

4 System performance in ensuring access to higher education

This chapter examines the performance of the state higher education system in ensuring access for young people. It focuses on the transition from secondary schools to higher education, including efforts to attract students. It also explores study advice and career orientation for secondary students from *Präsenzstellen* (presence centres) and *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* (Study Orientation Network), as well as from outside of the education sector. Enrolment rates are analysed, including trends such as a low direct transition from secondary school to higher education in the state. Finally, the chapter explores the decision making of school leavers and sets out factors that influence the choice of study destination.

School to higher education transition in Brandenburg

The secondary school tracking system decides early on academic careers, but permeability and flexibility of the system have increased

Admission to any course of study leading to a first degree at a higher education institution (HEI) generally requires a general higher education entrance qualification (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife*) or a subject-restricted higher education entrance qualification (*Fachgebundene Hochschulreife*) (Eurydice, 2021^[1]). The former entitles school leavers to study at any HEI in any subject or field, while the latter permits entry into universities of applied sciences (UAS) and only into specified university courses (MBJS, 2021^[2]). In Brandenburg, the higher education entrance qualification for UAS (*Fachhochschulreife*) also allows students to enter specific university courses (which is not the case in all German states). The higher education entrance qualification can also be gained through vocational education or adult education (*zweiter Bildungsweg*) (Box 4.1).

Over 70% of students who enrolled in one of Brandenburg's HEIs in the winter semester 2019/20 accessed it through a general university entrance qualification acquired through upper secondary schooling in Germany. Only 12% of students accessed higher education through an advanced technical college certificate or a subject-restricted entrance qualification. Around 15% of students acquired their entrance qualification abroad.

Box 4.1. Obtaining a higher education entrance qualification

The pathway through secondary education is decided in the last year of primary education. In Brandenburg, children usually attend primary school for six years, whereas four years is the norm in most German states. Brandenburg has three secondary education paths: *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Oberschule* (non-academic), *Gymnasium* (academic) and *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive, combining different paths). The decision is taken by the class conference (an assembly of all teachers of a cohort) based on the recommendation of the class teachers following a discussion with the parents. Gifted children on a non-academic path may change to the academic or comprehensive path after four years of secondary school, where they are grouped into specific classes for gifted children.

In the 2019/20 school year in Brandenburg, 41% of children transitioned from primary school to an academic secondary school, 38% to a non-academic secondary school and 17% to a comprehensive school. The share transitioning to academic secondary schools was almost 10 percentage points higher for girls.

Students can obtain the following school-leaving certificates after completing regular secondary schooling:

- **(Erweiterte) Berufsbildungsreife ((Extended) General school-leaving certificate)** can be obtained at all school types at the end of grade 9. It primarily entitles holders to begin vocational training under the dual system (which combines an apprenticeship and theoretical training). The extended certificate on completion of grade 10 enables a broader range of options for vocational training (e.g. *Berufsfachschule*).
- **Fachoberschulreife (Intermediate school-leaving certificate)** can be obtained at all school types after ten years of schooling. It entitles holders to begin vocational training or to continue education. In addition to enabling people to begin vocational training under the dual system, it also allows them to begin full-time school-based vocational education and training. In addition, if they achieve a certain average mark, they can access the various types of school at the upper secondary level.

- **Allgemeine Hochschulreife or Abitur (General higher education entrance qualification)** can be obtained after grade 12 at *Gymnasium* or grade 13 at *Gesamtschulen*. A higher education entrance qualification is evidence that the holder is prepared and entitled to enter higher education.

Apart from secondary schools, higher education entrance qualifications can be obtained in vocational schools or adult education, either in part-time (e.g. *Abendgymnasien*) or full-time schools (e.g. *Fachoberschule, Berufsoberschule*).

Of 21 100 students who completed school in Brandenburg in the 2018/19 school year, 7% acquired no school-leaving certificate, 14% a vocational school-leaving certificate, 39% an intermediate school-leaving certificate and 40% a general higher education entrance qualification

Brandenburg is therefore one of the six German federal states with more school leavers with a general higher education entrance qualification than with an intermediate school-leaving certificate.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (2020^[3]), *Schulen*, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Schulen/_inhalt.html (accessed on 15 March 2021).

Admission criteria and procedures are based on quota and selection criteria defined by regulations

In some cases, HEIs may place additional requirements on applicants for specific programmes, beyond the general matriculation standard. For admission to certain study programmes, previous related practical experience is required. In certain study fields at UAS and universities, the applicant's aptitude is determined through a separate test procedure. This applies particularly to sport, design and creative and performing arts.

According to the *Brandenburgisches Hochschulgesetz* (BbgHG) (Brandenburg Higher Education Act), § 9, vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification obtained at school are granted the right of entry to higher education under certain conditions (*Hochschulzugang für beruflich qualifizierte Bewerber ohne schulische Hochschulzugangsberechtigung*) (CHE, 2021^[4]). Craftsmen certificates and advanced further training certificates have unrestricted access to higher education programmes similar to applicants with a general higher education entrance qualification. Vocationally qualified applicants without advanced further training can study programmes related to their work field after completing vocational training and work experience of at least two years in their field. In Brandenburg (unlike in states like Saxony or Saxony-Anhalt), these applicants do not have to pass additional aptitude tests. However, faculties or departments can stipulate such tests in their statutes (Technische Hochschule Brandenburg, 2021^[5]). The knowledge and skills acquired outside of higher education can count for credit for up to half of a higher education programme, if the content and level are equivalent to the programme part being replaced (CHE, 2021^[4]).

Generally, HEIs in Brandenburg recognise completed programmes, modules and courses from other HEIs in Germany and abroad. After successfully completing at least two semesters in another federal state, students can continue their studies in Brandenburg in the same or a closely related study programme, regardless of the type of higher education entrance qualification (CHE, 2021^[4]). Individual HEIs take further decisions on the recognition and awarding of credits for academic achievements.

HEIs administer admission to bachelor's and master's programmes autonomously within the legislative framework. The legislation defines certain quotas: for instance, 10-20% of study places are reserved for specific groups (e.g. hardship cases, applicants for a programme in a field with high demand). The remaining places are allocated according to selection criteria: grades in the prior qualification and at least one other predefined criterion (e.g. subject-specific aptitude tests, application interview).

Programmes with nationally restricted study places (ie.g. medicine, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, dentistry) are centrally co-ordinated by the Foundation for Higher Education Admission (*Stiftung für Hochschulzulassung – SfH*).

The state strategy for career and study orientation is an important step towards better guidance at schools

In 2015, Brandenburg's Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports (*Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport – MBSJ*) developed a strategy for career and study orientation. This set up a framework for a comprehensive, systematic career and study orientation at schools. The strategy was updated at end-2021 and will be implemented gradually as of 2022/23 (Box 4.2). Brandenburg's government signed a co-operation agreement with the federal government (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* - Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales* - Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) and the *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* (Federal Employment Agency) on the implementation of career and study orientation in Brandenburg's schools.

Box 4.2. The updated state strategy for career (and study) orientation

The state parliament adopted a new strategy for career and study orientation in September 2021. It wants schools to become more practice-oriented, focused on the individual, and better integrate career and study orientation into schools' organisational structures in order to better prepare students for the world of work. In addition, the strategy encourages schools to consider regional economic and social contexts and develop an increasingly digital offer. The strategy has four fields of action:

- Promote school autonomy: Schools in the state of Brandenburg will be enabled to plan and implement career and study orientation. The state will strengthen the interdisciplinary character of the task and support schools in the further development of their orientation concepts. Furthermore, adequate resources and the qualification of teachers need to be ensured. Additional offers for self-reflection are intended to support the schools in assessing their own career and study orientation offer and in identifying the need for action.
- Accompany needs-oriented career choice process: All young people are to be supported with their transition to career and education. The orientation offer should focus on the individual, be practice-oriented and take an approach neutral to gender and sensitive to the needs of other target groups. Schools should improve the visibility and image of the orientation offer to reach all target groups. A continuous evaluation of the orientation offer will be required.
- Strengthen co-operation between schools and external partners: The orientation offer should be implemented in co-operation with relevant stakeholders. The development and enhancement of models for co-operation, particularly in rural regions, are to be promoted.
- Intensify collaboration with parents: Parents are to be more closely involved in the career and study orientation of their children. Their participation should be encouraged and information flows should be improved.

Successful career and study orientation offers are promoted to achieve the set goals. The package of measures is to be supplemented with elements that target further development of professional orientation. The main projects include:

- conception and implementation of a follow-up programme to the Secondary Level I Initiative;
- introduction of the digital career choice pass 4.0;
- development of a modular training series for school administrators and teachers;

- digitalisation of the award procedure “Schools with excellent career and study orientation”.

The orientation offer in Brandenburg is usually financed by the state, the European Union, the federal government, the Federal Employment Agency and other partners (e.g. companies, chambers/business associations, social partners, foundations, municipalities). Implementation of the development projects in the strategy will depend on available funding.

Source: MBS (2022^[6]), *Landesstrategie zur Beruflichen Orientierung: Handlungsrahmen einer systematischen, individuellen und praxisnahen Ausbildungs- und Studienorientierung an Schulen im Land Brandenburg*, Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg.

Career and study advice and orientation at schools

Brandenburg’s schools offer some options for career and study orientation. Students can undertake work experience in the ninth grade and are offered career guidance during *Studien- und Berufsorientierung* (a study and career orientation seminar). This course requires students to reflect on their own professional future over two years and to get acquainted with requirements of the higher education and professional world (MBS, 2021^[7]). The *Berufswahlpass* (career choice pass) provides a structured tool for individual career and study orientation from grades 7 to 13 (including documentation of projects and practical experience, analysis of strengths and interests, career planning, etc.) (MBS, 2021^[7]). All grade 9 students receive the *Kopfstütze* (headrest) school calendar that gives useful advice for choosing careers and study fields. It also provides information on vocational training and study options in Brandenburg and Berlin. Students in grades 7 or 8 can take part in an analysis (*Potenzialanalyse als Kompass*) that explores their strengths, inclinations and interests as a compass for a structured, individual study and career orientation. The analysis includes student-self evaluations, a day of practical simulation and exercises, and individual counselling (Kobra.net, 2021^[8]).

Netzwerk Zukunft Schule und Wirtschaft für Brandenburg (The Network Future) manages the state strategy for career and study orientation and promotes co-operation between schools, businesses and HEIs (Netzwerk Zukunft, n.d.^[9]). It supports schools, for example, in implementing their career and study orientation programmes and offers training for teachers in providing career and study orientation. For one day each year (*Zukunftstag*), businesses, HEIs, research institutes, public agencies and other organisations open their doors to students in grades 7-10 so they can gain first-hand work and study experiences (FBB, 2021^[10]).

Netzwerk Zukunft has granted some of Brandenburg’s schools the “School with excellent career and study orientation” award (Netzwerk Zukunft, 2021^[11]). This distinction recognises strong engagement in providing the mandatory *Berufswahlpass*, *Kopfstütze*, work placement and other features of the programme. In Brandenburg, this distinction is held by 61 of 149 *Oberschulen* (intermediate secondary schools) but by only 15 of 103 *Gymnasien* (academically oriented high schools) and 4 of 45 *Gesamtschulen* (comprehensive secondary schools).

Schools granted the award offer a wide range of activities that demonstrate the worlds of work and higher education to their students. Many can rely upon established networks with education providers and employers, strong alumni networks and “friends of the school” associations, extracurricular activities on campus, a relatively good material base and a strong school identity. These bring students and their families, teachers and school principals closer together. These schools can also compete for European and federal funding programmes to support their ambitious projects. Ensuring such a comprehensive offer state-wide requires opportunities for peer learning among all – public and private – schools. In addition, the state government may need to adapt its regulation for teaching hours to include a provision for career and study orientation. In addition, it may need to provide or expand earmarked state funding for the offer in study and career orientation.

The higher education framework contracts promote student orientation and guidance by HEIs

HEIs play a key role in providing career and study orientation and have been funded for this role by the ministry and European Social Fund (MWFK, 2013^[12]). The higher education framework agreement expects HEIs to expand orientation services, as well as to co-ordinate efforts for student recruitment and guidance with other institutions (MWFK, n.d.^[13]). The measures of MWFK can be grouped into four pillars (Box 4.3).

Box 4.3. MWFK measures to gain students for Brandenburg

1. Joint appearances at education fairs in the Western German states

For several years, MWFK has organised and financed joint appearances of Brandenburg's HEIs at educational fairs, especially in the Western German states. HEIs all rate this joint initiative as positive.

2. Regular advertising of the website www.studieren-in-Brandenburg.de

The most recent advertising campaign of the website, which lasted for several weeks on Jam FM, featured two radio commercials. In the winter of 2019/20, this campaign reached around 1.7 million listeners in the advertising-relevant target group. Other advertising channels include press releases and a flyer, bookmarks for Instagram, Instagram advertising, ads on local online news websites, screen ads in 25 subway and train stations in Berlin, in-app advertising on the cell phones of students in Berlin and ads in high school newspapers.

3. Expanding funding and mandate of *Netzwerk Studientorientierung* to approach prospective students in Berlin

One-third of students at Brandenburg's HEIs come from Berlin's schools. MWFK funded an additional position at the co-ordination office of *Netzwerk Studientorientierung* (Study Orientation Network) office to work with prospective students at Berlin's schools. The network has increased and diversified its offer on social media. The aim is to connect all Brandenburg's HEIs with the network via social media so prospective students can receive "first-hand" answers to their questions.

A related measure is expanding www.studieren-in-Brandenburg.de across all institutions by improving the presence of study offers at Brandenburg's HEIs; launching the assessment tool of the *Netzwerk Studientorientierung*; and introducing subject-related knowledge tests.

4. Supporting peer groups

Project funding can support initiatives of peer groups advertising Brandenburg's HEI locations among students as valuable places of living; this is not happening yet.

Source: Information provided by the Ministry of Science, Research and Culture (*Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur, MWFK*).

HEIs have expanded their presence in the (online) media, providing information about studying in Brandenburg and dual studies. HEIs participate in career fairs organised and financed by MWFK. Online Self-Assessment provides an interactive opportunity for students to discover their own interests and skills and to gain insights into study programmes. Institutions offer information events and workshops in schools. They also organise information days and open houses where future students and parents can visit the campus and participate in seminars, workshops and other activities.

Zentrale Studienberatung – ZSB (HEIs' student advice centres) provide information and guidance to (future) students, parents and teachers. As an independent association of the eight public HEIs, *Netzwerk*

Studienorientierung (Study Orientation Network) is the largest provider of career and study guidance in Brandenburg (Netzwerk Studienorientierung Brandenburg, n.d.^[14]). It runs offices at each HEI; provides guidance and counselling; and maintains the *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* website (Box 4.4). The network offers counselling and study orientation in and outside of schools, including study counselling, university information days, a workbook for future students, Instagram challenges, seminars and information evenings. It also provides training for school teachers. The network organises about 1 000 events per year, which attract about 30 000 participants. It is financed jointly by MWFK and HEIs.

Box 4.4. The digital offer of *Netzwerk Studienorientierung*

Netzwerk Studienorientierung (Study Orientation Network) addresses prospective students who seek information about study options at HEIs in Brandenburg and need support in their study choice. It maintains the major web portal about higher education in Brandenburg: www.studieren-in-Brandenburg.de. The network considers the website to be part of its customer relationship management. Recently, it improved the website significantly to offer the following information and tools:

- a compilation of pre-study programmes at HEIs in Brandenburg, including junior studies that allow students to attend lectures at HEIs and collect European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System credits, to attend trial lessons in courses at the bachelor's level and to complete internships at HEIs;
- a digital rally to explore HEIs in the state based on the app Actionbound, including an interactive quiz that lasts about 20 minutes;
- an online media centre that contains various videos about studying at HEIs in Brandenburg, rallies to explore campuses, recorded webinars on study orientation and interviews with alumni provided by HEIs;
- digital study counselling provided by HEIs and the network;
- a workbook to support prospective students in their study choice;
- information about Brandenburg HEIs;
- a blog that includes articles about choosing study courses;
- an event calendar that is searchable by personal subject-related interests, HEIs, target groups and types of events;
- links to the Instagram and the Facebook channels of the network, as well as to the WhatsApp messenger chat service of HEIs;
- a section that focuses on teaching staff and parents to receive input for supporting young people in their study decisions.

It targets and accompanies prospective students, primarily from Berlin but from elsewhere as well. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, its digital offer has turned out to be even more important. The above measures have likely raised awareness about the HEI offer in Brandenburg, particularly among students in Berlin and peripheral regions in Brandenburg. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the website has been visited more than 11 000 times. More than half of the users come from Berlin.

Sources: *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* (n.d.^[14]), Website of *Netzwerk Studienorientierung*, www.studieren-in-brandenburg.de (accessed on 8 April 2021); *Netzwerk Studienorientierung Brandenburg* (2020^[15]), "Bericht der Koordinierungsstelle des Netzwerks Studienorientierung", Universität Potsdam.

The HEIs' *Präsenzstellen* (presence centres) also provide information, including for student financing; advise (prospective) students; and engage in networking with companies, chambers of commerce and

associations (Box 4.5). Each centre is set up and operated by one HEI or jointly by two HEIs in co-operation with business actors in *Regionale Wachstumskerne – RWK* (the regional growth core) that host the centre. Independently from its host HEI(s), each centre presents the offers of all HEIs in Brandenburg. The centres are steered by a co-ordination office at the TH Brandenburg.

Box 4.5. *Präsenzstellen* of HEIs in Brandenburg

Since 2018, MWFK has expanded the HEI presence in several growth cores (RWKs), mainly in rural areas located at some distance from HEIs. The work of *Präsenzstellen* is based on specific regional (economic) issues, and key activities vary from centre to centre. HEIs and RWKs jointly set the focus and choose locations of *Präsenzstellen*. The current locations are listed below:

- **Präsenzstelle Prignitz** is managed by TH Brandenburg in co-operation with the RWKs Prignitz and Neuruppin and with *Wachstumskern Autobahndreieck Wittstock/Dosse e.V.*; the office operates three locations.
- **Präsenzstelle Schwedt Uckermark** is managed by HNE Eberswalde, in co-operation with the RWK Schwedt/Oder.
- **Präsenzstelle Spremberg** is managed by BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, in co-operation with the RWK Spremberg.
- **Präsenzstelle Luckenwalde** is managed by TH Wildau and FH Potsdam, in co-operation with the RWK Luckenwalde.
- **Präsenzstelle Westlausitz/Finsterwalde** is managed by the BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg and the TH Wildau, in co-operation with the RWK Westlausitz.
- **Präsenzstelle Fürstenwalde** is managed by the European University Viadrina University and the TH Wildau, and operated in co-operation with the RWK Fürstenwalde/Spree.
- **Präsenzstelle O-H-V/Velten** is managed by the University of Potsdam and the TH Brandenburg, in co-operation with the RWK Oranienburg-Hennigsdorf-Velten.

The *Präsenzstellen* areas of activity include networking, mediating and co-ordinating between the HEI/research sector and the region; strengthening the presence of HEIs in the regions; ensuring the availability of skilled workers; and improving transparency, co-operation and communication between academia, business and civil society actors.

Präsenzstellen organise various types of events. They have introduced new communication channels such as digital consultation hours and digital morning calls with professional input. They also provide a *Kinderuni* (university for children), public scientific events, and open stage story-telling events. In Luckenwalde, they established a co-working space. Events and activities tested at one *Präsenzstelle* and that have generated positive effects are adopted by the others. Recently, *Präsenzstellen* improved visibility by launching a joint website (www.praesenzstellen.de), which complements the seven websites of the individual centres.

The state provided EUR 1.5 million for *Präsenzstellen* in 2019 and EUR 2.5 million in both 2020 and 2021 (MWFK, 2018^[16]). *Präsenzstellen* are only funded until the end of 2023; the state plans to evaluate them in 2022/23. The work of *Präsenzstellen* is widely appreciated by regional business stakeholders who hope the centres will be sustainable.

Sources: MWFK (n.d.^[17]), *Wissens- und Technologietransfer*, <https://mwfk.brandenburg.de/mwfk/de/wissenschaft/wissens-und-technologietransfer/~mais2redc107558de>, (accessed on 13 July 2021); *Präsenzstellen* (n.d.^[18]), *Willkommen in den Präsenzstellen der Hochschulen in Brandenburg*, www.praesenzstellen.de (accessed on 13 July 2021); Expert interviews with representatives of MWFK and written information provided by MWFK to the OECD project team.

Study orientation and guidance also happen outside of the education sector

Studentenwerke (student service organisations) are institutions under public law, affiliated with one or more HEIs. Brandenburg has two of these, one in Potsdam and the other in Frankfurt (Oder). In addition to processing applications for the Federal Training Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz – BAföG*) and other ways of counselling on financing options, they offer a comprehensive range of social security and student support services, and provide students with affordable housing. Day-care centres, organised with external providers, and counselling centres are also available.

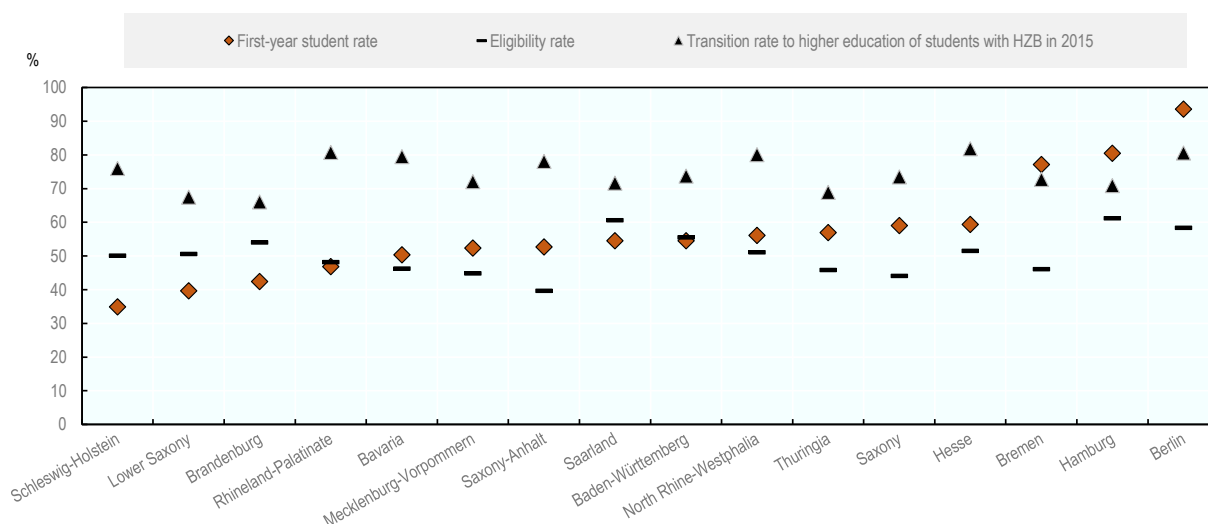
The regional employment agency in Brandenburg (*Agentur für Arbeit*) also provides information and guidance for (prospective) students. The tasks of employment agencies include career guidance for young people, first-year students and higher education graduates. In Brandenburg, the employment agency has five branches; it reports reaching about 80% of the young people in Brandenburg with career guidance offers before they leave school.

Brandenburg's schools appear to collaborate extensively with the employment agency. Many school representatives interviewed by the OECD acknowledged the agency's support as structured, informative and usually unbiased towards any of the post-secondary paths. Moreover, the agency counsellors appear well informed about, and connected with, the guidance offer of other providers.

Enrolment rates in Brandenburg's HEIs

Brandenburg's first-year student rate is low, coupled with a low direct transition from secondary to higher education

Figure 4.1. First-term student rate, eligibility rate and transition rates to higher education, 2018



Notes: The first-year student rate refers to the share of students in the state enrolled for the first time in an HEI in the winter term 2017/18 or the summer term 2018 from the same-age population of the state. The eligibility rate shows the share of students holding a higher education entrance qualification (Hochschulzugangsberechtigung, HZB) of the same-age population. The transition rate to higher education is computed as the share of students who enrol in an HEI by 2018 from all students who obtained a HZB in the state in 2015.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (2019^[19]), *Bildung und Kultur. Nichtmonetäre hochschulstatistische Kennzahlen* [Education and Culture. Non-monetary university statistical indicators] (database), *Fachserie 11, Reihe 4.3.1, Tables 1, 10 and 13*, https://www.statistischebibliothek.de/mir/receive/DEHeft_mods_00128354 (accessed on 3 November 2021).

Brandenburg has one of the lowest rates in Germany of higher education enrolment (43% of the population were of school leaving age in 2018) (Figure 4.1). The rate is low despite a relatively high rate of higher education eligibility – holding a higher education entrance qualification (Hochschulzugangsberechtigung, HZB) among leavers from Brandenburg’s schools. In 2018, the state had one of the highest eligibility rates (54%). This means that more than half of the corresponding cohort obtained an entrance qualification that year. Of those who left Brandenburg schools holding a qualification to enter higher education, only 66% transitioned to higher education – the lowest rate of all German states.

Most eligible students who decide to study move to another German state, especially Berlin

In Germany, around two-thirds of students remain in the state in which they acquired their university entrance qualification. However, many students from the new *Länder* leave the state to study. In 2018, Brandenburg had the highest “student outflow rate” (73%) among the states (Figure 4.2, Panel A). A closer look at students’ destinations shows that nearly half of these students move to neighbouring Berlin. Some others can be found in Saxony (8.8%), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (6%) or North Rhine-Westphalia (5.8%).

Brandenburg’s high outflow rate goes hand in hand with a high “student inflow rate”, the highest among the *Länder* (Figure 4.2, Panel B). In 2018, 71% of all first-year students in Brandenburg obtained their higher education entrance qualification elsewhere – mostly in Berlin (30%) or a foreign country (27%).

However, the number of incoming students does not fully compensate for those leaving. The migration balance rate (i.e. the difference between the number of incoming and outgoing first-year students) shows a negative balance for Brandenburg (Figure 4.2, Panel C). Notably, Brandenburg’s has the lowest net inner-German migration. This means it loses many students to other federal states without attracting a substantive share of their students to its higher education. This is in contrast to neighbouring Berlin, where the migration rate is positive even without accounting for incoming international students.

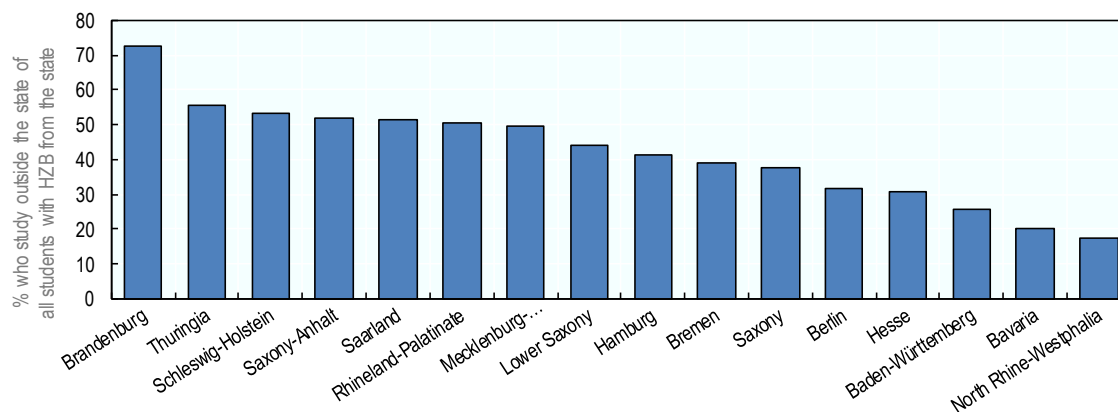
Motivation of school leavers to study

Brandenburg has the lowest share of school students eligible for higher education who are willing to study

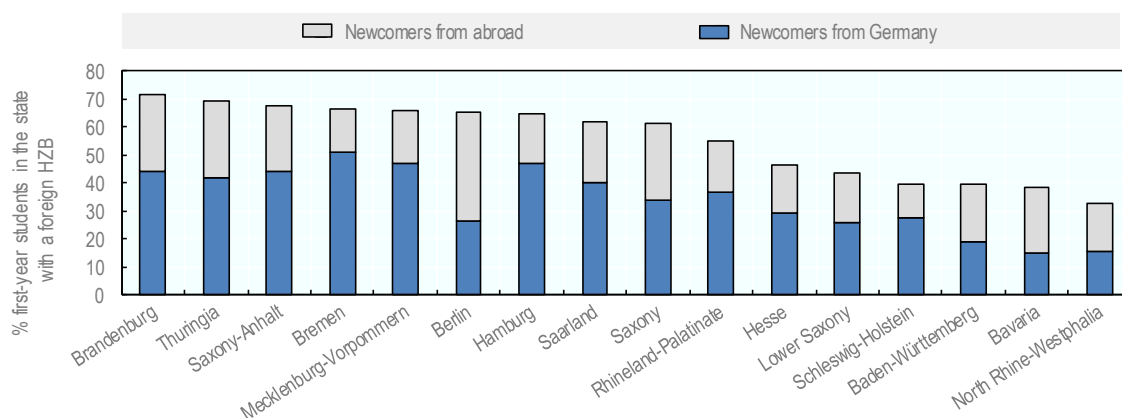
Survey data on school leavers with higher education eligibility largely reflect the trends discussed above. In 2012, 63% of surveyed school leavers in Brandenburg, responded they would “definitely” or “likely” take up higher education studies, versus 70% in the rest of Germany (Figure 4.3). Instead, Brandenburg’s school leavers are relatively more likely to aim at vocational education and training (VET). Among the cohort of 2012, 28% of students intend to transition into VET compared to 20% in East Germany and 22% in West Germany. Analysis shows that, across Germany, students’ reported education goals are closely aligned to their later education behaviour. For example, 89% of final-year secondary school students who reported plans to pursue higher education were enrolled in higher education six months later. Similarly, 74% of students who aimed at VET followed through on their intentions within six months of completing secondary school (Box 4.6).

Figure 4.2. Students' mobility at the entry to higher education, 2018

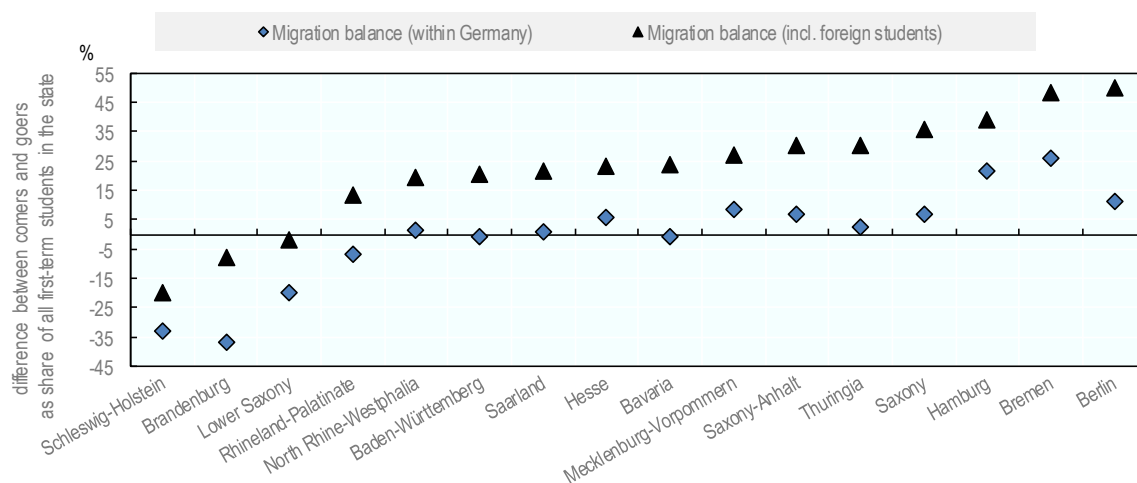
A. Outflow of first-term students from the state where HZB was obtained, 2018



B. Inflow of first-term students with HZB from Germany or abroad, 2018



C. Migration balance of first-term students, 2018



Note: First-term students are those enrolled for the first time in a higher education institution in the winter term 2017/18 or the summer term 2018.

Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt (2018^[20]), Bildung und Kultur. Studierende an Hochschulen. Wintersemester 2017/2018, Fachserie 11, Reihe 4.1, Table 6, https://www.statistischebibliothek.de/mir/receive/DEHeft_mods_00092410 (accessed on 6 November 2021); Statistisches Bundesamt (2019^[21]), Bildung und Kultur. Studierende an Hochschulen. Sommersemester 2018, Fachserie 11, Reihe 4.1, Table 4, www.statistischebibliothek.de/mir/receive/DEHeft_mods_00095976 (accessed on 6 November 2021); Statistisches Bundesamt (2019^[19]), Bildung und Kultur. Nichtmonetäre hochschulstatistische Kennzahlen, Fachserie 11, Reihe 4.3.1, Tables 1, 10 and 13, https://www.statistischebibliothek.de/mir/receive/DEHeft_mods_00128354 (accessed on 3 November 2021).


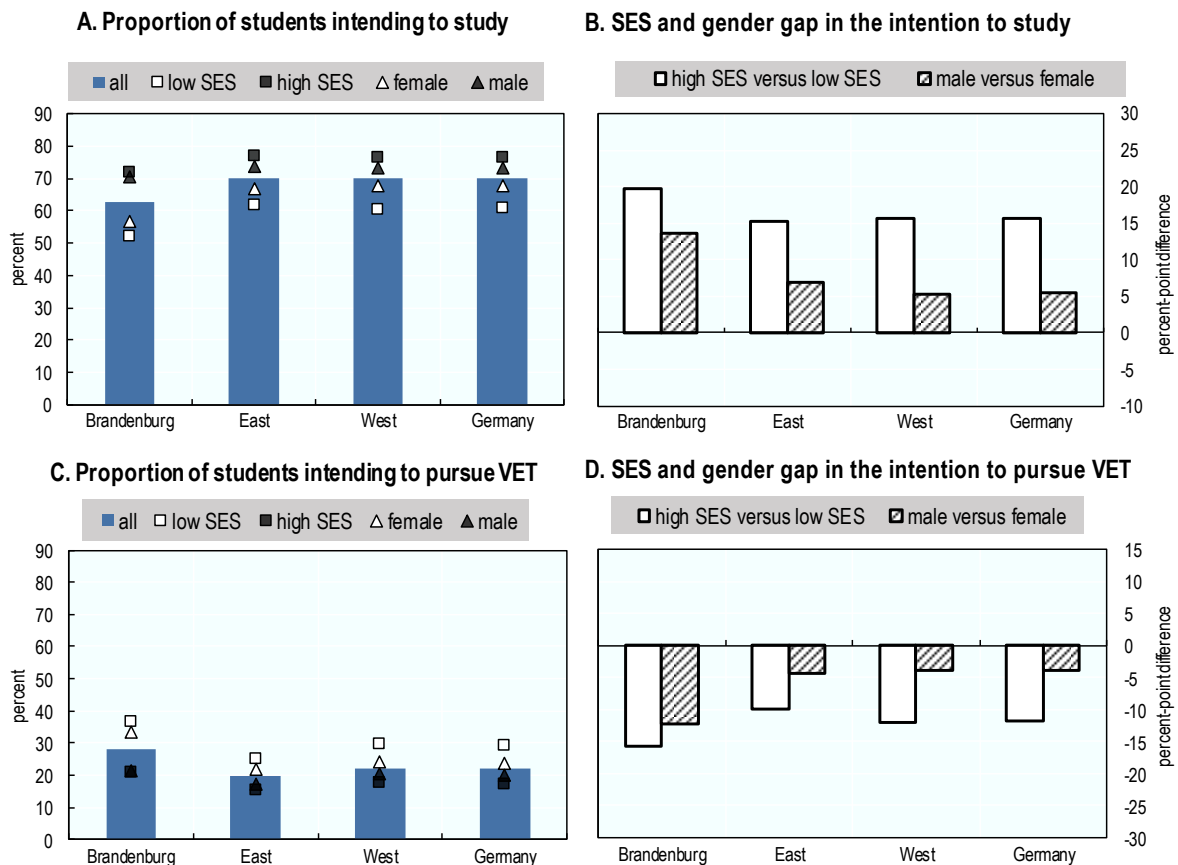
StatLink  <https://stat.link/y6isdb>

Figure 4.3. Students' intentions to study and pursue VET, by socio-economic status (SES) and gender

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/4udyg1>

Box 4.6. DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012

The German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification (FDZ-DZHW, 2021^[22]) is a nation-wide follow-up survey of the eligible school leavers cohort of 2012. The most recent panel study in 2018 has not released the micro-level data for independent research purposes yet. However, DZHW studies

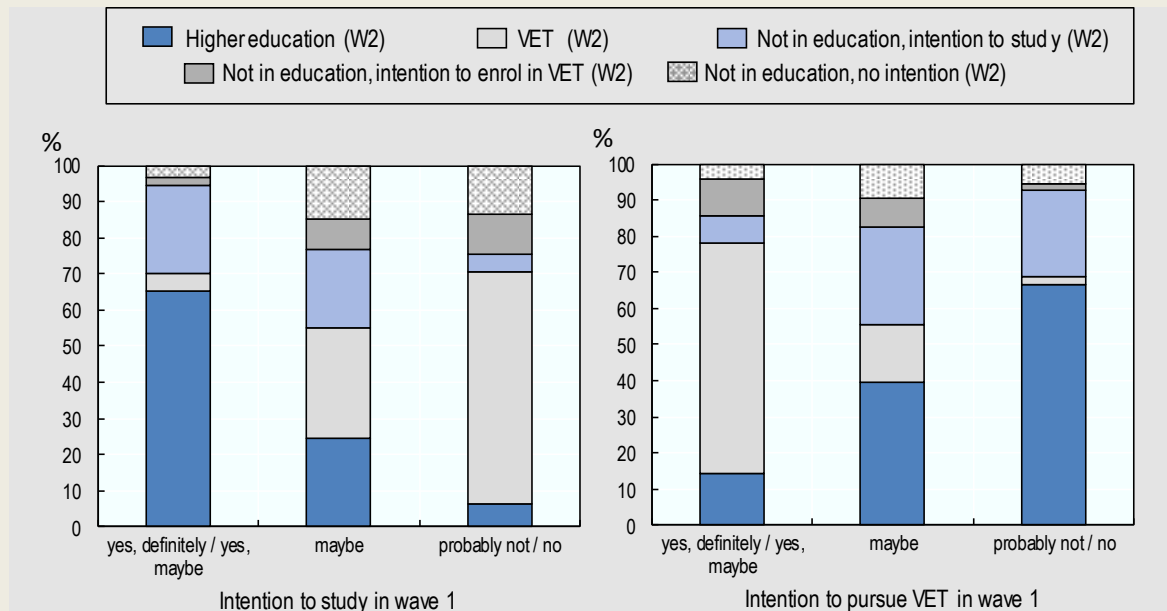
based on the 2018 study show that results for the whole of Germany remained stable over 2012-18. The only differences concern the role of schools and counsellors in the provision of career and study orientation. DZHW has kindly provided aggregate results of these differences for Brandenburg based on the 2018 dataset, complementing the OECD study.

The first survey wave of the 2012 panel study took place in the last year of school, approximately half a year before graduation. It covered 32 800 eligible students from general and vocational secondary schools in Germany. This survey wave collected information on students' plans for further education and the resources and support they receive when making this decision. The second wave took place half a year after graduation and collected data on the education trajectories of students. In all, 11 700 respondents took part in this survey. In 2018, a third follow-up survey, with 6 100 respondents, was carried out.


Analysis is restricted to data from the first survey wave of the 2012 panel study. Only this survey contains enough students from Brandenburg (nearly 1 200 respondents) and data are still available. Hence, the focus is on students' intentions to study or continue on to vocational education and training (VET) and not on actual education behaviour. However, additional analyses based on the entire German sample show that education goals reported in the first wave are closely aligned with later enrolment. In the second wave, half a year after graduation, only 69% of school leavers were in education. Among the students who reported an intention to study in the first interview, 65% were enrolled at a higher education institution and another 24% were not yet enrolled but intended to do so. Among those who initially aimed at VET, 64% were enrolled in VET in the second wave and 10% were prepared to do so.

Figure 4.4. Relationship between education goals and later education enrolment

Education participation in wave 2 by intention to study and pursue VET in wave 1



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/l6va4k>

Additional analysis (not presented here) shows the determinants of the intention to study are similar to the factors related to actual enrolment.

Many eligible students decide on vocational training while at school, especially girls and disadvantaged students

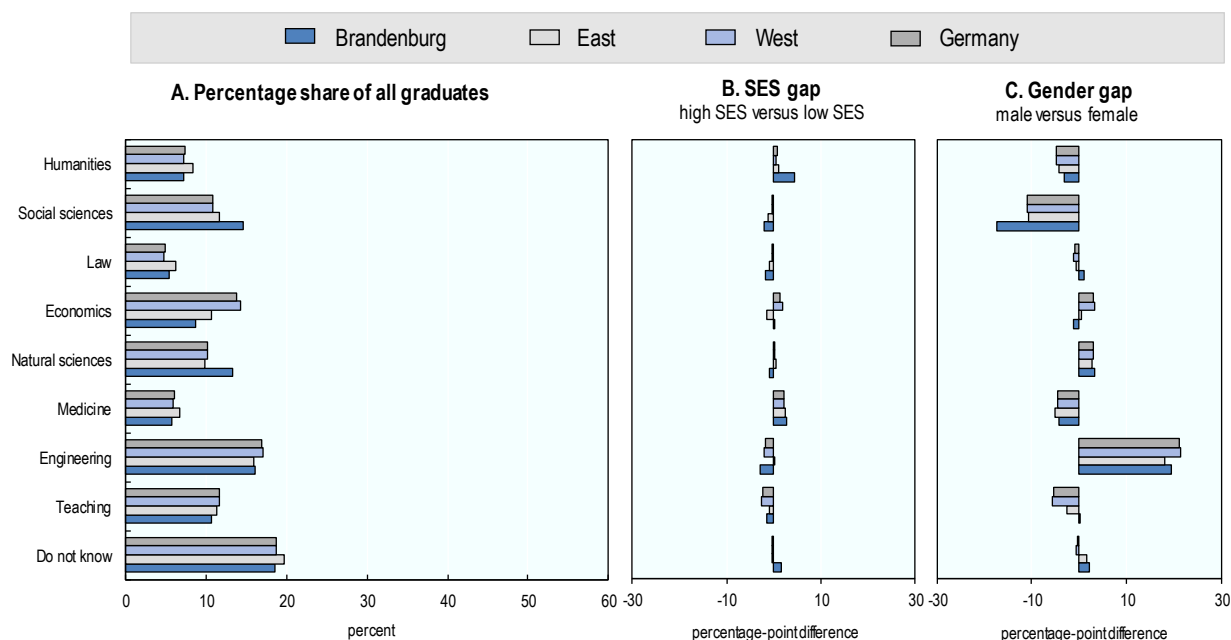
Brandenburg exhibits relatively greater socio-economic and gender differences in the decision to study than other German states (Figure 4.3). Male school leavers are 14 percentage points more likely than female school leavers to opt for higher education; students from high socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds are 20 percentage points more likely than students with low SES to choose to study. In Germany, on average, the gender gap amounts to 5.5 percentage points and the socio-economic gap to 16 percentage points. In Brandenburg, male students and high SES students are relatively less likely to aim at VET compared to female and low SES students, respectively.

Differences in uptake of education at a university or a university of applied sciences are laid out in school


In Brandenburg, as in Germany as a whole, around half of eligible students who intend to study intend to enrol at a university and approximately another quarter intends to continue at a UAS (Figure 4.5). A considerable share of those who wish to study – 20% in Brandenburg and 18% in Germany – are still uncertain about the type of HEI in their last year at school. There are socio-economic and gender differences in the choice of type of institution: students from advantaged backgrounds are more likely to opt for university and less likely to choose to study at *Fachhochschule* than students with low SES; male students are less likely to choose university education and more likely to choose a UAS than female students. However, the gender gap in the choice of *Fachhochschule* is considerably smaller in Brandenburg than elsewhere.

Figure 4.5. Students' desired type of institution, by socio-economic status (SES) and gender

Eligible students in their last year of school who intend to study, 2012



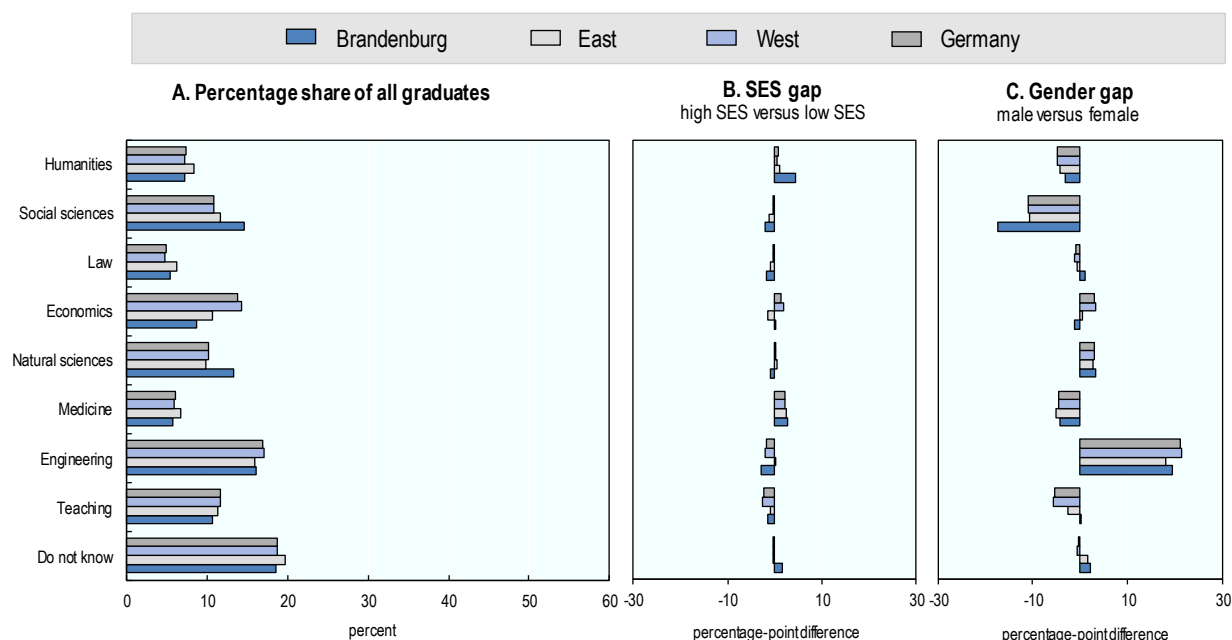
Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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Brandenburg deviates more noticeably from the German average in choice of study field (Figure 4.6). A higher share of students who wish to study, and particularly a higher share of female students, choose a field of study from the social sciences. Brandenburg's school leavers are also more likely than German students on average to opt for the natural sciences, and less likely to choose economics. As in the Eastern *Länder* on average, gender differences in Brandenburg with respect to choosing the teaching profession, economics and humanities are somewhat smaller compared to West Germany.

Figure 4.6. Students' desired field of study, by socio-economic status (SES) and gender

Eligible students in their last year of school who intend to study, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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The perceived costs of higher education and the relatively high returns on vocational education and training deter students, especially women and disadvantaged students, from entering higher education

School leavers' propensity to study typically depends on how they assess the costs and benefits of higher education. A higher share of students report the costs of studies play a role in their education decision in East Germany, including Brandenburg, than in West Germany (Figure 4.7). By contrast, the labour market returns to higher education are rated equally high: 90% of students in each region, for example, report that holders of higher education degrees have good career chances. With regard to VET, Brandenburg's school leavers tend to perceive higher returns than their peers elsewhere in Germany, particularly in terms of income, working conditions and social recognition.

If social groups perceive the utility and costs of education investments differently, social disparities in education participation may emerge. In Brandenburg, as in the other regions, cost considerations are less likely to hamper high SES students in their education decisions than low SES students (Figure 4.7, Panels A and B). SES differences in the perceived returns to higher education are small in all regions. However, low SES students, especially those in Brandenburg, are more likely than students from advantaged backgrounds to rate the value of VET high.

With regard to gender differences, male students in all regions are more likely to perceive high returns to higher education than female students. Conversely, higher shares of female students assess the returns to VET as high (Figure 4.7, Panels C and D). The difference with respect to VET is more pronounced in Brandenburg. There, female students are nearly 10 percentage points more likely than male students to report a VET degree is linked to good overall labour market chances, high job security and good career options.

Students in higher education may be eligible to offset some study costs through financial support from the federal government or from a foundation that provides scholarships (see Chapter 5). However, information and advice on student financial aid appears fragmented. Brandenburg's students are underrepresented in awards from *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Merit Foundation) – the oldest and largest organisation for promotion of young talent in Germany. Indeed, many of Brandenburg's schools have never nominated one of their graduates for a scholarship.

Many schools in Brandenburg are not using their right to nominate prospective students to *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*

Each April, *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* asks all schools in Germany leading to a higher education entrance qualification to propose talented graduates for a scholarship immediately after completing upper-secondary education. The schools are allowed to submit one proposal for every 40 graduates. In 2010-19, of the schools invited to nominate candidates, only 27% on average from Brandenburg responded. Nationwide, however, half of eligible schools did so.

Recent initiatives of *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* in North Rhine-Westphalia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Saxony-Anhalt show that working together with state governments and local schools can significantly increase the number of nominations (Box 4.7).

Box 4.7. Initiatives of *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* to motivate more schools to use their right to nominate students

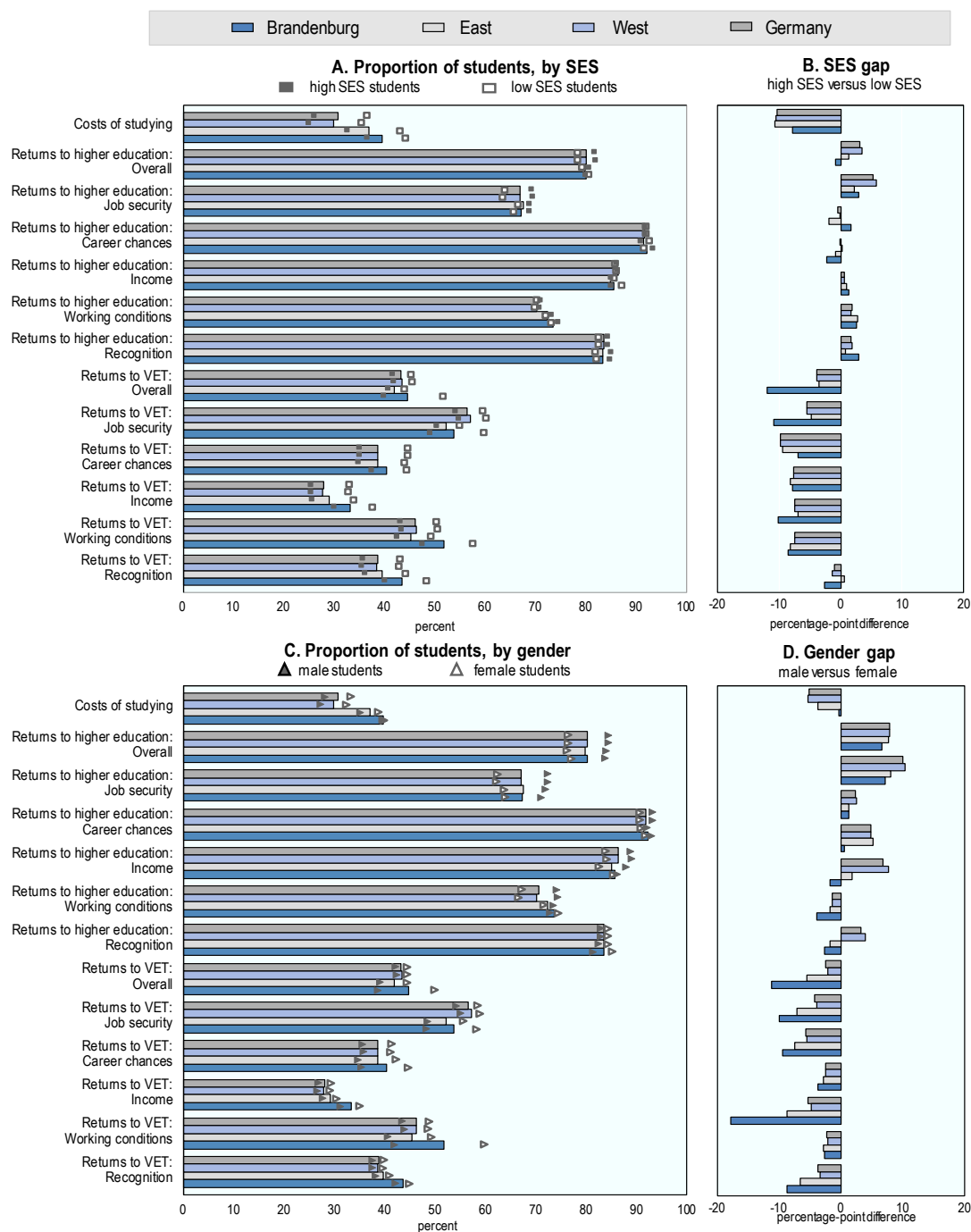
Since 2017, *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Merit Foundation) and *Talentförderung* (Centre for the Promotion of Talents) in North Rhine-Westphalia have been co-operating to reduce social inequalities in the state education system. Together, they also try to create new access opportunities to the student funding offer of the Foundation. More than 60 talent scouts from the Centre from 17 state higher education institutions have been co-operating with more than 300 schools in North Rhine-Westphalia to discover and promote talented students predominantly from non-academic families. Talent scouts can nominate a student for the Foundation's selection process in addition to each school's own right to nominate. The initiative has had a significant effect on the schools' use of their right to nominate students. Among the schools that did not use this right prior to 2017, 31% of co-operating schools have done so over the last four years compared to 21% of the schools where talent scouts were not active.

At the start of the 2019 school year, the Foundation attended events involving school principals in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Saxony-Anhalt. As a result, the share of schools not using their right to nominate fell slightly between 2018 and 2019 from 82% to 68% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and from 78% to 72% in Saxony-Anhalt.

Source: Information provided by the German National Merit Foundation (*Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*).

Figure 4.7. Costs and benefits of higher education, by socio-economic status (SES) and gender

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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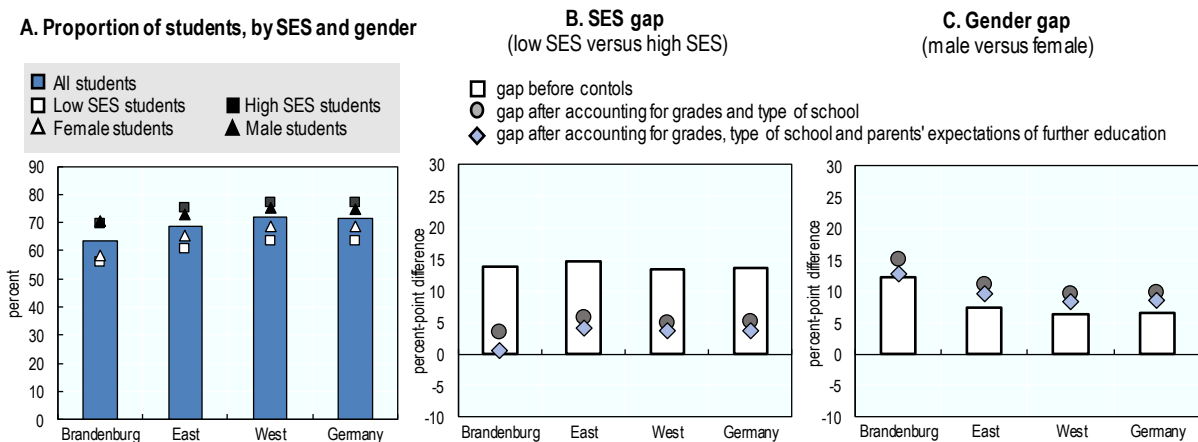
School graduates' expectations of completing higher education pose another barrier, explaining socio-economic and gender disparities

A central component of education decision making is how students assess their chances to complete a degree successfully. This expectation may be based on objective evaluations of one's academic performance and skills. However, gender stereotypes or class-specific education expectations and preferences may also affect this self-assessment. Compared to the rest of Germany, a lower share of Brandenburg school graduates expects to complete a higher education degree successfully (Figure 4.8, Panel A). In all regions, students with low SES are 14 percentage points less likely to hold such expectations than students with high SES (Figure 4.8, Panel B). After accounting for grades and type of school, the SES gap decreases substantially. This means a relatively poorer performance of low SES students and the type of schools they typically attend dampen their expectation of success in higher education. In addition, controlling for parental expectations of further education is linked to an additional small decrease of the gap. This indicates that, net of academic achievement, parental expectations play a smaller role in students' expectations of completing a higher education degree.

In Brandenburg, the gender difference in education expectations is relatively larger. Female students are 12 percentage points less likely than male students to expect to complete a higher education degree successfully, compared to a gap of 7 and 6 percentage points in East and West Germany, respectively (Figure 4.8, Panel C). After accounting for grades, type of school attended and parental expectations of further education, these differences remain. This is partly explained by the small difference between female and male students in Germany in academic achievement and parental education expectations.

Figure 4.8. Students' expectations of successfully completing higher education

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

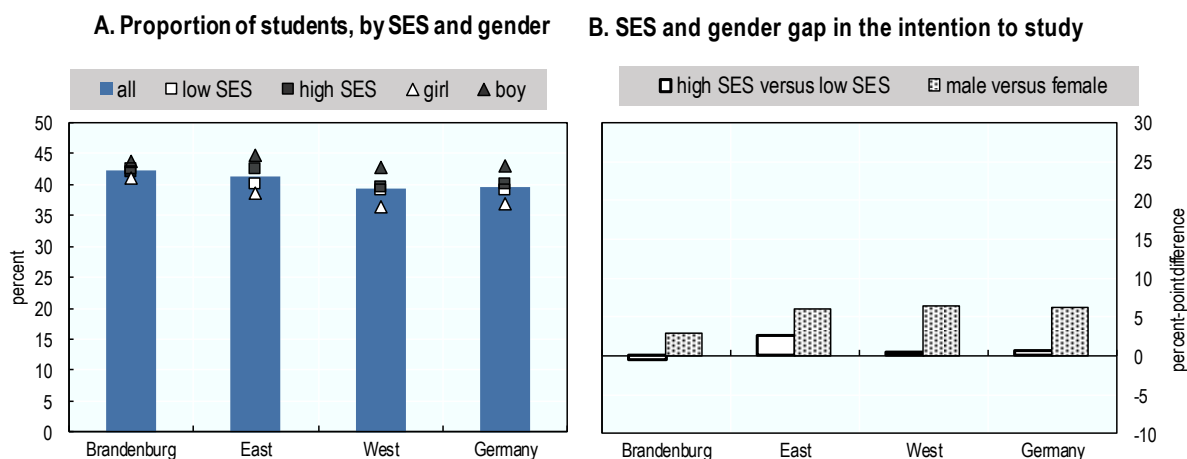
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Around 40% of school graduates consider themselves well informed about study options

Well-informed education decision making enables a better match between students' abilities, interests, expectations and their choice of study programme. In 2012, less than half of students in each region felt well informed about post-secondary education options (Figure 4.9). This applies equally to female and male students, as well as to students with low and high SES.

Figure 4.9. Proportion of students who feel well informed about education options

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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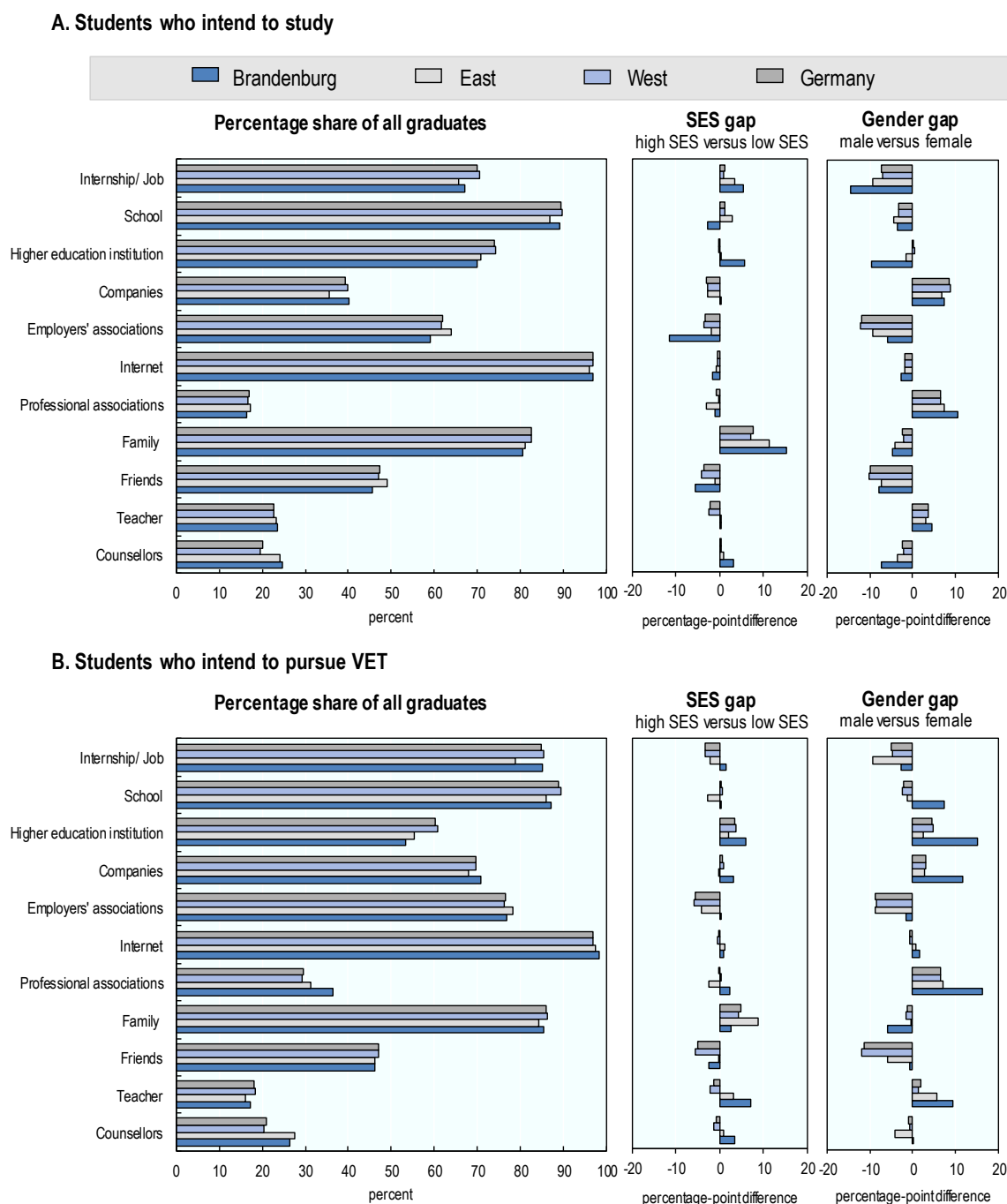
The Internet, school and family are students' primary sources of information

How students get information about education options generally depends on whether they aim at higher education or VET (Figure 4.10). Students who aim at VET gather information from companies, employers' associations, internships and jobs more frequently than those who intend to take higher education.


However, for both groups, the Internet, school and family are the most common information sources. Among students who wish to study, high SES students are more likely than low SES students to get information support from the family. This is not surprising, given their parents by definition have a higher education degree and, thus, more knowledge about the higher education system. In Brandenburg, this difference amounts to a higher likelihood of 15 percentage points for high SES students and in Germany, on average, of 7.7 percentage points. Such SES differences are smaller among students who aim at VET. With regards to gender differences, male and female students have similar chances to get information from their school and family. However, they differ on the use of companies, employers' associations and professional associations as information sources.

When deciding how to continue their education, many school graduates in Brandenburg and in Germany overall are overwhelmed by the huge number of education options, the unpredictable labour market demand and by an uncertainty about their own interests and aptitudes (Figure 4.11). Meeting the admission requirements of desired programmes and, particularly in the Eastern *Länder*, financing studies are further common difficulties for school leavers. By contrast, smaller shares of school leavers report that a lack of information or a lack of support from the school pose barriers to choosing further education. As expected, high SES students are less likely than students with lower SES to perceive the financing of studies as a problem. Furthermore, male students are in general less likely than female students to report difficulties in choosing post-secondary education. Male students are especially less likely than female students to perceive admission requirements as a hurdle. The latter may be due to the fact that male students are relatively less likely to opt for the more demanding studies at a university (see Figure 4.5) and that they hold higher expectations of success in higher education (see Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.10. How students get information about post-secondary education options



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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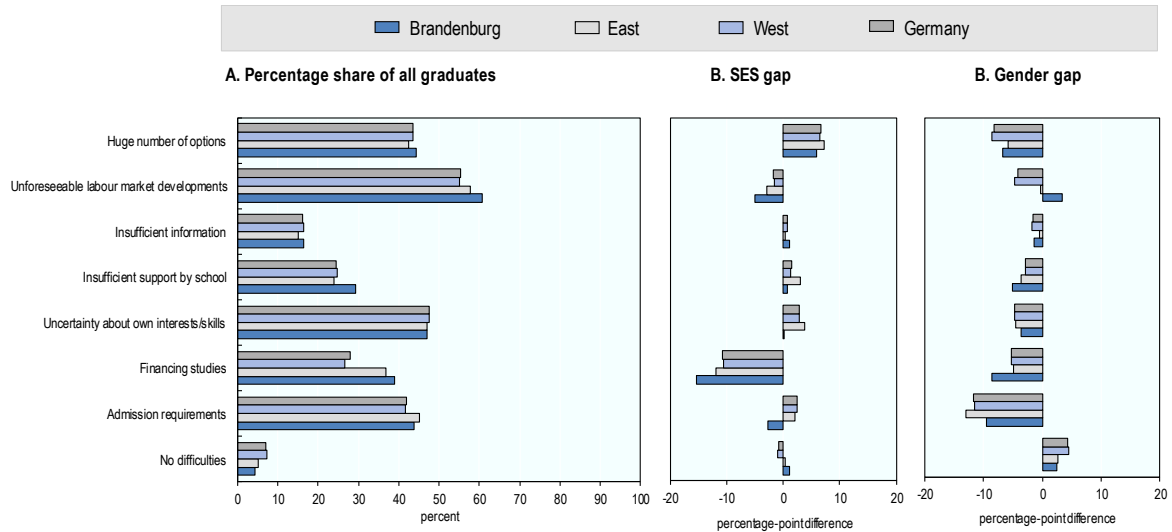
Students receive increasing support from teachers, and career and study counsellors

Compared to the 2012 cohort, students who acquired their higher education entrance qualification in 2018, received more support from career and study counsellors, and teachers (Figure 4.12). In Brandenburg, one-third of students report being advised by a counsellor in 2018, which is 8 percentage points higher than in 2012. Moreover, one in five received support from teachers. In addition, support in Brandenburg

appears more extensive than in the rest of Germany. These results are likely to be directly related to the launch of the federal and state strategies for career and study orientation in 2015 and the range of orientation measures at schools. In contrast, students rely less on advice from the wider family and friends.

Figure 4.11. Difficulties in choosing post-secondary education

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012

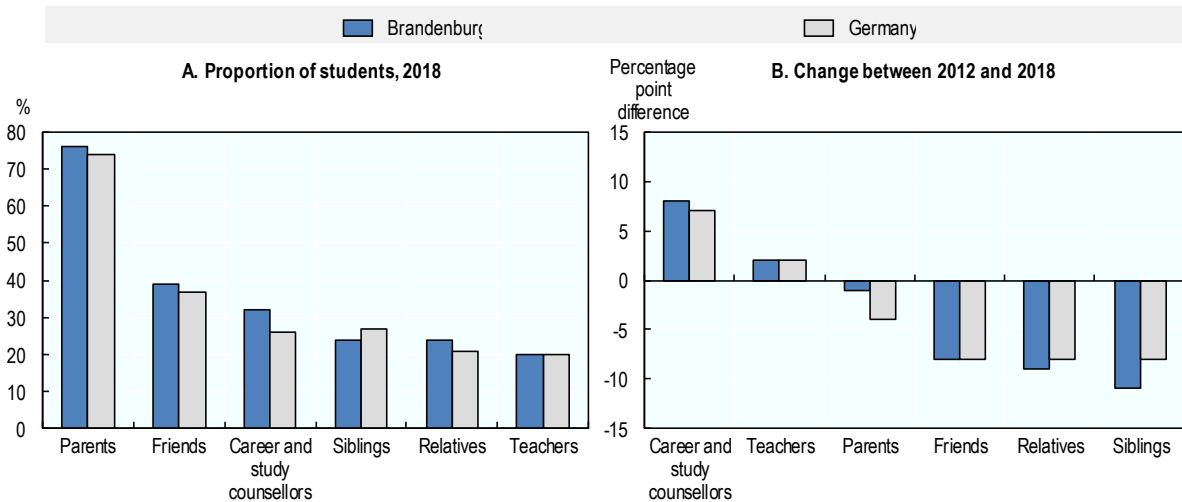


Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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Figure 4.12. Who supports students in their career and study choices?

Students with higher education eligibility in 2018 vs. 2012



Source: DZHW calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012 and 2018.

StatLink <https://stat.link/k5ylzw>

Four of ten students report their school provided extensive information and guidance in choosing a course of study and career (Table 4.1). In contrast, 27% report having received little or no information about the various educational pathways from their school. The support level varies depending on the type of school: 44% of students at a comprehensive or academic school felt well supported by their school but only 32% of students at a non-academic school felt the same. The Germany-wide trend is similar. However, the results for Brandenburg by type of school appear surprising since many more non-academic schools than academic schools are granted the distinction “School with excellent career and study orientation”.

Table 4.1. Level of support for career and study orientation provided by school

Students with higher education eligibility in 2018

	High level of support		Little or no support	
	Brandenburg	Germany	Brandenburg	Germany
All	41	39	27	26
Low SES	43	38	27	26
High SES	39	39	28	25
Male	45	42	26	23
Female	38	36	28	28
Comprehensive and academic path	44	40	26	23
Non-academic path	32	35	32	31

Source: Information was provided by the DZHW; DZHW calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2018.

Parents of disadvantaged students believe less in the capacity of their children to succeed in higher education

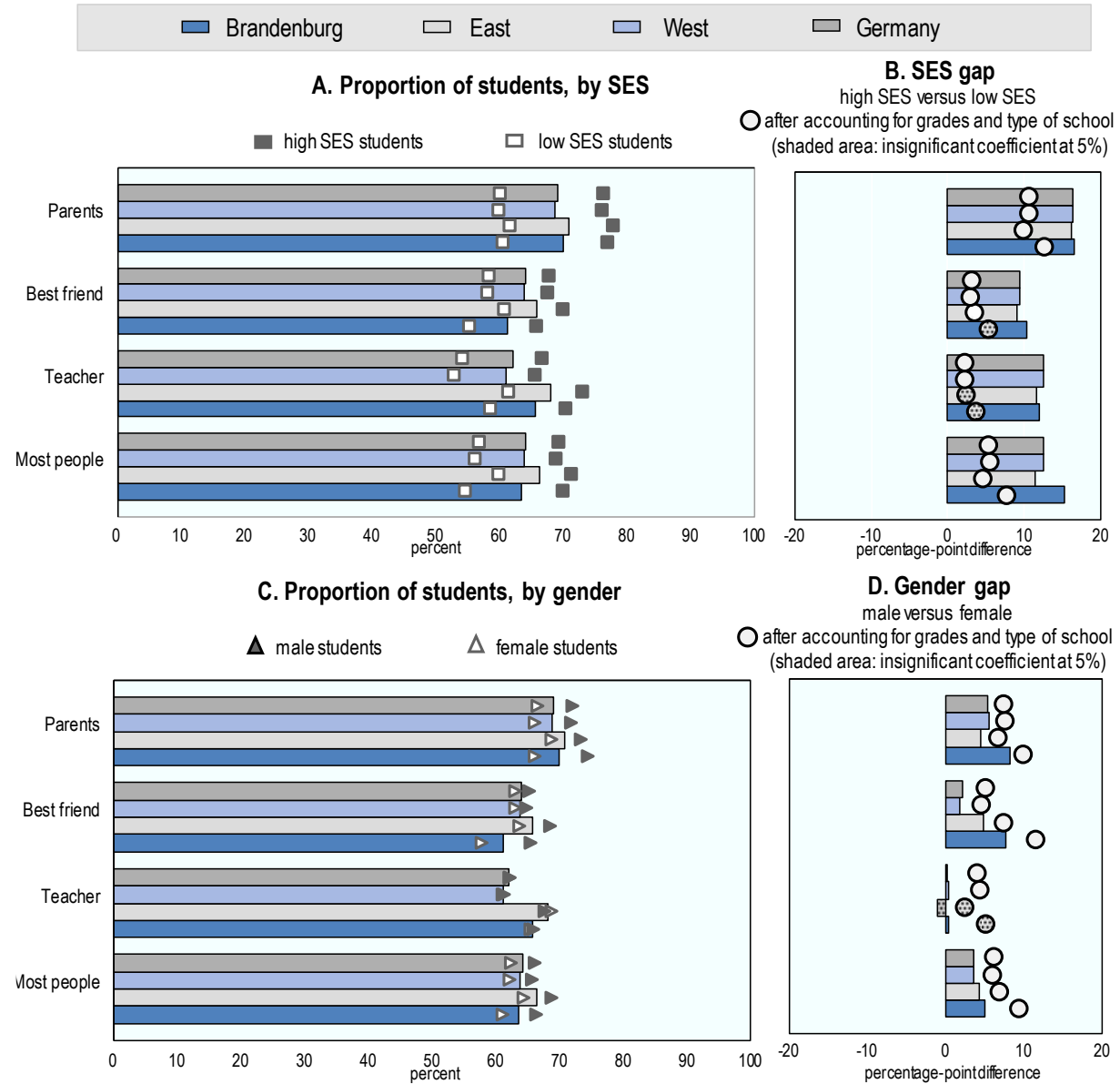
The expectations of parents, teachers and peers on whether students should pursue higher education may have an important impact on education decisions. Across regions, between 60-70% of students report that their parents, best friend, teacher and most people believe they should study (Figure 4.13). In all regions, students with high SES are more likely to report such expectations than low SES students. After accounting for grades and type of school, SES differences with respect to parents' expectations of further education persist. Meanwhile, differences in teachers' expectations decrease considerably. This suggests that parents follow class-specific aspirations that are not necessarily aligned with their children's actual academic performance. For their part, teachers' expectations are strongly based on academic performance. In all regions, gender differences related to other persons' expectations of further education are small.

Barriers to higher education study: Cost, parental and own fears of failure, information overload and attractiveness of VET

Figure 4.14 estimates the relationship between school leavers' intention to study and the various likely determinants of education decision making discussed above. The magnitudes and directions of the associations are similar across regions. In all regions, the expectation of successfully completing higher education shows the strongest relationship with the intention to study, controlling for all other factors, including academic achievement and teachers' expectation of further education. Parents' and peers' expectations of further education are also linked to a substantially higher likelihood of choosing higher education (around 14 and 13 percentage points, respectively, in each region). By contrast, teachers' beliefs that students should study do not play a role after accounting for other factors, especially grades. Feeling well informed is also not associated with the decision to study.

Figure 4.13. Other persons' expectations of students completing higher education

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.


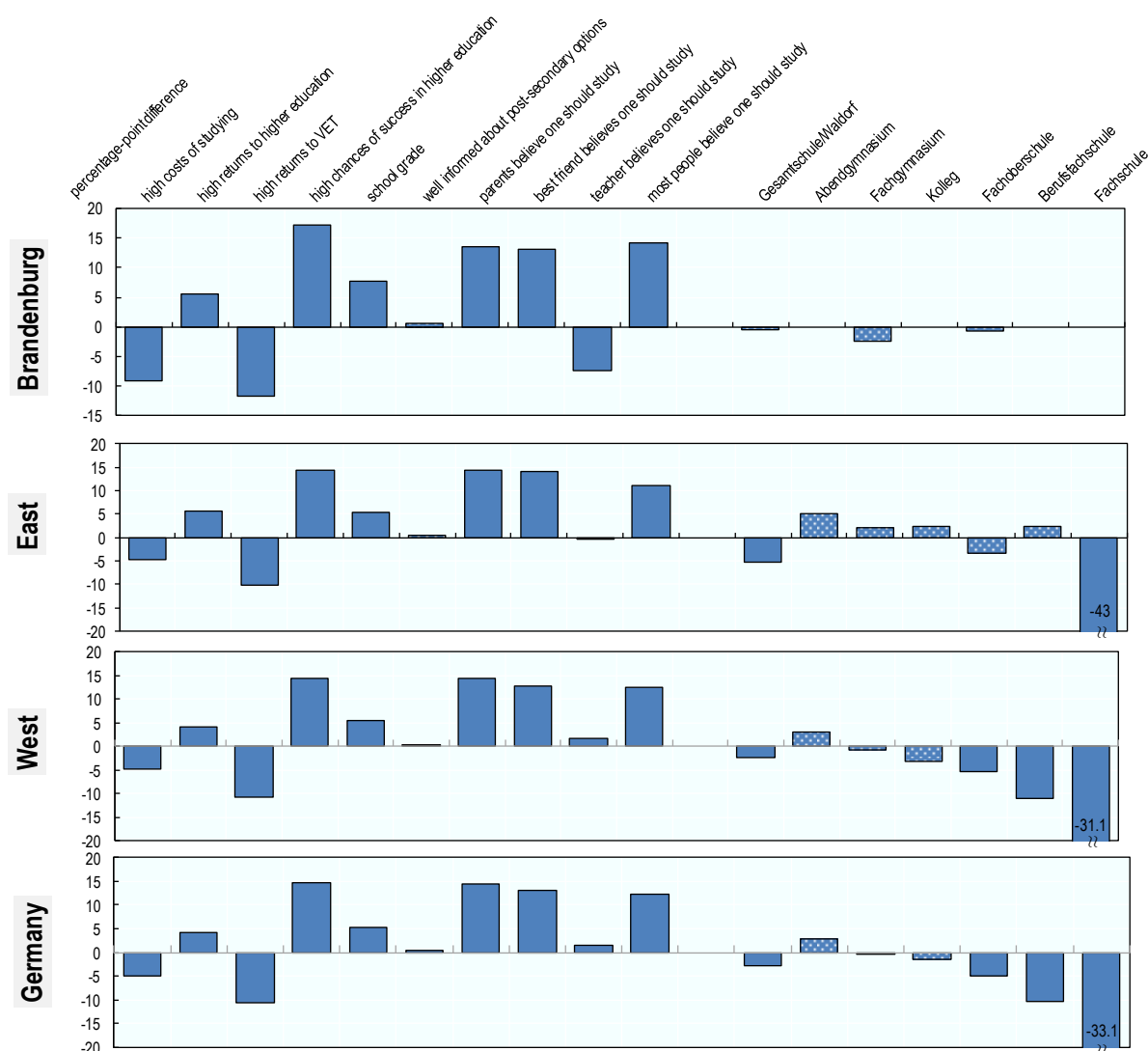
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Figure 4.14. Determinants of the decision to study

Average marginal effects, students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012 (shaded bars: insignificant coefficients at 5% confidence)



Notes: Coefficients from logistic regressions for each region. Coefficients are presented as average marginal effects, e.g. the average percentage change in the probability to decide to study when an explanatory factor increases by one unit. The reference categories of the presented binary factors (from left to right) are students who report that costs have no or some impact on their decision to study; low to moderate returns to higher education; low to moderate returns to VET; low to moderate chances of successfully completing higher education; poorly to moderately informed; parents/best friend/teacher/most people do not or to some extent expect that respondent expect that respondent should study. The reference category of the type of school is *Gymnasium*. The coefficient of school grades shows the change in outcome for one standard deviation increase in grades. All models control for age, gender and socio-economic background.

Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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Interestingly, the perceived returns to VET are relatively more important than those to higher education. A high perceived return to VET is associated with a lower probability of choosing higher education across regions of 14 to 17 percentage points. Meanwhile, high perceived returns to higher education lead to a higher probability of 4 to 6 percentage points of choosing higher education.

In Germany, on average, the costs of studying play a small role in choice. However, in Brandenburg, costs have a larger impact on the education decision, leading to a lower probability of intent to study of 9 percentage points.

Obviously, factors such as school grades, parents' expectations, teachers' expectations and perceived returns to study all interact. They also have different effects on high and low SES students and on male and female students. Figure 4.15 further analyses the SES and gender effects on the decision to undertake higher education. It breaks these differences down into their components, looking at how factors like school grades, students' and parents' expectations of success and perceived returns to VET contribute to the decisions of school leavers, controlling for SES (Panel A) and for gender (Panel B). In other words, it shows the relative importance of different factors to the intention to pursue higher education in each of the SES groups and in each of the gender groups.

Panel A quantifies how differences in various factors contribute to the difference between high and low SES in the decision to pursue higher education. Panel B shows the extent to which the various factors contribute to the gender difference in the decision to study.

Panel A shows that around one-third of the gap between high and low SES students' decision making in Brandenburg (7 of the 20 percentage-point difference) cannot be explained by any factors in the model. However, of the factors in the survey, the difference in perception of returns to VET between high and low SES students makes the biggest contribution to the SES gap in the intention to study in all regions. This difference explains 17% of the SES gap in the intention to study in Brandenburg (or 3.3 of the 20 percentage-point difference between high and low SES students in the decision to study),

Differences in school grades also contribute greatly to the socio-economic differences in education decisions. In Brandenburg, school grades account for 12% of the difference between high and low SES students in their decision. This means that high SES students have a 2.4 percentage-point higher probability to study because of their relatively better grades. In East and West Germany, this contribution share is smaller – 10% and 9%, respectively.

Students' expectations of success and parents' expectations of further education also contribute to the SES gap in the choice of studying. However, their contributions are smaller than perceived returns to VET and school grades.

Panel B shows the decomposition of the gender gap in the decision making on higher education study. In Brandenburg, the other variables cannot explain about half of the difference. However, here too, the perceived returns to VET play a major role. Gender differences in the assessment of these returns contribute to about a quarter of the gender gap in each region. Differences in how male and female students rate their chances of success in higher education are also important.

Distance to higher education institutions is another barrier to study for Brandenburg's students

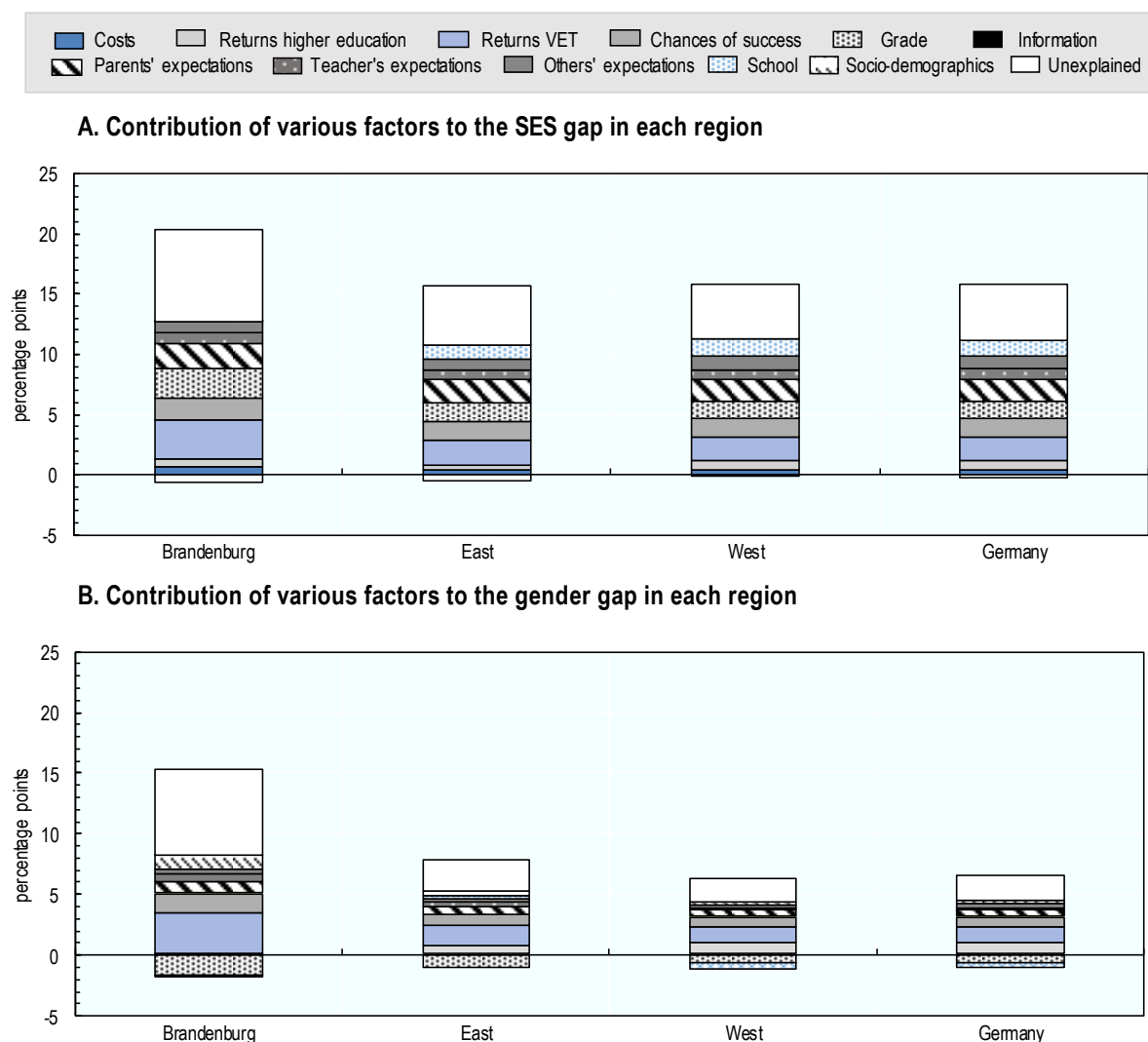
Distance to regional HEIs is another factor in shaping students' aspirations. This is due both to the largely rural character of the state and the locations of institutions. As distance to regional HEIs increases, a student's intention to study decreases (Quast, Mentges and Buchholz, forthcoming^[23]), which is often related to monetary costs and information deficits. Similarly, on average in Germany, 15-year-old students in a city of over 100 000 people are 12 percentage points more likely to expect to attend higher education than those attending a school in an area with fewer than 3 000 inhabitants – after accounting for students' socio-economic status and maths proficiency (OECD, 2019^[24]).

The average distance to regional HEIs affects both the decision to study and the choice of study location. Students who acquired their higher education entrance qualification in a remote place (far from an HEI) are willing to move farther away for their studies – if they have decided to study – than peers from cities

and regions with a high density of HEIs (Quast, Mentges and Föste-Eggers, 2021^[25]). These results have direct implications for Brandenburg, which is struggling to retain its eligible school leavers for in-state studies. The recent establishment of *Präsenzstellen* in remote areas is an important step in bringing HEIs closer to prospective students.


Figure 4.15. Decomposition of the socio-economic and gender gaps in the intention to study

Students with higher education eligibility in their last year of school, 2012



Notes: Results obtained using a decomposition method proposed by source (Karlson, 2012^[26]) with one model estimated for each region. The height of the bar corresponds to the total percentage-point difference in the intention to study between high and low SES students in Panel A, and between male and female students in Panel B. The subcomponents show the contribution of each factor to these total gaps. For example, in Brandenburg, high SES students are 20 percentage points more likely to intend to study than low SES students (Panel A, left bar). The relatively better grades of high SES students are responsible for 2.4 percentage points of this SES gap. Hence, socio-economic differences in grades contribute 13% to the SES gap in the intention to study.

Source: OECD calculations based on the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification 2012.

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Assessment and policy recommendations

Equitable access to higher education is vital to help people adapt to a changing world of work. In Brandenburg, however, there remain large gaps in access and willingness to study between young people with high and low socio-economic status and between boys and girls. The DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers identified several factors that influence school leavers' decisions and potentially create barriers to access. These include perceived high costs of studies, perceived high returns of VET, lack of self-esteem and parents' views, and the large amount of available information. The large average distance to regional HEIs is another barrier to study for Brandenburg's school students.

Ensure prospective students have structured information to make informed choices

Timely, reliable and well-structured information about post-secondary education and training pathways, funding options and the labour market can ease students' decisions about higher education.

There is a great deal of career and study advisory information for prospective students; indeed, there could be said to be an overload. Schools, career advisers, HEIs and government agencies are all “competing” sources, but their information is not connected. Many information sources tell the “story” from their own perspective. Their information may be authoritative and accurate but not comprehensive.

The main source of higher education information is the *Hochschulkompass* website run by the German Rectors' Conference. It presents information about German HEIs and their programmes and allows for search by field of study, location and study format. It will soon be linked to the “hoch & weit” portal, which is geared towards mature learners with information about continuing education. Prospective students can also access online rankings of German HEIs and study programmes. The CHE ranking of the Centre for Higher Education, for example, contains information on teaching quality, research performance and equipment, as well as students' opinions on study conditions. For some programmes, it also includes professors' views of the reputation of their departments. The *Arbeitsagentur* website of the *Bundesagentur für Arbeit – BA* (Federal Employment Agency) provides labour market information, including trends by occupation. It also provides general information about the various post-secondary pathways and their funding options. In addition, it allows users to search professions by field of study and delve into sub-fields. The website also points students to several useful e-assessment tools.

At the state level, the *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* website targets prospective students looking for guidance about what and where to study at HEIs in Brandenburg. The website appears well structured and provides much relevant information for prospective students. However, a few additional improvements could make it even more user-friendly. A general search field as well as a search function for the study programme offer in Brandenburg, for example, might improve navigation. It could also provide general information about Brandenburg as a place to live and study and compile arguments in its favour (as the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern website does) or link to such information. Targeted information for international students in both German and English, as available on the websites of some other German states, could be considered. Direct links to social media profiles of HEIs rather than just their websites could appeal to young users.

Fachkräfteportal (Brandenburg Skills Portal) is another useful resource, offering information on the labour market in the state, the study offer and other related topics. The portal informs about job vacancies and apprenticeship opportunities in the state and provides useful information for newcomers, returnees, prospective students and other target groups.

The two websites – *Hochschulkompass* and *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* – are not linked and do not refer to each other, although both have been advertised via some national and state-level channels. Some countries have ensured their advisory websites combine information from all sources (e.g. labour market agencies, education agencies and education providers). A single, curated source of information can make

it easier for prospective students and their families to make informed decisions (Hofer, Zhivkovikj and Smyth, 2020^[27]) (see Box 4.8 for the Irish case).

Box 4.8. CareersPortal: The “one-stop shop” for those needing and providing study and career orientation in Ireland

The CareersPortal website was launched by the Minister for Education and Science of Ireland in 2008 in response to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. The group aimed to ensure that career guidance professionals and users of career information in Ireland had a clearly defined and up-to-date reference. One key recommendation was the creation of a Central Careers portal.

The CareersPortal, developed and run by a private company, aims to be a one-stop shop for national career information. The career guidance programmes are designed to provide the most up-to-date and relevant information and resources on careers in Ireland. The portal provides information about the world of work and the world of education along with advice and information for a number of target groups: secondary school students, college students and graduates, jobseekers, and career changers, adult learners, parents and guardians, guidance professionals and careers educators.

The CareersPortal website, which is freely available to all Irish citizens, addresses the following key areas: i) career sectors; ii) CourseFinder database (CAO/PLC/Fetchcourses); iii) occupational database (Career Explorer); iv) self-assessment tools; v) scholarship and supports (financial/disability); vi) organisation profiles; vii) career interviews and videos; viii) work experience advice and vacancies; ix) apprenticeships database; x) upskilling opportunities and supports; xi) college profiles; xii) integrated labour market information – jobs in demand; xiii) careers advice; xiv) daily career news and events; xv) employability/career skills; and xvi) subject choice.

The unique architecture allows information to flow freely between sections. This helps users to plan and direct their careers in the context of the labour market and available education and employment opportunities.

The site has over 2 million visitors a year (from the Irish population of 4.9 million). One of its greatest achievements was using all the information to develop two bespoke guidance programmes. During COVID-19 lockdowns, these programmes have been invaluable to both the guidance community and their clients. They have allowed the guidance relationship and practice to continue seamlessly in a remote setting.

One key success factor was CareersPortal's ability to engage and collaborate with a wide selection of public and private stakeholders who agreed to help create content. The central advisory board, made up of guidance counsellors from across the community, is another key success factor. Connecting with and training career guidance professionals in the use of the resources and in understanding their role as gatekeepers has been essential.

Source: Careers Portal Ireland (n.d.^[28]), <https://careersportal.ie/about.php> (accessed on 20 October 2021).

Prospective students of higher education in Brandenburg – and the rest of Germany – need well-structured information and online guidance tools to make informed choices about their education pathways and study programmes. The federal government could work on making the *Arbeitsagentur.de* or another web portal a comprehensive information and counselling online tool for prospective students at German HEIs. This project could be overseen by a joint taskforce of the federal ministries responsible for employment, education and sciences, and the economy; BA and chambers of commerce and crafts; experienced career counsellors; and experts from the secondary and post-secondary education sectors.

Ensure strong study orientation support in Brandenburg

Advisory tools and career information resources are critical mechanisms for helping students make wise choices. However, people will only access those tools and resources if they are focused on their studies and recognise the importance of education in opening career opportunities. That orientation starts from a young age and gains momentum as the student progresses through education. The comprehensive, integrated information resources and advisory tools discussed above contribute to that process. However, they are only one part of the broader orientation. Online tools can help students explore educational options and narrow them down to their interests, aptitudes and career expectations (Vuorinen, R., Sampson, J. P., & Kettunen, J., 2011^[29]). However, these tools are rarely sufficient to motivate students to enter higher education, especially those from low-income families.

The orientation process involves many different components:

- **Brandenburg's schools** provide career and study orientation to students. However, the guidance staff at schools are often full-time teachers, who provide career and study orientation to students alongside their teaching responsibilities. Despite the training and support available to those teachers, it is unclear how well they can keep up to date on educational options, funding options (such as scholarships and BAföG) and labour market needs. In addition, schools struggle to support students and their parents with their applications. Yet support with applying for higher education and financial aid, provided in person, can boost enrolment in higher education (Bettinger et al., 2012^[30]) (Oreopoulos, P. and R. Ford, 2016^[31]).

An information and guidance offer that combines all of the above aspects delivered across all types of in-state schools and funded appropriately could reduce uncertainty about the cost and labour market relevance associated with higher education in Brandenburg.

Brandenburg's schools could also be more active in nominating gifted school students for scholarships of excellence offered by *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* and informing about other scholarships. In the last decade, only one in four schools in Brandenburg invited to nominate graduates by the Foundation has done so compared to half of schools nationwide.

- **Parents and caregivers** play an important role over many years in the orientation of young people towards their career and further education choices. They are role models and act as counsellors. Often, they are decisive participants in the decision-making process. However, parents may lack information about educational paths and developments in the labour market. An additional challenge for parents is how to talk to their children about occupations, the labour market and the occupational implications of educational choices in ways that engage and make sense to students. Ireland's "CareersPortal" website (Box 4.8) supports parents and caregivers in this by providing questions that can stimulate conversations. In addition, public service offices would also need to be mandated and trained to provide advice and support, particularly to parents and working adults in the study and career choice decision, or to refer them to specialised counsellors in the field. Such offices include local employment agencies, revenue agencies and social welfare offices.
- **Brandenburg's HEIs** and *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* provide career and study orientation to prospective students in a structured way, including via digital counselling. StudiPortal is expected to offer online study orientation, preparation and guidance linked to the *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* website. MWFK has assured funding of these structures within HEI contracts and has expanded their mandates, but funding beyond 2023 remains an issue. However, HEIs are only likely to be effective in counselling when students have developed some level of orientation towards higher education. Further, it is not clear whether HEIs' counselling is reaching prospective students from disadvantaged families or female students. Targeted outreach to vocational schools, and HEI role model and mentoring programmes may help raise the aspirations of remote families, those from low SES families and girls. In addition, the good showing of an HEI or study programme in rankings can draw interest from prospective students and their parents. Finally, HEIs should

continue to invest in digital marketing and to increasingly leverage social media platforms – particularly WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok, Germany's most widely used platforms among youth (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019^[32]), as this is where they meet (prospective) students today.

- **Student mentors and ambassadors:** The federal initiative *ArbeiterKind.de* uses volunteers – mostly students or academics – to target advice on higher education options to school students whose families have no experience of higher education in some parts of Brandenburg. Most of the volunteers are first-generation HEI students who use their own experience to encourage those who may not have thought of higher education. Austria's recent experience in promoting access to higher education for underrepresented groups provides a useful model for regional and institutional initiatives (Box 4.9). Student ambassadors can also spread the word on line if they manage a social media channel and feed it in with videos about their lives as students. Successful and influential alumni can also help with student recruitment.

Box 4.9. Austria's policy agenda to promote access to higher education for underrepresented groups

Austria promotes access to higher education among students from underrepresented groups, including those with *Berufsreifeprüfung* (professional matriculation examination), those whose parents do not have a *Matura* (higher education entrance qualification), those from rural regions and those with a migrant background.

Austria has a number of regional and institutional initiatives to increase higher education uptake.

- The University of Innsbruck launched the “*Chill die Basis*” project that aims to achieve equitable access to higher education in Tyrol. Bringing together five universities, the Chamber of Labour and the Psychological Student Advisory Service, the project examines inequalities in access and devises measures to reduce them (University of Innsbruck, 2021^[33]). The measures include an outreach programme “Talent Scout” – visiting schools in the region to provide prospective students with individual guidance (University of Innsbruck, 2021^[34]).
- The Styrian University Conference, comprising all nine HEIs in Styria, provides prospective students with information on study programmes and advice services on line and via phone (CAMPUS 02, 2021^[35]). The University of Graz in Styria also offers targeted support and information services to first-generation students and students from a migrant background as part of the project *Peer Mentoring/Die Ersten in der Familie, die an die Uni gehen* (Peer Mentoring/The First People in the Family to Go to Uni). It offers individual consultation and counselling to the targeted students and helps them develop their social network upon enrolment (University of Graz, 2021^[36]).

A review of these measures shows that accessible peer support and individual counselling have a positive impact on access to higher education. In addition, information and support from outside of the school system were found to be important as many Austrian students do not enrol in higher education directly on completion of secondary education. The review suggests that stronger links are needed among information on study and career options, counselling provision, and information on financial and non-financial support, to attract more talent from underrepresented groups (BMBWF, 2017^[37]).

The National Strategy on the Social Dimension in Higher Education has set national goals, including nine quantitative targets reflected in performance agreements with public universities and a financing plan for universities of applied science. The targets include reducing underrepresentation of students whose parents do not have a *Matura* (high school graduation), and reducing regional differences in access to higher education. The federal education ministry also aims to improve the quality and

accessibility of information and promote more targeted communication to increase higher education uptake in underrepresented groups.

Source: University of Innsbruck (2021^[33]), *Chill die Basis*, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/soziologie/forschung/sozialstrukturanalyse-sozialpolitik-sozialforschung/chill-die-basis/>; University of Innsbruck (2021^[34]), *talentescout-tirol*, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/public-relations/studienberatung/talentescout-tirol.html>; CAMPUS 02 (2021^[35]), *Steirische Hochschulkonferenz startet Info-Offensive für Studieninteressierte*, <https://www.campus02.at/news/steirische-hochschulkonferenz-startet-info-offensive-fuer-studieninteressierte/>; BMBWF (2017^[37]), *Nationale Strategie zur sozialen Dimension in der Hochschulbildung* Bildungsministerium für Bildung und Forschung; BMBWF (2021^[38]), *“Soziale Dimension”*, <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Studium/Leitthemen/SozDim.html> (accessed 1 February 2021).

Bringing higher education physically closer to prospective students can also bridge the gap. Following the example of the “*Campus connectés*” in rural France (Box 4.10), the seven *Präsenzstellen* could be also used as sites for regional students enrolled at Brandenburg’s HEIs. Each centre could provide a connected classroom where students taking a course off-campus could work under supervision and benefit from individual and collective tutoring.

Box 4.10. *Campus connectés*: Study sites to facilitate access to higher education in rural France

Campus connectés (CCs) are state-certified sites where students can study remotely, with tutoring, in courses offered by French HEIs. CCs allow people to study close to their home in rural areas; every student is registered to a public university. These places provide connected classrooms where students can work. Students are supervised and benefit from individual and collective tutoring. Since first opening in 2019, CCs have drawn strong demand.

CCs aim to expand opportunities to pursue higher education, especially in rural regions where too many high school students choose not to enrol at a distant university campus in an expensive large city. Students in a CC can pursue the same courses as they would in a university campus without leaving home.

Most learners are young students who have just completed secondary education, or who have already started higher education. There are also adult learners. All study towards a bachelor’s or master’s degree, or a university or technological diploma. They must be on-site at least 15 hours a week to receive guidance and advice from the tutor. They can also benefit from communication workshops, foreign language classes or meetings with business leaders in the region.

Chances for success in distance higher education in France are much lower than in university campuses. Therefore, in-person tutoring and social interaction are key features of CCs. On-site tutors organise educational workshops and social events, which allow people in the same cohort to connect with each other.

There are 89 CC sites in metropolitan France and overseas. The sites receive EUR 50 000 per year, and the French HEI partner receives EUR 10 000 per year to support their collaboration. The total budget of the CC initiative is EUR 25 million over five years. CCs aim to enroll 5 000 students per year within the next five years. While this is a small share of each year’s cohort of 700 000 higher education students in France, this is considered an important step in rural areas.

Source: Campus connectés (n.d.^[39]), www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid39023/www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid39023/les-lieux-labellises-campus-connecte.html (accessed on 25 March 2021).

Policy recommendations

Box 4.11. Policy recommendations to ensure prospective students have structured information to make informed choices and ensure strong study orientation support

Study and career orientation at schools

- Study and career orientation at schools should be comprehensive and include i) information about study and career paths and programme options; ii) information about financing options for the various education pathways, including higher education and vocational education and training (VET), and non-financial support mechanisms available to students; and iii) individual counselling for students and parents. Career orientation should be appropriately funded across all public schools and peer learning should be encouraged among all schools – public and private.
- Brandenburg's schools should more actively use their right to nominate gifted school students for scholarships of excellence offered by *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Merit Foundation) and provide better information and support for scholarship applications.

Study and career orientation at HEIs

- MWFK should ensure sustainable funding for the (currently temporary) structures of study and career orientation at HEIs, particularly *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* (Study Orientation Network) and *Präsenzstellen* (presence centres) and consider extending the mandate of *Präsenzstellen* to also use them as study sites.
- HEIs should continue to reach out to schools, including vocational schools, via *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* and *Präsenzstellen* and offer individual guidance and peer support, particularly to disadvantaged school students.
- MWFK and *Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport – MBSJ* (Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports) should take steps to introduce a student-mentorship programme between school students and HEI students, particularly for disadvantaged students.

HEI digital marketing

- HEIs and *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* should maintain the recently developed digital information and counselling offer and continue to invest in digital marketing and to leverage social media platforms, as this is where they increasingly meet (prospective) students.
- HEIs should consider employing student ambassadors to manage social media channels, informing about life on campus and engaging alumni in student recruitment.

Career orientation information and tools

- MWFK should advocate among German states and also with the federal government for career advice tools that integrate all forms of relevant data, and for a one-stop national career and study guidance website that would provide impartial, objective and factual information in a structured way and that would give access to interactive tools to aid the decision-making process, ensuring:
 - that the site is designed to help young people, their families and advisers by reducing uncertainties (for instance, about labour market needs), by providing tools that help them clarify their career and study interests, and by helping them navigate the myriad study and career options and their funding;

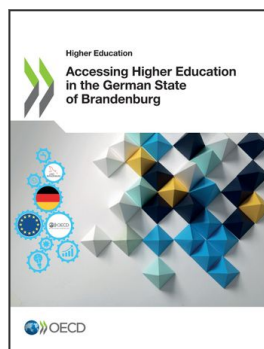
- that the website explains the benefits of lifelong learning and provides information and tools to help mature learners and workers who are seeking help to deepen their skills or to shift their career trajectories.
- The state government should maintain and expand the use of tailored information channels to target learners in Brandenburg (and other German states, notably, neighbouring Berlin), with the two Brandenburg advisory websites *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* and *fachkraefteportal-brandenburg.de* via social media, targeted online ads, billboard ads, etc.
- *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* should regularly update the *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* website, which is already well structured, to include new useful features and relevant information.

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