Does early education have long-lasting effects?

A new paper published today (9 December 2005) in *Fiscal Studies*, evaluates the effects of early education on a cohort of British children born in 1958. In contrast to most available studies, the paper assesses the longer term impact on these children, considering how early education has affected their cognitive and social skills whilst at school, and their educational attainment and labour market outcomes into adulthood.

The paper assesses the effects of ‘early education’, defined in two ways:

1. **Pre-compulsory education**, defined as any early education prior to the age of 5, whether taking place in a school setting (through early entry to primary school), or in a pre-school setting such as nursery or playgroup; and

2. **Pre-school education**, encompassing just pre-school settings, such as state-maintained or private nursery, or playgroup, irrespective of whether the child subsequently entered school early.

Our research has found that:

- **Cognitive test scores:**
  
  We find evidence of some positive and long-lasting effects from early education. In general pre-compulsory education (pre-school or school entry prior to age 5) was found to yield large improvements in cognitive tests (including maths and reading) at age 7, which, though diminished in size, remained significant throughout the schooling years, up to age 16. Attendance of pre-school (nursery or playgroup) was found to yield a positive but short-lived impact on test scores.

- **Socialisation:**
  
  The effects on socialisation appear to be more mixed; we found some positive, though short-lasting effects on teachers’ reports of children’s social adjustment of pre-compulsory education (only at age 7); on the other hand we found some adverse behavioural effects on parental reports at age 7 persisting up to age 11.

- **Adult outcomes, including education, employment and wages**
  
  In adulthood, pre-compulsory schooling was found to increase the probability of obtaining qualifications and to be employed at 33. For both pre-compulsory education and pre-school we found evidence of a marginally significant 3-4% wage gain at 33.

Our findings suggest that starting education before the compulsory school starting age at 5, can have long-lasting, positive impacts on children’s lives.

ENDS

Notes to editors:


2. Contact Emma Hyman or Bonnie Brimstone in the IFS press office on 020 7291 4800 for copies of the article.