic reform, partly because the officially reported dropout rates are low.

However, most of the countries discussed in this book have implemented policies directed at dropout and completion issues at a systemic level, even those mentioned above. Several different measures have been presented and discussed in the various case study chapters. This section will focus on only some of the measures, those where it is possible to extract salient features. The themes that will be discussed further are: (1) counselling and career guidance, (2) income support for students, (3) raising the compulsory school leaving age, (4) expanding program offerings to include vocational education, (5) diversifying qualifications and extending schooling, and (6) comprehensive system reforms.

Counselling and Career Guidance

Several countries have focused on better career counselling and planning offered globally in every school. In Iceland, both lower and upper secondary schools are, according to Icelandic law, obliged to provide access to counselling. In some lower secondary schools, career guidance has been introduced as a part of the student's timetable. The idea is that this will help smooth the transition into upper secondary education. A similar concept exists in Norway. As a part of a comprehensive reform of primary, lower and upper secondary education in 2006, two new subjects were introduced, one in lower and one in upper secondary. In both subjects, career guidance is supposed to have a substantial place in the curriculum. The overall intention is that better guidance will help students in making more informed educational and career choices. By lowering the risk of making poorly informed choices, reduced dropout and increased completion are the assumed effects. The same thoughts are presented in the chapter on Finland. The authors note that 'during the past few decades, an attempt has been made to reduce young people dropping out of education as well as interruption of (vocational) schooling, for example by increasing vocational guidance and individual counselling (both in basic and secondary education)'. In Scotland, access to quality guidance is also considered a prerequisite for making

more informed choices in relation to further education. As the author of the chapter on Scotland describes it, 'rational decision-making requires good information'. In Australia, pathway planning programs have been introduced. One example is the Managed Individual Pathways program (MIPs) that has been implemented in government secondary schools in the state of Victoria. This program provides all students aged 15 and above with individual assistance to develop education and career pathway plans. It serves as a framework for the development of individualised pathway plans and targeted career counselling.

It is clear that some countries have implemented systemic policies related to career guidance and counselling intended to give students a better foundation for their school and program choices, thereby reducing the chances of dropout and increasing the chances of completion. Of reported evidence on impact or effectiveness, the Australian MIPs program has been evaluated with the conclusion that it has helped raise Year 12 completion. For the other countries that have implemented large-scale career guidance and counselling schemes, it is not possible to say how well they work, as no evaluations have been reported.

Income Support

Another policy measure used in some countries is financial or income support to students from poor backgrounds. In Australia, the scheme is titled Youth Allowance. It is a federal government initiative which is family income means-tested and targeted at students 16 years of age or older from poor backgrounds. To receive support, persons under 18 must be in full-time education or training. In England and Scotland, young people from low income families can apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), worth up to £30 per week. The idea behind this policy is that by addressing financial pressures, the students' economic circumstances will be less likely to prevent them from continuing in education and training. Evaluations in three countries show that there seems to be a positive effect of this kind of income support. In Australia, 'there is some evidence to suggest that this initiative has helped increase school completion'. In Scotland, an 'evaluation of the first pilot EMAs estimated that they increased participation rates by 7 percentage points overall, and by 9 percentage points among young people from low-income families'. In Spain, the conclusion is that the grant policies introduced there have had a greater impact on school enrolment than on school performance.

Raising the Compulsory School-Leaving Age

Possibly the most direct systemic measure targeting dropout is raising the compulsory school-leaving age, that is, lifting the minimum age at which a person is legally allowed to drop out of school. It may seem obvious that adding another extra

compulsory year of schooling will make students more likely to attend during that particular year. But will this bring about lower dropout rates in subsequent, non-compulsory education?

The school-leaving age has been raised in some Australian states. In South Australia the school-leaving age was increased from 15 to 16 in 2003, and further increased to 17 years of age from 2009. Similar changes have been made in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania. These changes have been introduced largely in the belief that they will lead to increased school completion and smoother transitions to further education and work.

In the United States, the school-leaving age varies from state to state with most having a leaving age of 17 or 18, but a handful having a leaving age of 16. In some of the states where it is 16 or 17, there have been proposals to raise the compulsory schooling age to 18 years of age. The chapter on the United States refers to a recent review of several studies that examined the relationship between the state compulsory schooling age and dropout or graduation rates, which found that states with higher compulsory schooling ages had lower dropout rates or higher graduation rates (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

In England it has been decreed that those who started in secondary school in September 2008 will form the first cohort obliged to participate in some form of officially recognised education or training until the day they reach 17 years of age. In 2015 the law will require all young people to participate until their 18th birthday. The intention is to retain students in some form of education and training for longer, and by doing this increase the numbers who obtain upper secondary qualifications.

The new English legislation has been a source of debate. In a critical review of the new legislation, Wolf (2008) argues that it runs counter to the understanding about the relationship between motivation and learning. She also states that this reform will have a negative impact on the youth labour market. Many businesses that employ 16- and 17-year-olds will stop doing so, she writes, because of the requirement to provide them with formal, recognised training. This will, according to Wolf, harm the most disadvantaged and marginalised young people. The counter argument is that now employers will have to provide young people with the necessary vocational education and training to enable them to progress both within and beyond their current employment. This will be good both for the country's economy and for the individual.

Wolf's arguments may be pertinent. It is possible that raising the leaving age will keep a greater proportion of students in school for longer, but it is unlikely that the selection processes that are producing social stratification will change. The different country chapters in this book suggest that the characteristics of dropouts are similar and the same sorts of students are likely to be failures in a system with a raised school-leaving age. The question is, will there be fewer of them? There may be better results if instead of raising the school-leaving age, educational systems invest more in addressing the challenge of creating pedagogy that will make more students want to stay, voluntarily.

Vocational Education as a Program for Reducing Dropout and Increasing Completion

Program reforms have provided one of the main policy tools available to nations to improve completion rates. One of the key program reforms in many systems has been the development or transformation of vocational education.

In Australia, one of the main program developments in recent years that has worked to help raise rates of school completion has been the implementation and expansion of vocational education. In that country, vocational education in schools has been developed as an alternative to traditional academic programs to assist an increasing number of young people, with a wider range of abilities, to participate in upper secondary courses and obtain relevant qualifications. A study which found that Year 9 students who were planning to drop out were ultimately more likely to complete school if they entered vocational education courses rather than academic or general programs (Lamb & Vickers, 2006) indicates that the availability of vocational education courses can improve the likelihood of school completion.

In Scotland, authorities view vocational learning as a way of addressing disengagement and low participation. Policy-makers there, according to the chapter on Scotland, 'see an expansion of vocational learning and an improvement in its status as a means to expand participation in post-compulsory learning as well as to achieve the desired curriculum diversity and cultural change'. This goes for vocational education and training in schools as well as apprenticeships provided in alternative settings.

The chapter on Scotland, however, cautions against this simplistic perception of vocational education as a solution leading to increased participation, reduced dropout and increased completion. The chapter argues that the quality of apprenticeships is uneven, and that even if they tend to be successful under specific sectoral and labour market conditions, they cannot be expanded to any sector or labour market context where these conditions are not satisfied. They are less suitable for the lowest qualified school leavers and cannot be used as the principal means of attracting and motivating young people who would otherwise drop out of learning. It is also argued that 'vocational learning has an important role both as a component of general education and as a principle for organising some learning pathways, but its potential contributions to the problems discussed above are both specific and limited'.

Vocational education is the main alternative in upper secondary education provided in almost all nations. In some countries, such as Switzerland and Germany, it enrolls the largest numbers of upper secondary students. This is also true in Norway where, every year, around half of the students entering upper secondary education take a vocational track. The evidence in Chapter 2 suggests that countries that have developed strong systems of vocational education tend to have high completion rates. Countries that do not have these traditions, where vocational education has not really been a strong part of the school system, have recently turned to vocational education as a means of encouraging more young people to remain at school to completion. The evidence from such countries is that there are economic and labour market returns to vocational qualifications compared to not having any qualifications

(dropping out). Other evidence, reporting on motivation, learning and disaffected learners, also suggests that vocational education and better vocational options may be an effective way of (re-)engaging at least some groups of disaffected young people prone to dropping out of school (Steedman & Stoney, 2004, cited in the chapter on Scotland).

At the same time, vocational education does not necessarily function as a way to increase completion and reduce dropout. Providing vocational programs is not sufficient to guarantee high completion, and vocational programs may not be the most appropriate way to engage the most disaffected young people. This is suggested by the Norwegian case, where the lowest completion rates are found within vocational education. Currently, around 80% of those doing academic programs complete, while the figure is only 50% for those in the vocational programs. The lower completion rates in vocational than in academic programs could indicate that vocational education is not necessarily the most appropriate solution for young students having problems with completion, though their completion rate may be lower again if these students were to enter the academic track. Those not completing vocational programs in Norway are typically low achievers with high absenteeism and their parents tend to have low levels of education. Thus, they have similar characteristics to dropouts in most other countries. The Norwegian case makes it reasonable to ask whether vocational education in other countries can work to bring such students through to completion. Since vocational education is organised and delivered differently in different countries, it may not play the same role in countries where there is a weak vocational education tradition. It may attract students who otherwise might have dropped out of academic tracks, and help them complete, but this may have little to do with vocational education per se, and simply reflect the fact that it is the main alternative to academic study.

One of the main issues with alternative programs such as vocational education is the tension between the role they can play as a safety net, enhancing students' chances of finding jobs as skilled workers, and the role they play as streams of relegation, orienting students from poorer backgrounds away from higher education and the professions (Shavit & Muller, 2000). If vocational education works to improve school completion it may also contribute effectively to stratification and the reproduction of inequality. There are few examples in the case study chapters of where vocational education provides the same foundations and offers access to the same opportunities beyond school as academic or general education. This remains a critical issue and challenge for systems relying on vocational education to reduce dropout and raise completion rates.

Diversified Qualifications and Extended Schooling

In some countries, schemes have been introduced allowing students to complete equivalent qualifications and, in some cases, qualifications that are not really equivalent to academic upper secondary or vocational qualifications.

In the United States, the *General Education Development* (GED) certificate has been developed as an equivalent qualification to the high school diploma. The numbers of young people now completing a GED are quite large, both in percentage terms and in absolute numbers. Yet there is considerable debate about its equivalence. There is concern about whether or not those who attain a GED have reached or achieved the same standard of skills as those who gain a regular high school diploma. Research suggests that the earnings and employment returns to the GED are significantly less than those to the regular high school diploma though better than for dropouts without any qualifications (see Chapter 1 and the chapter on the United States).

In Norway it is possible to gain recognition of learning or achievement for those who do not complete an academic or vocational qualification through what is termed *competence at a lower level* – a certificate of competence which is awarded after having been a *learning candidate* (such as an apprentice or someone not aiming for the journeyman's exam). This has not been a popular option: less than 1% of all cohorts after 1994 have chosen this option. A new way to achieve competence at a lower level, the *Certificate of Practice*, is being tested in the school years 2007–10. This gives the students the option to go through a 2-year upper secondary education which is mainly based on practical learning in a workplace, finishing with a competence test. Preliminary results from the evaluation of this new scheme are positive, with potential dropouts more likely to remain at school, better able to cope and with more positive attitudes towards school (Markussen et al., 2009). However it is too early to draw any firm conclusions. Even if this program is successful, the benefits of such a certificate in the labour market may well be minimal and therefore the role of the qualification controversial.

In Iceland, a new degree, the *Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate*, was introduced in 2008. It takes one and a half to two years to complete, and is aimed at students who do not plan to complete further degrees. One of its main purposes is to reduce dropout at the secondary level by offering an alternative course of study for those who are at risk of dropping out. Students who undertake the course can use it as a bridge to other upper secondary courses such as academic qualifications and vocational education, though it does not qualify students for post-school study. Therefore, it is not clear how popular it will be given that it only conveys rights to study at the same level. It may persuade students to complete at least one and a half years instead of the one year which many typically complete before dropping out – but this remains to be seen.

In Australia, a similar qualification has been introduced in the state of Victoria. Known as the *Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning* (VCAL), it was introduced as an option for groups of students who tended to fail or not complete mainstream upper secondary courses. VCAL is a more applied or 'hands-on' option for students at upper secondary level. It provides practical, work-related experience, as well as literacy and numeracy skills and the opportunity to build personal skills focusing on life and work. It is an accredited upper secondary certificate, though it does not provide access to higher education or the main avenues of post-secondary study.

Giving students the possibility of completing upper secondary education with an equivalent qualification, or with a qualification at a lower level than a full vocational qualification, might support higher rates of completion (e.g., Markussen et al., 2009). But research suggests that the alternative qualifications may be less valuable in the labour market (e.g., OECD, 2009, p. 23; Rumberger & Lamb, 2003; Frøseth, 2008).

Linked to the idea of offering alternative qualifications is the notion of offering additional years of school to catch up or as bridging years to other courses. An example is provided by Year 13 courses offered in Australia which aim to work as a bridge between school and further study for students who have completed school but failed to gain a relevant qualification or to reach a satisfactory standard. Another example is the introduction of a voluntary extra year of schooling between compulsory and upper secondary education offered in Finland. In that country there is an option available for young people to have an additional year in basic education before entering upper secondary education. The idea is to prevent dropout immediately after compulsory education and to make it possible for some students to improve their achievements before entering upper secondary education. In 2006, only 2% of the cohort chose this option. However, despite the small numbers it represents an important policy option because it addresses critical issues associated with dropout: it targets students who have reached the end of compulsory education but have fallen behind and are at risk of failure in upper secondary education, and it gives students the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to help them cope with further study.

Systemic Reforms

Some countries have implemented ambitious comprehensive or wide-scale reforms across the whole system with one of the aims (among many others) being to reduce dropout and increase completion.

In Iceland an educational reform of the entire school system is currently being implemented. In this reform the dropout issue was given priority when the legislation was changed (The Preschool Act, No. 90/2008; The Compulsory School Act, No. 91/2008; The Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92/2008). The chapter on Iceland reports that:

The intention explicit in the reform is that education shall be organised so as to meet the requirements and expectations of students, substantially increase curriculum flexibility, add to the number of educational pathways offered, facilitate the completion of upper secondary programs in 3 rather than the normative 4 years, and create conditions for more students to complete defined study programs, with a view to decreasing school dropout.

In 1994 a comprehensive reform was implemented in upper secondary education in Norway. Reform 94 introduced major changes in both structure and content. Different branches of upper secondary schooling (general, mercantile, vocational) were merged into a single system. Because of capacity constraints within vocational upper secondary education, large numbers of young people were, prior to the reform, forced to be early leavers between compulsory and post-compulsory

education, at the age of 15 or 16. One of the main reasons for the reform was to make it possible for everyone who had just left compulsory education to enter upper secondary education. In terms of levels of participation, the reform was a success. As a result of the reform virtually universal entry to upper secondary education was achieved and the completion rate among vocational education students was doubled from 30% in the cohort entering upper secondary in 1991, to 60% in the cohort entering in 1994 (Støren et al., 1998). This suggests that Reform 94 worked because it opened up for almost all the opportunity to enter upper secondary education. But, in spite of this, dropout has remained a problem in Norway, as only two out of three in every cohort completes upper secondary education. When a new comprehensive reform was introduced in 2006, one of the main aims of that reform was to reduce early leaving and improve completion (St.meld. nr. 30, 2003–04).

Some countries have implemented systemic reform of their school systems with the aim of reducing dropout and improving completion. The Norwegian Reform 94 succeeded, even though dropout was not eliminated. It provides a clear example of policy implementation with impacts in the intended direction. Yet there is a need to wait to see if the reforms in Iceland and Norway deliver all of their intended effects.

Reducing Dropout and Raising Completion in All Systems

It is apparent from the case study chapters, and the previous chapter on inequality, that in spite of variations in the rates, by and large the same sorts of factors predict dropout and completion in every nation. This is what might be expected based on educational research and theory on the formation of social differences in education. The sociology of education has long underlined the importance of social structures for individual educational behaviour. There is an extensive literature and well-developed social theories on the mechanisms reproducing social disparities in education (see, for instance, Boudon, 1974; Bourdieu, 1977b; Willis, 1988; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). Social background predicts both school achievements and dropout. Across nations, ambitious, high-achieving students from educated, two-parent families are those who in general have the highest likelihood of completing their education.

It is also evident from the country chapters, and through the discussion in this synthesis chapter on policy, that the measures adopted and implemented to prevent dropout and increase completion vary, one might say in spite of the common factors affecting dropout and completion. Further, while noting that far from all of the reported strategies have been evaluated, based on the evaluations and effect studies referred to in the country chapters it is fairly clear that the key policies vary in their impact, with some seeming not to have had much effect on the dropout and completion rates, and others having had considerable impact. However, it is important to note that the systems differ in their starting points and in what they count as completion, and the effects of policies may well vary depending on the amount of

‘room for improvement’. It may be that as systems reach similar mass levels of completion, thanks to reforms and policy efforts and as the result of the effects of labour market change, they will all report a similar size ‘residual’ core of dropout that is more difficult to shift. But all systems continue to strive and have implemented recent policies and reforms aimed at increasing completion rates.

Given the various continued efforts in different countries, it would be reasonable to ask two crucial questions. First of all, given where systems are, is it possible to reduce dropout and increase completion further? Second, based on the findings that the main factors accounting for dropout and completion are more or less the same across the 13 countries featured in the national case studies, is it possible to work out some new, perhaps common policies?

The first question may seem easier to answer, keeping in mind that this is a question of possibilities to help bring about better results. Based on the fact that some measures have actually been proven to impact on dropout and completion rates – even at local levels or among groups of schools, such as those in disadvantaged settings (see the chapters on Australia and the United States, for example) – it would be reasonable to conclude that it is possible to reduce dropout and increase completion rates given the right measures. The national case studies give cause to expect that measures targeting individuals and schools (measures defined here as individual-level or institutional-level) can have impact. Schools can be transformed and rates of completion for groups of individuals rise. Implemented in the right way, such measures may help to keep individuals in education who otherwise would have left.

Individual and school-level measures may well work effectively in different national contexts given that there are similar predictors of dropout and completion in every country, and similar processes of social differentiation. Of course it is important to recognise differences in national contexts that may affect how well such measures work – differences for instance in how the education system is organised and structured, how the labour market is functioning, and so on. And although the most important predictive variables are found to be more or less the same in nearly all the countries featured in the case studies, when it comes down to individuals and schools, there may be additional context-based variables that are influential.

In the past, as shown in Chapter 1 and in various case study chapters, the most significant reductions in dropout and increases in completion rates at national levels have involved systemic intervention, even if this has been in the context of other influences bringing about change, such as economic shifts and declining youth labour markets. In the period from the middle of last century, different countries have experienced large rises in upper secondary educational attainment across generations. These have been in part influenced by large-scale reforms to schooling and programs. System-level policies linked to school organisation and program provision have been important to producing mass rates of completion. There are some specific examples of system-level reforms that have had a large impact on dropout and completion rates. One is Reform 1994 in Norway where everyone was given the right to 3 years of upper secondary education, alternative options were

brought together in single comprehensive schools and vocational programs were strengthened. Following the reform there was a significant reduction in the number of early leavers and a significant improvement in the completion rate within vocational education.

The second question asked is whether it is possible, based on the experiences described in the national case studies, to identify and suggest common policies which might reduce dropout and raise completion. Some systems show that they have already reached mass levels of completion and others are moving towards this situation. The problem for most countries will become how to improve rates further and it may be that the actions needed are rather similar. So despite all the differences in national contexts, and the challenges connected with identifying relevant measures to combat dropout and improve completion, this chapter has discussed some policy measures which have been implemented in different countries: career guidance and counselling, income support for students, raising the compulsory school-leaving age, vocational education and alternative programs as a means to better completion and reduced dropout, and comprehensive institutional and program reforms. The common types of approaches taken suggest that it is possible to share experiences across borders and that effective policies may be relevant cross-nationally. But, this does not imply or prove that these policies have the potential to reduce dropout and improve completion in all countries in the same ways and with the same effects.

If policies are to be effective they need to handle a multitude of reasons for dropout, some of them universal, some of them country or system-specific. Thus, policies need to be based on a combination of a thorough understanding of what leads to dropout, as well as deep appreciation of local conditions. It may be possible for countries to learn from and assist each other since the systems in each country seem to work similarly in generating success and failure and the same sorts of students are affected, regardless of the country. A good starting point for working cooperatively and learning things from each system that may be of benefit for others will be a common commitment to developing better theory in understanding dropout and completion in each country context. Strong policies and interventions will be best developed on the basis of sound and tested theories about the reasons young people complete or drop out, and an understanding of the processes that contribute. Despite the extensive and common ways in which researchers in every country are able to identify the attributes of dropouts and completers, there remains a lack of powerful theories and understanding of the processes involved. There also needs to be a similar commitment to change, and recognition of the concerted effort required to address the complex and various social forces that affect behaviour. As concluded in a recent evaluation of the Norwegian *Plan of Action against Dropout in Upper Secondary Education*, to be successful, policies need to be 'firmly rooted in the educational system on all levels, not as a project, but as an ongoing, ordinary part of the activities of every school' (Buland & Havn, 2007). Thus, the task involves systematic, enduring, goal-oriented hard work across different arenas simultaneously. This conclusion might be valid for most of the countries represented in this book.

Finally, it may be worth repeating the point made by Rumberger in an earlier chapter of this book (on the United States), that in order to reduce dropout and increase completion, it will be necessary to remember that education is only one part of a larger social and economic system in which inequality is a main feature. In his words:

It is unlikely that [we] will ever eliminate disparities in dropout rates...without eliminating disparities in the resources of families, schools and communities. To the extent that dropping out is a social and not just an educational problem, then effective solutions must address changes in families and communities as well as schools. But the more comprehensive the scope of change, the more difficult change becomes. Ultimately, the ability to 'solve' the dropout problem...may depend more on the country's ability to address widespread inequalities in the larger social and economic system.

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