

Research Digest

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1 Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the CAYT digest. In this digest we aim to bring to the Department's attention key pieces of work in the field of youth transitions. In particular we highlight high quality research that has been published in the last few years and projects that are underway and relevant to the Department.

We have organised the work under the following themes:

- education and employment;
- risky behaviours and positive activities;
- disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

2 Education and Employment

2.1 Measuring school effectiveness

References

Schools, markets and league tables, *Fiscal Studies special edition*, Dearden, Micklewright and Vignoles (eds) 2011

Background papers

<http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp1016.pdf>

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/papers/2010/wp241.pdf>

<http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp1011.pdf>

Issues

Drawing on international experience this work looks at different ways of measuring school effectiveness, in particular issues related to school performance data.

It looks at challenges of developing good measures of school performance for the purposes of improved accountability and informed school choice.

Summary of main points

- In the opening paper of the edition, Flavio Cunha argues that skill accumulation is much broader than simply the accumulation of academic skills and knowledge. Non cognitive skills, such as attitudes and behaviours, are potentially as important in the labour market and this means measures of school accountability need to take a broader set of skills into account when judging the performance of schools.
- Smith and Muriel suggest there is a need for any efficient education system to have a mixture of regulation, professionalism, markets and performance management. All these elements require good information on school performance. They argue that without school accountability systems, standards may be lower across the board. Hence the difficulties of designing a system which enables parents to choose genuinely more effective schools, whilst also minimizing distorting behavior by schools to manipulate their league table positions, should not be underestimated.
- Work by Dearden, Micklewright and Vignoles confirms that schools are differentially effective for children with higher and lower levels of prior achievement. Parents therefore need to know the value added of schools across the full distribution of prior attainment to give them a better guide as to the most appropriate school for their particular child, given his or her ability.
- Goldstein and Leckie outline a number of statistical problems with school league tables. Firstly, measures of school performance, particularly those based on a value added model, tend to be remarkably unstable over time. If measures of school effectiveness are unstable over a number of years this means that for parents looking forward and trying to choose a school that is likely to be effective in the future, historic indicators of school performance

are less than useful. This problem is compounded by the fact that schools' value added and contextualized value added scores are often not significantly different from one another. Crucially, whilst these statistical difficulties may make it difficult for parents to choose schools sensibly on the basis of league table information it does not prevent policy-makers from using these data to hold schools accountable for their past performance.

- Miranda and Rabe-Hesketh suggest that measuring the effectiveness of schools using administrative data can be problematic due to missing information. For example, not having information on parents' education levels and having instead to rely only on the FSM indicator as a measure of SES causes some schools' performance to be over (and under) estimated. ,
- Allen and Burgess ask whether, given these potential flaws in the available data, parents should use information on schools performance to inform school choice? They conclude that choices informed by league table data are more optimal than choices made randomly. More controversially they find that choices based on raw GCSE score league table information are also more optimal than randomly choosing a nearby school. This may seem surprising given that differences in raw GCSE results may largely reflect differences in pupil intakes. However, Allen and Burgess argue that a school's intake and its ability to attract high quality teachers, headteachers, governing bodies, unpaid volunteers, teaching assistants, and other resources are closely related. Hence the achievement of incoming students turns out to be a relatively good guide for parents trying to choose a good school for their child.

2.2 Australian labour market transitions

References

Annual transitions between labour market states for young Australians. A National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program Report, Hjelke Buddelmeyer, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and Gary Marks, Australian Council for Educational Research.

<http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED510048.pdf>

Issues

This study examines labour market transitions and specifically the impact of labour market status in one year on subsequent labour market status the following year. The report therefore assesses the benefits of time spent in "desirable" labour market states, i.e. permanent work, and conversely whether there are negative effects from time spent in less desirable labour market status, such as casual employment, unemployment or not being in the labour force at all.

Summary of main points

The study finds that a person's labour market status in the previous year is the most important predictor of their current labour market state, and even more important than qualifications. Being in full time work dramatically increases the probability of being employed in the next period (by 20 percentage points for women and 10 percentage points for men) as compared to being unemployed in the previous period. However,

education is a protective factor. Being unemployed in the previous year had little impact on labour market status the next year for those with high levels of qualifications (degrees) but a large negative impact for those with lower levels of qualification.

2.3 Transitions from School to Work (in the UK)

References

Schoon, I. & Silbereisen, R.K. (Eds.) (2009). *Transitions from School to Work: Globalisation, Individualisation, and Patterns of Diversity*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Issues

This book provides a unique perspective on the global changes that have transformed school-to-work transitions since the 1970s, and offers an integrative conceptual framework promoting a comparative, cross-national understanding of school-to-work transitions in a changing social context. The articles assembled in this book compare and assess variations in school-to-work transitions across Europe and North America. Unlike most other volumes in this area, which are pitched at either the macro or the micro level, this book attempts to integrate both perspectives, capturing the complexity of this critical life course transition. Furthermore, the authors are addressing interventions and policies aimed at improving the capacity of individuals to make effective transitions and to enable societies to better coordinate educational and occupational institutions.

Summary of main points

The findings suggest that adopting standard traditional models of youth transitions can lead to policy not being able to respond adequately to the needs of the young people or their parents.

For example, it is likely that a single training period before entry into the labour market will no longer be sufficient, and future workers must be prepared for continuous learning, for upgrading of skills, or reskilling throughout their working life. The research suggests that there have been structural changes and institutional changes that have produced a more diverse set of transitions over time. The book also presents evidence of greater levels of psychological insecurity amongst those making these transitions. For instance in the school context, as discussed by Salmela-Aro in Chapter 13, those who opted for the more competitive academic track within the Finnish school system are experiencing raised levels of burnout.

The book argues for policies that can respond adequately by acknowledging the broader range of transitions that young people make, and that are informed by empirical evidence on the multiple influences on these transitions and their dynamic interaction over time. Research should aim to obtain a clearer and more detailed understanding of the multiple interacting factors shaping the school-to-work transitions and the embeddedness of these transitions in other domains of experience, such as the move to independent living away from parents, family formation, etc. The book makes the case that young workers in the future will increasingly have to combine the roles of student, worker, partner, and parent and maintain a keenness to learn new skills throughout their working life.

2.4 Youth Transitions in a Globalised World

References

3 projects are currently being conducted within the ESRC funded Priority Centre Learning and Lifechances in the Knowledge Economies (LLAKES), Strand 3: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/27063.html>

Issues

Continuity and change in developmental transitions

International Comparative Project in collaboration with John Schulenberg at the University of Michigan, Lea Pulkinnen at the University of Jyväskylä, Katariina Salmela-Aro and Ellen Ek at the University of Helsinki, and Ingrid Schoon at the Institute of Education in London.

This study brings together evidence from large scale national and community longitudinal data sets from Britain (National Child Development Study, NCDS, and British Cohort Study, BCS70), the United States (Monitoring the Future study, MTF), and Finland (Northern Finland Birth Cohort, NFBC, and the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development, JYLS) to examine the pathways of young people in their mid-20s. The findings have been presented at the conference of the International Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies (SLLS) in Cambridge and will be published as a special issue.

The role of school motivation and aspirations in shaping transition to adulthood

Teenage career aspirations, values, and engagement in school are important predictors of later occupational attainment and income, wellbeing, as well as civic participation and political trust. Findings have been published or are currently in press, highlighting the importance of early education experiences and encouragement from parents and teachers in shaping later outcomes.

Ashby, J. & Schoon, I. The role of aspirations, ambition and gender in predicting adult social status and earnings. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (in press).

Schoon, I. & Cheng, H. (in press). Determinants of Political Trust: A life time learning model. *Developmental Psychology*.

Schoon, I. & Duckworth, K., (in press). Leaving school early and making it. *European Psychologist*

Schoon, I. and Polek, E. (in press). Pathways to economic wellbeing among teenage mothers in Great Britain. *European Psychologist*

Duckworth, K., & Schoon, I (2010). Progress and attainment during primary school: the roles of literacy, numeracy and self-regulation. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 1(3), pp. 2223-240

Schoon, I (2010). Childhood cognitive ability and adult academic attainment: evidence from three British cohort studies. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 1(3), pp. 241-258

Schoon, I., Cheng, H., Gale, C. R., Batty, G. D., & Deary, I. J. (2010). Social status, cognitive ability, and educational attainment as predictors of liberal social attitudes and political trust. *Intelligence*, 38: 144-150.

Schoon, I. (2008a). A transgenerational model of status attainment: The potential mediating role of school motivation and education. *National Institute Economic Review*, 205, 72-82.

Schoon, I., Ross, A. & Martin, P. (2007). Science Related Careers: Aspirations and Outcomes in two British Cohort Studies. *Equal Opportunities International*, 26, 129-143

Schoon, I., Martin, P. & Ross, A. (2007). Career transitions in times of social change. His and her story. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 70, 78-96

UK research is extended to examine the role of aspiration, motivation and values in shaping the transition to adult roles within the framework of an international post-doctoral Fellowship programme PATHWAYS to ADULTHOOD. Within this programme a unifying framework for the study of youth transitions in a comparative context has been developed, a manual of comparative measures across international cohorts has been published, and recent findings will be published in special issues of academic journals. For more information see <http://www.pathwaystoadulthood.org/>

Summary of main points

Teenage aspirations as well as motivation towards school predict adult occupation and social status attainment. Furthermore experiences in the family and school context influence levels of political trust expressed in mid adulthood.. Regarding transition experiences researchers have found that changes in transition patterns over time within countries was limited, with though the step into family formation and parenthood has become delayed over time. In each country and for each cohort, earlier affluence and higher education aspirations are crucial determinants of the transition pathway taken. In particular family background and parental aspirations have been found to influence whether young people take a fast or slow track transitions into the labour market and indeed into partnering and parenthood. Furthermore, the research indicates that higher levels of well being were associated not just with higher levels of academic attainment but also with being able to establish oneself in the labour market, to make the step onto the housing ladder, and being able to support a family by your mid twenties or early thirties. The conclusions are therefore that both fast and slow transitions into the labour market and independence are associated with high levels in life satisfaction. Policy-makers therefore need to recognise the multitude of different “successful transitions” to adulthood and not overly focus on the slower academic transition track into higher education and then work.

2.5 The role of attitudes and behaviours in explaining socio-economic differences in educational attainment

References

Report by CMPO and the Institute for Fiscal Studies for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/educational-attainment-poor-children>.

This work is to be published in a special edition of “Longview” (the journal of the Society of Longitudinal and Life Course Studies) in January 2011.

Issues

It is well known that children growing up in poor families leave school with considerably lower qualifications than children from better off backgrounds. This research sheds light on the role of attitudes and behaviours of both parents and children in explaining the development of these socio-economic gaps over time.

Using data from four contemporary cohort studies (the British Cohort Study, the Millennium Cohort Study, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England), it makes use of a simple decomposition analysis to illustrate the extent to which the socio-economic gaps in educational attainment at ages 5, 11 and 16 can be accounted for by differences in parent and child attitudes and behaviours.

Summary of main points

The key points arising from this analysis are as follows:

- 1) Our analysis using the British Cohort Study suggests that around one sixth of the socio-economic gap in children’s cognitive ability can be accounted for by differences in the cognitive ability of their parents.
- 2) We find that prior attainment (at age 3 in our age 5 analysis, age 7 in our age 11 analysis, and age 11 in our age 16 analysis) accounts for between 40% and 60% of the socio-economic gap in educational attainment at each age.
- 3) Taken together, these findings suggest a potentially important role for policy to reduce the socio-economic gaps in educational attainment, even after children have started secondary school.
- 4) While our analysis is not causal, the following attitudes and behaviours seem to make particularly large contributions to the socio-economic gap in educational attainment at various ages:
 - a. Home learning environment
 - b. Parental and young people’s aspirations for future education
 - c. Locus of control
 - d. Engagement in risky behaviours
- 5) Future research could therefore usefully focus on establishing whether:
 - a. There is a causal relationship between these factors and educational attainment;
 - b. These factors are malleable and responsive to policy.

3 Risky Behaviours and Positive Activities

3.1 Crime reducing effects of education

References

The Crime Reducing Effect of Education, Stephen Machin, Olivier Marie and Sunčica Vujić, Centre for Economic Performance Discussion Paper 979 (2010)

<http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp0979.pdf>

Issues

This work has investigated the links between crime and education in Britain.

Summary of main points

Individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to engage in criminal activity.

Specifically the authors claim to have uncovered a *causal* impact from education participation on property crime specifically, using a quasi-experimental approach based on changes in the compulsory school leaving age. They conclude that increased education participation can yield wider social benefits, in the form of reduced crime, over and above the impact of education on economic outcomes.

3.2 Young people's perspectives on the criminal justice system

References

Responding to youth crime and antisocial behaviour: Young people's perspectives on the criminal justice system. McNaughton Nicholls, C. Kinsella, R. & Cleghorn, N. (2010)

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/responding-to-youth-crime--anti-social-behaviour>

(for the summary, full report to be published late in 2011)

The findings contributed to proposals for reforming the way society responds to youth offending, developed by the Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Antisocial behaviour ('the Commission'). Their recommendations can be found at: <http://www.youthcrimecommission.org.uk>

A guide to engaging young people and professionals in a dialogue has been published separately

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/responding-to-youth-crime--anti-social-behaviour>

Issues

The Police Foundation and NatCen carried out¹ an engagement project with young people who have experience of the youth justice system as witnesses, victims or perpetrators of crime. The research involved speaking to young people and with

¹ Funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Social Justice Programme

focus groups as well as a series of workshops that brought young people together with members of the Commission to discuss their views.

Summary of main points

- An over-all lack of trust in the police. To counter this specialist training for police officers on working with young people (which could be developed, informed or delivered by young people) was suggested.
- Attending court is not necessarily a deterrent that would prevent young people from committing an offence and can become routine.
- The process of attending court is not well understood by young people or explained to them. However young people favoured decisions being made in court by professionals and not a lay panel.
- Restorative forms of justice were favoured by the young people throughout the research. Examples included offenders mending buildings they damaged, paying damages to people to replace property they had stolen and providing the chance to consider the impact their offending may have had.
- It was suggested that young people, particularly those who are ex-offenders, could be employed to support other young offenders, because they understand what they are going through and the young person will listen to and respect them.
- A points system for young offenders to 'earn' credit with which to work towards rehabilitation, benefits such as housing, and the eventual clearing of their criminal record was suggested.

3.3 v, the national youth volunteering organisation

References

Formative evaluation of v, the national youth volunteering organisation, NatCen led Consortia, with Public Zone, The Third Sector Research Centre, the Institute for Volunteering Research.

An interim report was published this year and is available at the following:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/482454/8e8b0ea8-8b04-4d81-ad83-5ec05829dafa.pdf>

The final report will be published mid 2011, and a series of additional papers are also anticipated.

Issues

This formative evaluation commenced in 2009, with the aim of evaluating the investment made by v (whose main funder is OCS), via their grant funded network and the extent to which v have met their objectives in terms of improving the quality, quantity and nature of youth volunteering in England. The evaluation team provide ongoing recommendations to support the development of v and their work. The methodology consists of eight strands: a grant recipient survey, survey of young people, discourse analysis, cost benefit analysis, analysis of administrative data, qualitative case studies, qualitative research with stakeholders and an analysis of marketing and communication material and strategies. These strands are brought together thematically throughout the evaluation.

Final analysis will pay particularly attention to the experiences of different young people as they volunteer, their motivations, outcomes and ongoing development that may be attributed to the activation of pro-social behaviour. Papers outlining the methodological innovations from the evaluation (such as a model of SROI for youth volunteering) are also anticipated.

Summary of main points

The findings from the interim report are preliminary and largely descriptive in nature. **v** has met and indeed exceeded the numerical target set for volunteering opportunities by the Russell Commission, which established **v**. Further, comparative analysis in the report indicated that the young people volunteering for **v**-funded projects were relatively diverse, particularly in terms of ethnicity, and more likely to be drawn from socially excluded groups (such as the homeless, those in the care system, offenders, single parents, young people in low-income households or refugees). However, the report also highlighted concerns, including tension between ensuring diversity in the volunteering group and recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers. The report also highlighted early problems that the projects had in monitoring the characteristics and activities undertaken by volunteers.

4 Disadvantaged and vulnerable groups

4.1 Educational achievement of ethnic minorities

References

Passing through school: the evolution of attainment of England's ethnic minorities, A Report for the National Equality Panel, Simon Burgess, Deborah Wilson and Jack Worth, August 2009.

Issues

This report builds on previous work by Wilson et al (2005) in considering the educational trajectories of students from different ethnic groups, controlling for other characteristics and factors that influence educational achievement.

Summary of main points

The research confirms that ethnic minority students have higher value added in their achievement in secondary school all the way through from KS2 to KS5 and that the underperformance of White students is particularly acute for poor (FSM eligible) boys.

Key findings include:

- Using a value added model and assessing progress between key stage 2 and key stage 4 (GCSE), students from the Indian minority ethnic group achieve an additional 56 GCSE points compared to White students (for context a C grade is worth 40 points).
- Those from a Chinese minority ethnic background achieve an additional 73 GCSE points compared to White students.
- Students classified as "Black other" do not achieve significantly more (or less) points as compared to Whites.
- Black Caribbean minority ethnic students achieve 9 points more than White students.
- The traveler/gypsy group is the only group that under performs White students, and in this case achieves 56 fewer points on average.

4.2 Addressing the under achievement of low SES children: a theory of lifecycle skill formation

References

Investing in our young people, Flavio Cunha and James J. Heckman, National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper 16201

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w16201>

Schoon, I, Bynner, J., Joshi, H., Parsons, S., Wiggins, R.D. & Sacker, A. (2002). The influence of context, timing and duration of risk experiences for the passage from childhood to early adulthood. *Child Development*, 73, 1486-1504.

Schoon, I. (2006). *Risk and Resilience: Adaptations to changing times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Issues

This paper provides a review of the key recent literature on skill formation, i.e. the production of skill of young people and recognizing the importance of understanding the large socio-economic gaps in cognitive and non cognitive skills that emerge early in children's lives. The review covers crucially important issues such as the importance of non cognitive skills for later labour market outcomes, the evidence supporting the need for early investment to develop both cognitive and non cognitive skills, the dynamic nature of skill formation and hence the need for both early and later complementary investments and the importance of critical and sensitive periods for skill formation. This is consistent with previous evidence from the psychological literature on the development of non cognitive skills, such as resilience (Schoon et al. 2002; Schoon 2006). The review provides a theoretical overview with some empirical evidence for the optimal timing of investment over the life-cycle.

Summary of main points

The research confirms the importance of making adequate investments in the early years in order to narrow socio-economic gaps in cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The review also highlights however, the dynamic nature of skill formation. It therefore makes the strong case for adequate later investments in young people, which are also needed to ensure continued skill development and to ensure that the socio-economic gap in skills does not widen further.