

Vocational Schools as Pathways to Higher Education: International Perspectives

Guest Editors: Christian Imdorf (Leibniz University Hannover), Claudia Schuchart (University of Wuppertal), Nadine Bernhard (TU Berlin)

Submission of Abstracts: 15 July 2024

Submission of Full Papers: 15 December 2024

Publication of the Issue: July/September 2025

The new millennium higher education expansion in Europe was accompanied by educational reforms aiming at adjusting upper secondary education to an increasingly diversified higher education system. Thereby an important part of the European policy agenda is to make access to higher education (HE) more inclusive. Permeability between vocational education and training (VET) and HE is considered key to enhancing HE access of new social groups and it has been taken note by research in several European countries. Likewise, as there is a royal road to HE in every country, the development and upgrading of VET has evolved country-specific and created specific alternative and 'second chance' routes into HE, which are today taken by significant proportion of students to enter HE. One of these routes are upper-secondary or post-secondary vocational schools. Such schools have traditionally provided access to HE in some countries (e.g. Austria, Germany, Bulgaria), while in others they have only taken over this function more recently (France, Switzerland amongst others).

In many countries, vocational schools have become particularly important for students without an academic background to get ready to study and access HE. Access to HE is restricted in different ways in different countries, and opportunity structures for disadvantaged youth therefore also vary by national contexts. The special issue project asks how both traditional and recently developed vocational schools improve access to HE for young women and men from less advantaged backgrounds (due to social origin, migration experience, or age) and help reducing educational inequalities in different countries. We are also interested to better understand how vocational schools select (e.g. by counselling strategies) and prepare their students (e.g. rising their aspirations) for trajectories into HE, and how effective those schools are in terms of transitions to higher education and labour market returns. Finally, we are interested in the ways educational trajectories through these schools are governed at an organisational and institutional level.

Vocational schools differ by more-or-less specific vocational skills they convey (that is, in their degree of vocational specificity), by the mix of vocational and general skills they teach, and in whether they offer school-leaving qualifications and/or labour market relevant certificates. We are interested in contributions on vocational schools of different kinds, which are however united in their institutional and social function to feed higher education. The aim of the special issue is to highlight international research on this important but under-researched topic, and thus to make the international relevance of the topic visible in order to stimulate further, including international comparative research.

Instructions for Authors:

Authors interested in submitting a paper for this issue are asked to consult the journal's instructions for authors and submit their abstracts (maximum of 250 words, with a tentative title and keywords) through the abstracts system [here](#) (abstract submission will be open from December 2023). Abstracts should briefly state the research problematic, the theoretical embedding of the research question, the research design (data and methods) and preliminary results. When submitting their abstracts, authors are also asked to confirm that they are aware that Social Inclusion is an open access journal with a publishing fee if the article is accepted for publication after peer-review (corresponding authors affiliated with institutional members of the journal do not incur this fee).

Open Access:

The journal has an article publication fee to cover its costs and guarantee that the article can be accessed free of charge by any reader, anywhere in the world, regardless of affiliation. The journal Social Inclusion defends that authors should not have to personally pay this fee and advise them to check with their institutions if funds are available to cover open access publication fees. Institutions can also join the journal's Membership Program at a very affordable rate and enable all affiliated authors to publish without incurring any fees. Further information about the journal's open access charges and institutional members can be found [here](#).