

Professor Blossfeld, are educational qualifications worth less these days?

© Patricia Achter/University of Bamberg

The sociologist Hans-Peter Blossfeld believes that education will also be worthwhile in the future.



© Patricia Achter/University of Bamberg

The sociologist Hans-Peter Blossfeld believes that education will also be worthwhile in the future.

"In a longitudinal study I conducted together with Professor Rolf Becker from the University of Bern, I looked at career entry and career history processes over the past 50 years. The results surprised even us. For me personally, the study was a biographical déjà-vu experience. At the [Max Planck Institute for Human Development](#) in Berlin, we began with longitudinal studies in the mid-1980s, exploring the educational paths taken by those born in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. This revealed very clearly that each new generation of young people would begin a career at a higher level after studying at university, and would rise more quickly through the ranks. Now, 30 years later, our study "Entry of men in the labour market and their career mobility" has produced the same results: **each generation has better career opportunities, with younger graduates finding ever better jobs** and already overtaking their elders at a relatively early stage in their careers.

Many applicants, but more jobs

This effect seems surprising at first. If more and more highly-qualified people apply for a fixed number of positions, one would expect them to be forced down into less prestigious jobs. This is only the case from time to time, however. This is because the structure of the

employment system as a whole is changing; this is the key finding of our latest study: **as the number of higher educational qualifications rises, so too does the demand for higher qualifications on the labour market** – both developments are going in the same direction. Our study was based on longitudinal data from the [German Life History Study \(GLHS\)](#) and from the study "[Arbeiten und Lernen im Wandel](#)" ("working and learning in transition", only in German) conducted by the [Institute for Employment Research](#). The two studies were comparable during the period 1945 to 2008. In all, **we analysed the data of around 8,800 people in West Germany**. The anonymised data sets contain information about professional and life histories, encompassing all areas of life from the start of school, education and career entry to the start of a family and career moves.

New opportunities through digitisation

Contrary to the fear that a sharp rise in graduates could lead to a widespread devaluation of academic qualifications, we are seeing a clear trend in the other direction: **well-educated graduates normally suffer no disadvantages in Germany**. They occupy increasingly prestigious positions in companies and in the public sector, and their education is paying for itself more and more as the working world undergoes structural changes. And this is just as much the case today as it was 50 years ago. **The long-term influence of artificial intelligence and digitisation on the labour market is not known**. However, there is growing demand for qualified personnel with IT skills in all sectors, be it in agriculture, the metals industry or energy generation. Though the number of university graduates is rising, new and high-skilled jobs are being created at a slightly faster pace.

Women have closed the gap – until they start a family



© Jacob Ammentorp

Lund/iStock/Getty images

Despite growing numbers of university graduates: career opportunities improve with every generation.

Our findings apply equally to women and men. **As far as educational qualifications are concerned, women have even overtaken men in the last two decades**. They are more likely to finish high school and go on to attend a traditional university, whereas more young men opt for a course at a university of applied sciences. Women have profited to an above-average extent from the educational expansion, and are on a par with their male counterparts when it comes to beginning a career. **When it is time to start a family, however, we see women falling back into a more traditional role**. From a methodological perspective, analysing what happens next is very complicated, as women tend to engage in phases of varying employment intensity or part-time work or may return to their previous position. We

therefore decided initially to concentrate on the career paths taken by men, and are now in the process of exploring the careers pursued by women.

There is no doubt that it is the unskilled and low-qualified workers who are losing out as a result of the structural transformations in the world of work; this is also shown clearly by our longitudinal analysis. The number of low-skilled jobs is declining because such positions are easier to eliminate or relocate abroad. People with little education are therefore finding it increasingly difficult to get a job and are receiving ever lower wages.

Education is paying for itself more and more

In general, however, we see reasons for optimism. Our study charts educational and career histories over five decades, during the course of which there were many crises. Whole generations of graduates in the 1980s were affected by unemployment, and sentiment in some cases was worse than today. Nonetheless, the structural effect we observed can be seen continuously over the entire period. We would therefore **predict that investing in education will also be worthwhile in the future** – for individuals and for society alike. As a country with a highly-developed industrial and service sector, Germany is more reliant than ever on higher education."

Professor Hans-Peter Blossfeld

A sociologist, Professor Blossfeld has held the Chair in Sociology I at the University of Bamberg since 2002. From 2008 to 2012 he was the scientific director of the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), the world's largest social science study of educational histories in Germany. From 2012 to 2017 he was a professor at the European University Institute in Florence. His research focuses among other things on the dynamics of social roles in the lives of men and women.

www.uni-bamberg.de > [Professor Hans-Peter Blossfeld](#)

Research in
Germany

Land of Ideas

AN INITIATIVE OF THE
 Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research

Green technology – safeguarding the future

Dear Gunda Achterhold,

As the dangers of climate change become increasingly clear, we need more urgently than ever to move towards a sustainable economy. Green technology has the solutions. You can also read in this edition how a computer scientist is developing data analysis tools, find out about the value of education today, learn about current funding programmes and discover our number of the month.

- > [In focus: Green technology](#)

- > [Career & funding](#)

- > [Just asking... Professor Blossfeld, are educational qualifications worth less these days?](#)

- > [Upcoming events](#)

- > [Number of the month: 195 million years](#)

In focus: Green technology



[Green technology for a sustainable economy](#)

> [Learn more](#)



[Stepping up the pace: the Smart Green Accelerator](#)

> [Learn more](#)

[Back to top](#) 

Career & funding



Smart data science for smart factories

> Read more

Back to top

Current calls

> Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung: scholarships for international and doctoral students

The deadline for applicants already in Germany ends on 15 July 2019.

> Sofja Kovalevskaja Award

Applications can be submitted until 31 July 2019.

> Advanced Grants from the European Research Council

Applications for the Advanced Grants can be submitted until 29 August 2019.

Back to top

Just asking...

Professor Blossfeld, are educational qualifications worth less these days?

> Learn more

Back to top

Upcoming events

> "Study and research in Germany" webinar series for science administrators

13 – 19 June 2019 at 12 pm EDT | 11 am CDT | 10 am MDT | 9 am PDT, registration will be open until the start of the webinars.

> "Research in Germany" webinar series

24 – 27 June 2019 at 2pm (CEST); registration will be open until the start of the webinars.

> "Research in Germany" at the Graduate Career Consortium (GCC) Annual Conference

Number of the month

195 million years

That is how old the dinosaur eggs are that were found in China in 2013. Bonn palaeontologist Martin Sander was a member of the team that examined the eggs.

› [Find out more](#)

Get updates

Get updates about research career options and funding opportunities in Germany, the latest research news, interesting research projects and upcoming events.



Editors

German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD

Section K22 – International Research Marketing

Dr Katja Lasch

Kennedyallee 50, 53175 Bonn

+49 (0)228-882-146

[Contact via email](#)

Final editing and translation

FAZIT Communication GmbH

[Contact via email](#)

Publisher

Federal Ministry of Education and Research

Heinemannstraße 2, 53175 Bonn

+49 (0)228-9957-0

[Contact via email](#)

[Back to top](#) 

www.research-in-germany.org

If you don't want to receive this email anymore, [click here](#) to unsubscribe free of charge.