

Adult education can substantially improve careers

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Precarious employment is a core concern in modern societies and an increasing trend worldwide. It is increasing among all occupational levels, including the traditionally protected, skilled and often highly unionised workforces of large firms. Is this a path of no return? Previous analyses have focused on the social structure to answer this question, and researchers have been devoted to exploring effective policies and structural changes in employment relations.

In this context, less attention has been paid to what individuals can do by themselves. In order to fill this research gap, we have explored the effect of completing formal education later in life on access to non-precarious employment. We measured both upgrades (an additional qualification higher than the initial qualification) and side steps (an additional qualification at the same level or lower compared to the initial qualification). We have used longitudinal data for Russia, Catalonia and the UK, and two different definitions of non-precarious employment: firstly in terms of job security and secondly as working full time and receiving wages above working-poor levels.

Overall, we found little impact of adult learning on securing an indefinite contract. However, upgrading seems to help individuals with unstable careers move into a full-time job with wages above the working-poor level. It particularly helps people move from unemployment to non-precarious employment. The size of this effect is surprisingly large, and even in a country with high turnover costs like Spain, adult learning can have a positive impact on certain outcomes.

Country-specific results

Regarding the **UK** we have found that both educational upgrades and educational side-steps can increase individuals' chances of moving into non-precarious employment, though the effects were slightly stronger for educational upgrades. In addition, adult learning tends to help labour market participants in marginal situations to improve their career perspectives slightly more than those who had already accessed non-precarious employment.

In **Russia**, adult learning is also a good tool for improving an individual's labour market position, with upgrading generally being beneficial and side-stepping helping only some groups in specific situations. In terms of job security,

upgrading has a positive effect on individuals' career but side-stepping does not. Our results suggest that both an upgrade and a side-step increase the chances of finding full-time work and receiving wages above working-poor levels. For upgraders, there were no significant differences according to employment status. In contrast, for side-steppers it seemed that the new educational qualification only benefited those in precarious jobs.

Finally, our results for **Catalonia** indicate that adult learning was beneficial for participants in more marginal labour market positions: an upward educational mobility can help individuals access full-time and decently paid positions. In contrast, those in non-precarious jobs did not benefit from adult learning and results even suggest some tendency for an upgrade to have a negative impact on the chances to stay in non-precarious jobs.

Our general conclusion is that adult learning can substantially contribute to individuals' careers, thus highlighting the agency of individuals who do not (yet) have stable and adequately remunerated jobs. However, it cannot necessarily be considered as a large-scale solution for getting rid of precarious jobs.

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Notes:

- This post is based on the authors' article [Does adult education contribute to securing non-precarious employment? A cross-national comparison](#), co-authored with Yuliya Kosyakova and Patricia McMullin, in *Work Employment & Society* April 17, 2015 0950017014561335.
- The post gives the views of its authors, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.
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