

Access to vocational education can boost income over the long term

Policymakers are growing increasingly interested in the effects of vocational training on labour-market outcomes. This column uses a quasi-experimental design based on admissions cut-offs to secondary education in Finland to study the long-term effects of access to vocational education. Applicants near the admissions margin experience an average 6% increase in earnings in their mid-thirties if admitted to the vocational track. For students with a preference for the vocational track, failing to be admitted to the vocational track reduces employment in their mid-thirties by nearly 20%.

In response to recent technological changes and the worsening outcomes of non-college-educated workers (Autor 2019), governments around the world are becoming more interested in whether different types of secondary education (vocational versus general) might play a role in providing young people the skills they need to succeed after they graduate (European Commission 2010, US Department of Education 2013, 2018). In stark contrast to the growing body of evidence on the impact of various fields of study in higher education (Altonji et al. 2012, Hastings et al. 2013, Kirkeboen et al. 2016), there exists a paucity of compelling causal evidence on the impact of secondary-school curricula on labour-market outcomes (Altonji et al. 2011, Hampf and Woessman 2017, Hanushek et al. 2011, 2017)...

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