

## **SHORTER SCHOOLING: Evidence from Germany of the impact on university attendance**

Cutting the number of years that young people in Germany spend in schools has reduced the proportion that goes straight to university and increased their probability of doing voluntary service or spending time abroad. That is the central finding of research by **Tobias Meyer** and colleagues, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Mannheim in August 2015.

Between 2007 and 2012, some states in Germany reduced the number of pre-university school years from 13 to 12. The curriculum and graduation requirements stayed the same, but students were able to start university and their professional lives a year earlier. The new study compares the outcomes in these states with those in ones that did not shorten the duration of school education.

The results show that students affected by the reform are about 15 percentage points less likely to be at university a year after graduating from school. But this effect differs between western and eastern Germany, particularly with female students. Students affected by the reform in West Germany become around 12 percentage points more likely to spend a year abroad or to do a year of voluntary service after school. In contrast, affected students in East Germany are more likely to start vocational education and therefore delay university or just not attend.

Most of the effects the researchers find are seen in students coming from a non-academic family. These students are also less likely to go to university beyond the first year after school graduation. The authors comment:

‘It is important to consider at least two aspects when shortening school. The curriculum should still prepare and motivate students for university education just as well; and schools should still give academic and occupational guidance.’

### **More...**

The duration of university preparatory schooling in Germany has recently been reduced from 13 to 12 years, without changing the curriculum. This reform has reduced the share of students attending university education in the first year after school graduation, but increased their probability of doing voluntary service or going abroad.

This is the main finding of research by Tobias Meyer, Stephan Thomsen and Heidrun Schneider to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Mannheim 2015.

The choice of the optimal duration of schooling is a fundamental issue of education policy. On the one hand, rising demands of labour markets require high quality education, which implies that enough time should be provided for preparatory schooling.

On the other hand, earlier entry into labour market could represent a more efficient use of young people’s human capital, and would help to ensure economic prosperity as well as the sustainability of the tax and social security systems.

In order to solve this trade-off, most German states have eliminated the last year of high school over the last decade, but kept constant graduation requirements. The main objective has been to achieve the same level of education within a shorter duration of schooling. Students should be enabled to start their university education and professional career one year earlier.

But it is unclear whether compressing the curriculum into a shorter school duration has positive, negative or zero effects on students. This question is widely debated, but until now, little evidence has been available.

The paper to be presented at the EEA conference complements the available evidence by analysing the effects of the shortened school duration on education decisions after high school graduation on a nationwide level. The effects are identified using the timing difference in the reform implementation across federal states. Between 2007 and 2012, some states have completed the reform introduction. The development of the outcomes of graduates from these states is compared with the development in states in which students have not been affected by the reform until now.

The results show that students affected by the reform are less likely by about 15 percentage points to be enrolled in university education in the first year after high school graduation. The reason for this effect differs between west and east Germany, at least with respect to female students.

Students affected by the reform in west Germany become more likely by up to 12 percentage points to spend a year abroad or to do a year of voluntary service after high school. In contrast, affected students in east Germany have a higher probability of starting vocational education and therefore reducing or delaying university enrolment.

Most of the effects are driven by students coming from a non-academic family. In addition, these students show lower enrolment in university education beyond the first year after school graduation.

Since the main findings are similar in all analysed states, they can be considered as generally valid. Students affected by the reform may be less oriented with respect to the decision what to do after high school. Furthermore, they could be or feel less prepared for university education than the students with a longer duration of schooling.

From a policy perspective, it is therefore important to consider at least two aspects when reducing school duration. The curriculum should be organised in a way that students are prepared and motivated for university education as well as with the longer school duration. And it should be ensured that high school provides sufficient academic and occupational guidance.

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New Evidence on the Effects of the Shortened School Duration in the German States:  
An Evaluation of Post-Secondary Education Decisions  
Tobias Meyer, Stephan Thomsen and Heidrun Schneider

Contact:

Tobias Meyer  
NIW Hannover

Email: [meyer@niw.de](mailto:meyer@niw.de)

Telephone (before and after the conference): +49 511 / 12 33 16-31