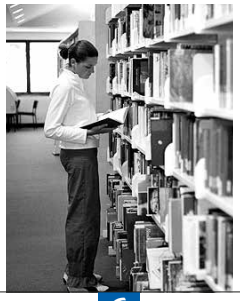


6

Students' expectations of further education

Which 15-year-old students are more likely to continue into higher education? This chapter examines some of the factors that shape that decision, and how the expectation of completing university can, in turn, influence students' performance in school and have an impact on their well-being, in general. The chapter also discusses how parents' attitudes can affect students' expectations of further education and how certain education policies can promote – or undermine – those expectations.

Adolescence is a time when students begin to think seriously about their future, when their aspirations become more closely aligned with their interests, their abilities and the opportunities available to them, and when their vision of themselves can be influenced by the peers and adults around them (Beal and Crockett, 2010). Students' expectations for their future influence what they choose to study and the activities they pursue, which, in turn, determine subsequent accomplishments (Nurmi, 2004).

Students' expectations can be self-fulfilling prophecies, as the effort students invest to meet their expectations often pay off (OECD, 2012). For example, when comparing students of similar socio-economic backgrounds and academic achievement, students who expect to graduate from university are more likely to complete this degree than their peers who do not have such high expectations (Beal and Crockett, 2010). Conversely, students who expect to drop out of school without qualifications are more likely to do so (Morgan, 2005; Perna, 2000). Positive expectations for the future are associated with high self-esteem and effective coping mechanisms. Negative or ambivalent expectations are instead often associated with a sense of hopelessness (Correa, Errico and Poggi, 2011).

What the data tell us

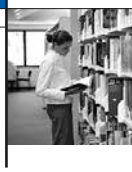
- On average across OECD countries, 44% of 15-years-old students in 2015 expected that they will complete university. In Colombia, Korea, Qatar and the United States, more than three out of four students expected so.
- In most countries and economies, girls were more likely than boys to expect to complete university; and in all countries and economies, disadvantaged students were much less likely than advantaged students to expect to earn a university degree.
- Top-performing students in all education systems were more likely than low-performing students to have high expectations for further education; but in several countries, large proportions of low-performing students expect to complete university.
- Students' expectations of further education are influenced by education policy, particularly the degree of sorting students into different education tracks.

A 15-year-old's expectation to participate in higher education is not a guarantee that the student will, in fact, pursue further education. Expectations of further education are based on students' evaluation of the costs and benefits of investments in further education (Morgan, 1998) and on students' self-assessment of their capacities to realise their aspirations. Adolescents frequently question their own opinions about their future, and often change their aspirations and expectations. The factors that shape students' expectations include the influence of people close to the student, such as peers, family members and teachers, past academic achievement, the degree of selectivity of universities, the direct financial and opportunity costs of participating in higher education, the returns associated with different choices, and the rigidity of the education system, which may restrict access to some education opportunities to only those students who have followed a particular path through the system. The variety of these factors explains how and why the expectations of 15-year-old students vary so considerably both within and across countries (Buchmann and Dalton, 2002; Mateju et al., 2007; Sewell et al., 2003; OECD, 2012). This chapter illustrates differences in education expectations between and within countries. In subsequent chapters, students' expectations of further education are examined in relation to students' social relationships at school, family resources and the activities students engage in outside of school.

DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATION EXPECTATIONS ACROSS AND WITHIN COUNTRIES

PISA 2015 asked students to report what level of education they expect to complete. The same question was asked in 2003, and to students in a group of countries and economies participating in the optional PISA educational career questionnaire in 2009. Across OECD countries, 44% of students reported that they expect to complete a university degree, defined as advanced research programmes or university programmes qualifying for advanced research (ISCED 5A and 6). In Colombia, Korea, Qatar and the United States, more than three out of four students reported that they expect to earn a university degree (Figure III.6.1).

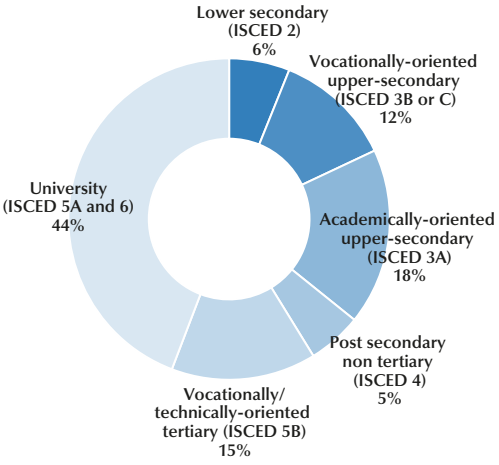
Should countries and economies be concerned that only a minority of students expects to complete university? It is difficult to accurately predict the number of university graduates a country needs to sustain innovation, growth and socio-cultural development. Tertiary graduation rates illustrate a country's capacity to provide the workforce with advanced and specialised knowledge and skills (OECD, 2016c). Earning a university degree is often a pathway to higher salaries



and better employment prospects. On average across OECD countries, the unemployment rate is 12.4% for adults who have not attained upper secondary education, while it is 4.9% for tertiary-educated adults (OECD 2016c). But university education also requires significant investments and means postponing the entry into the labour market. For some students, the opportunity costs of pursuing a university degree and the difficulties they must overcome to earn a degree may outweigh the benefits they will derive from enrolling in university. Not all students need a university degree to contribute productively to the economy and society, and to enjoy a fulfilling professional life.

Figure III.6.1 ■ **Percentage of students expecting to complete each education level**

OECD average



		Percentage of students in ISCED 2	Percentage of students expecting to complete					
			ISCED 2	ISCED 3A/C	ISCED 3A	ISCED 4	ISCED 5B	ISCED 5A & 6
OECD	Australia	86	2.8	4.7	30.5	4.6	3.2	54.2
	Austria	2	2.0	21.9	39.7	2.0	7.3	27.1
	Belgium	9	2.9	7.9	16.0	12.8	27.5	32.9
	Canada	12	1.3	0.0	11.7	7.2	16.4	63.5
	Chile	6	0.7	11.3	5.9	2.3	13.3	66.6
	Czech Republic	54	0.5	7.9	28.4	0.0	7.5	55.6
	Denmark	99	21.6	7.9	29.9	0.0	3.4	37.2
	Estonia	99	4.0	7.6	13.3	10.3	22.1	42.8
	Finland	100	15.7	0.0	38.8	4.7	13.7	27.1
	France	24	9.6	19.6	27.1	0.0	11.7	32.0
	Germany	96	34.5	2.6	39.8	3.8	1.5	17.8
	Greece	5	1.5	8.4	6.2	7.1	10.6	66.3
	Hungary	10	6.4	28.6	11.7	11.6	6.3	35.5
	Iceland	100	6.1	20.4	8.3	9.8	16.5	38.9
	Ireland	62	12.4	4.6	14.1	3.8	18.8	46.3
	Israel	11	1.1	2.5	28.0	2.7	8.7	57.0
	Italy	1	2.1	3.8	26.1	9.1	20.6	38.3
	Japan	m	m	12.0	10.9	m	18.5	58.7
	Korea	9	0.4	6.8	3.2	0.0	14.3	75.3
	Latvia	96	3.8	14.1	9.6	11.2	36.5	24.7
	Luxembourg	57	7.4	17.5	16.9	5.2	11.5	41.4
	Mexico	39	5.5	2.8	16.9	0.0	16.4	58.4
	Netherlands	71	13.2	0.0	13.1	28.9	27.3	17.4
	New Zealand	6	3.0	14.0	23.8	5.1	8.8	45.2
	Norway	100	3.1	17.5	7.0	11.1	37.3	24.1
	Poland	99	1.6	5.9	27.9	15.6	0.9	48.0
	Portugal	35	6.1	21.2	8.2	2.7	21.8	39.9
	Slovak Republic	47	m	m	m	m	m	m
	Slovenia	5	1.9	34.7	7.2	4.0	26.3	25.8
	Spain	100	13.0	7.7	15.5	0.0	12.9	51.0
	Sweden	98	7.6	18.6	14.4	0.5	20.2	38.7
	Switzerland	77	11.4	29.8	17.4	3.7	10.7	27.0
	Turkey	3	2.1	15.1	7.0	0.0	5.3	70.6
	United Kingdom	0	1.4	27.4	18.2	0.6	10.6	41.8
	United States	10	0.5	0.0	12.1	4.2	7.2	76.0
Partners	Brazil	22	3.5	5.3	26.6	9.4	9.0	46.2
	B-S-J-G (China)	63	11.9	14.6	13.3	7.2	15.3	37.7
	Bulgaria	3	3.3	13.8	7.2	12.8	23.5	39.4
	Colombia	40	1.8	0.0	13.9	0.0	8.1	76.3
	Costa Rica	53	2.3	8.8	6.5	7.2	20.7	54.4
	Croatia	0	0.2	12.9	19.2	19.2	12.4	36.1
	Dominican Republic	21	7.4	8.6	17.2	2.3	1.1	63.5
	Hong Kong (China)	33	2.1	2.3	13.4	11.5	15.9	54.9
	Lithuania	100	2.5	8.5	8.2	10.2	17.0	53.6
	Macao (China)	45	2.6	2.4	9.8	20.2	18.4	46.7
	Montenegro	3	0.5	13.6	1.0	19.6	0.0	65.4
	Peru	25	1.0	0.0	15.4	7.1	12.2	64.3
	Qatar	21	2.3	5.9	6.3	1.9	7.2	76.5
	Romania	100	m	m	m	m	m	m
	Russia	87	10.9	21.1	14.2	2.7	34.2	16.9
	Singapore	2	0.4	0.0	2.6	6.5	27.7	62.8
	Chinese Taipei	35	1.9	19.0	8.0	m	24.0	47.1
	Thailand	25	2.3	5.2	8.3	15.3	0.0	68.9
	Tunisia	34	7.6	2.6	23.3	9.4	5.6	51.5
	United Arab Emirates	14	2.0	3.8	13.2	3.5	5.5	72.0
	Uruguay	38	18.7	12.4	17.1	4.7	4.6	42.6

Note: The classification of education programmes follows the ISCED 1997 classification.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.6.1.

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In 2015, across all countries and economies, disadvantaged students were much less likely than advantaged students to expect to complete a university degree. A lack of financial resources and a paucity of role models can undermine the aspirations of disadvantaged students, with negative consequences on the effort they invest at school. Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic are the only countries where the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students in expectations to complete a university degree is less than 10 percentage points. In Beijing-Shanghai-Jiangsu-Guangdong (China) (hereafter "B-S-J-G [China]"), the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Spain, this gap is over 50 percentage points (Table III.6.2)

Immigrants often leave their countries with the determination to give their children high-quality education (Dustmann and Glitz, 2011). Immigrant students hold an ambition to succeed and progress in school that often matches, and in some cases surpasses, the aspirations of children in their host country (OECD, 2015). In 2015, both first- and second-generation immigrant students were as likely as non-immigrants to expect to complete a university degree, on average across OECD countries (Table III.6.2). Among the countries where more than 10% of students have an immigrant background, in Australia, Canada, Latvia, New Zealand, Qatar, Singapore, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, first-generation immigrant students were more likely to report that they expect to complete a university degree than students without an immigrant background. In Austria, Brazil, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong (China), Iceland, Israel, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and the United States, first-generation immigrant students had lower expectations for further education than non-immigrant students.

In 2015, girls were more likely than boys to expect to complete university. The largest differences between the shares of girls and boys who reported that they expect to earn a university degree (over 15 percentage points in favour of girls) are observed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Thailand, Tunisia and Uruguay. Only in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Chinese Taipei were boys as likely as girls to hold expectations of completing university education (Table III.6.2).

Girls' high expectations for their future education are reflected in high enrolment rates in universities. But even though women are over-represented among university graduates (57% of first-time graduates in 2014 were women in OECD countries, on average), they remain under-represented in certain fields of study, such as science and engineering. On average across OECD countries, there are three times more male graduates in engineering than female graduates (OECD, 2016c).

On average across OECD countries, about 36% of students expect that they will complete their education with a secondary degree (either lower or upper secondary, Figure III.6.1 and Table III.6.4). The share of students who expect to end their education at the secondary level is smallest in Singapore (3%) and largest in Germany (77%). Many students who are enrolled in secondary programmes that prepare students for a university education (ISCED 3A courses) expect to finish their education with their current degree (Table III.6.1).

In many countries and economies, students who attend schools in rural areas are less likely to expect to earn a university degree than students who attend urban schools. On average across OECD countries, 31% of students whose school is in a rural area or a village with fewer than 3 000 people, 42% of students in schools located in towns with up to 100 000 people, and 50% of students in cities with over 100 000 people expect to complete a university education. Differences in these expectations between urban and rural students were particularly large (over 40 percentage points) in Hungary and Turkey (Table III.6.3).

EXPECTATIONS OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

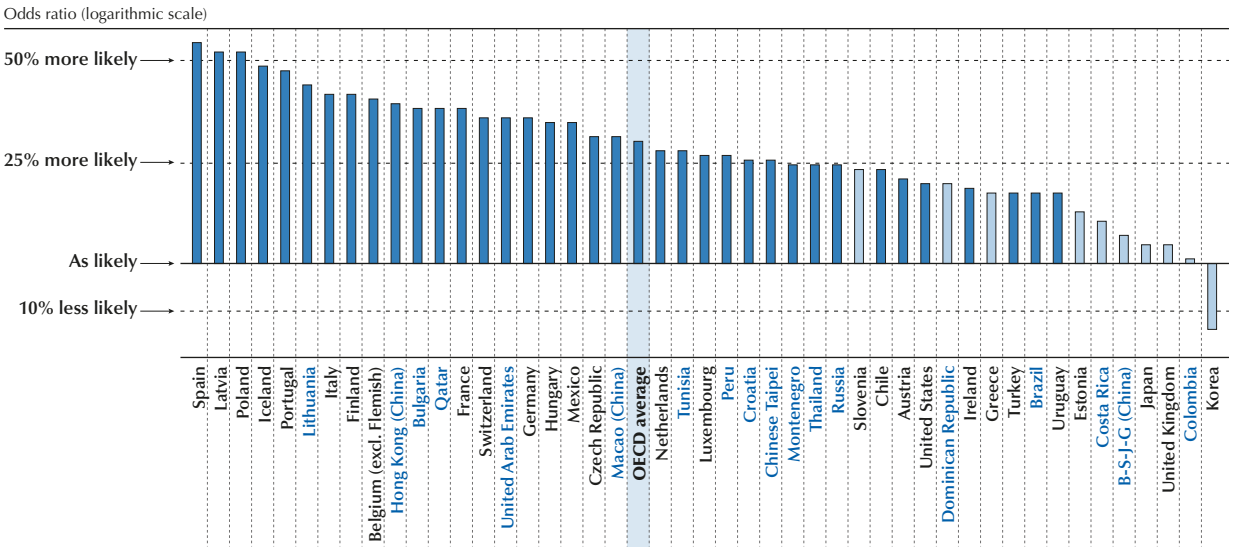
Positive expectations for the future signal high self-esteem and effective coping mechanisms. Figure III.6.2 shows that self-reported satisfaction with life is significantly related to students' expectations to complete university education. On average across OECD countries, students who expect to complete university education were 30% more likely than students without such expectations to report high satisfaction with their life (9 or 10 on a scale from 0 to 10). This relationship suggests that students' psychological and social well-being at school is strictly connected to how adolescents see their future as students (see also Figure III.8.8 on the relationship between exposure to bullying and education expectations).

EXPECTATIONS OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND HOW EDUCATION SYSTEMS ARE ORGANISED

Figure III.6.3 shows the percentage of low performers in all subjects (students who score below proficiency Level 2 in the PISA reading, mathematics and science tests) and top performers in at least one subject (those who score at Level 5 or 6) who expect to complete university education. In all countries and economies, top performers were more likely than low performers to report that they expect to earn a university degree. On average across OECD countries, about 70% of top-performing students and 20% of low-performing students reported that they expect to complete a university degree.

Figure III.6.2 ■ **Life satisfaction and expectations of completing a university degree**

Increased likelihood of feeling highly satisfied with life associated with the expectation of completing a university degree



Notes: Statistically significant values are shown in a darker tone (see Annex A3).
Highly satisfied students are students who reported 9 or 10 on the life-satisfaction scale, which ranges from 0 to 10.
Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the likelihood of feeling highly satisfied with life associated with expectations of completing a university degree.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.6.8.
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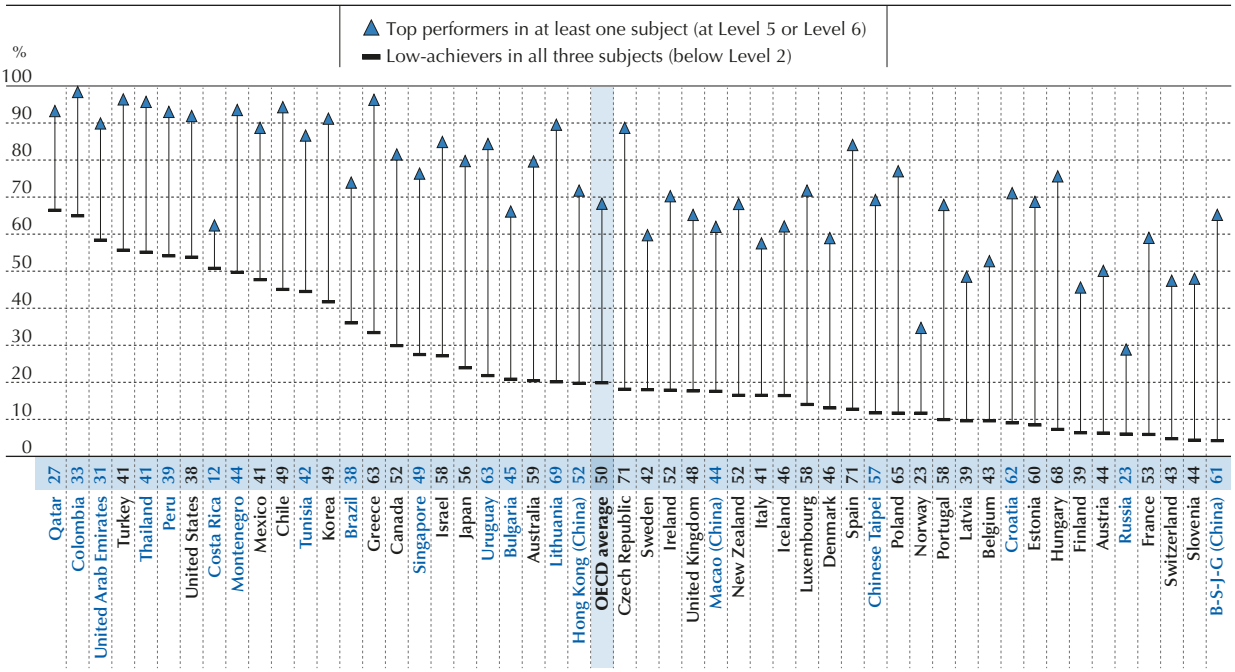
Figure III.6.3 ■ **Expectations of completing a university degree and performance**

Percentage of students expecting to complete a university degree, by performance in core PISA subjects



Notes: Only countries with available data for both low-achievers and top performers are shown.
Statistically significant differences between top-performers and low-achievers are shown next to the country/economy name (see Annex A3).
Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of low-achievers expecting to complete a university degree.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.6.7.
StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933471227

Large proportions of students hold expectations of further education that do not seem aligned with their performance in school. For example, in Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Qatar, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, more than one in two all-round low performers (students who score below proficiency Level 2 in the PISA reading, mathematics and science tests) reported that they expect to complete a university degree (Figure III.6.3). In these countries, the returns in earnings from higher education tend to be relatively high. For example, in Colombia in 2014, workers with higher education degrees earned 2.3 times the salary of adult workers with only upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, on average (OECD, 2016c, Table A6.1). If a large share of these low-performing students enrols in university, higher education institutions might be either forced to impose highly selective admissions and progression rules, or to lower the standards of their courses. In Finland, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation (hereafter "Russia"), Slovenia and Switzerland, fewer than one in two students who are top performers in at least one PISA subject expect to earn a university degree (Table III.6.7). In some of these countries (Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia and Slovenia) more than one in four students expect to complete a tertiary vocational programme (ISCED 5B).

Promoting high expectations for further education among top-performing students is particularly important, considering that these are the students who are most likely to succeed in higher education. But students at all levels of proficiency should receive some counselling so that they develop a realistic understanding of the requirements of higher education and how they can work to fulfil them (see box III.14.3 for a concrete example of how this can be done).

Students' expectations of further education are also influenced by the structure of education systems. In flexible education systems, students who have low expectations at age 15 can change their minds later on and pursue a university education. Longitudinal studies have shown that, in these systems, it is not uncommon for students to revise their expectations based on their performance and on changes in the external environment (Anders and Micklewright, 2015). In more rigid education systems, low expectations reflect the reality that 15-year-old students have already been judged as likely (or not) to qualify for admission to university.

In Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and Switzerland, more than one in two students reported that they expect to finish their education careers upon acquiring a lower or upper secondary degree (Table III.6.1). Three of these six countries – Austria, Germany and Switzerland – separate students into academically and non-academically oriented programmes before they are 13 years old. In Germany, a large proportion of students, particularly disadvantaged students, expects to leave education at the end of the first cycle of secondary schooling, when they have received around nine or ten years of general training (either academic or work-oriented, depending on the education track into which students are selected at age 10). This dual system in Germany aims to reduce youth unemployment by preparing all students for a smooth transition into the labour market. In France, only 13% of disadvantaged students expect to complete university (Table III.6.2). In Austria, France and Switzerland, many 15-year-old students expect to finish their education at the end of their vocational training programmes at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3 B/C).

School systems that track students into different education paths give students a strong signal about their likely careers, channelling their expectations and giving low-achieving students the means to access the labour market. Boys and girls in education systems that separate students into different types of schools tend to have lower expectations for further education than those in systems that have a comprehensive approach to schooling at the primary and lower secondary levels (Buchmann and Dalton, 2002; Buchmann and Park, 2009; Kerckhoff, 2000; Mateju et al., 2007; McDaniel, 2010; Rosenbaum, 2001).

The socio-economic status of students strongly influences their placement into upper or lower tracks. Advantaged students are most likely to attend academically oriented programmes that provide a direct pathway to university (OECD, 2016b). Figure III.6.4 shows that in systems where students are tracked between the ages of 10 and 12, only 21% of disadvantaged students, on average, expect that they will complete university, while in countries where students are separated into different tracks between the ages of 13 and 15, 36% of disadvantaged students, on average, expect to complete a university degree. The difference in expectations between advantaged and disadvantaged students is slightly larger in systems with early tracking. If sorting into different programmes is not based entirely on merit, these systems may waste academic talent, as some academically capable students might end up in the wrong track and cannot pursue a university degree because movement across tracks is rare and difficult.

Besides tracking, another way education systems can guide students' expectations is through high-stakes evaluations. Marks on assessments are an important source of information about students' potential success in future education. They can thus help high-performing students understand their academic potential and the need to cultivate it further.

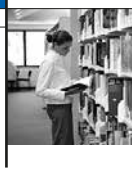
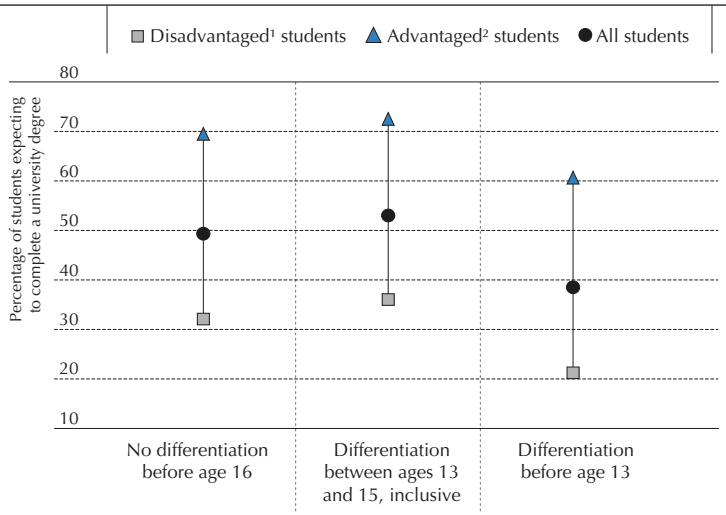


Figure III.6.4 ■ **Age at sorting into education tracks and expectations of completing a university degree**

Average across all countries and economies with available data



1. A socio-economically disadvantaged student is a student in the bottom quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) in their country/economy.
2. A socio-economically advantaged student is a student who is in the top quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) in their country/economy.

Note: All differences between advantaged and disadvantaged students are statistically significant (see Annex A3).

Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.6.10.

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If fully based on merit, this source of "institutional information" might also reduce inequalities in expectations by making students' self-assessments less dependent on the influence of their social group. However, for students who are not adequately supported by teachers and parents, failure in an important test can result in lowered expectations, and might even encourage students to drop out of school altogether. For example, Reardon and Galindo (2002) find that, among students with similar performance, the requirement to pass a promotion test in the United States is strongly associated with an increased probability of students dropping out of school.

The evidence on the relationship between testing policies and early dropout is not conclusive, as it is difficult to identify causal effects without randomised experiments (e.g. by randomly assigning students with the same characteristics to high-testing and low-testing environments). PISA data can only add descriptive evidence on this relationship. Table III.6.12 shows that, on average across OECD countries, students who attend schools that assess students with mandatory standardised tests at least once a year are as likely as students who are not assessed in this way to expect to earn a university degree.

Box III.6.1 **Parents' expectations of a career in science for their children**

Students' expectations of further education are oriented by the occupation they expect to be working in later on. Parents can influence both sets of expectations. Most parents are concerned about their children's work prospects and they encourage their children to fulfil their aspirations. But parents follow different approaches when influencing how their children think about their future. Qualitative evidence (Irwin and Elley, 2013) suggests that some parents adopt a *laissez-faire* approach, only responding to their children's requests for information and support, while others believe that they can shape the future success of their children by choosing what is best for them.

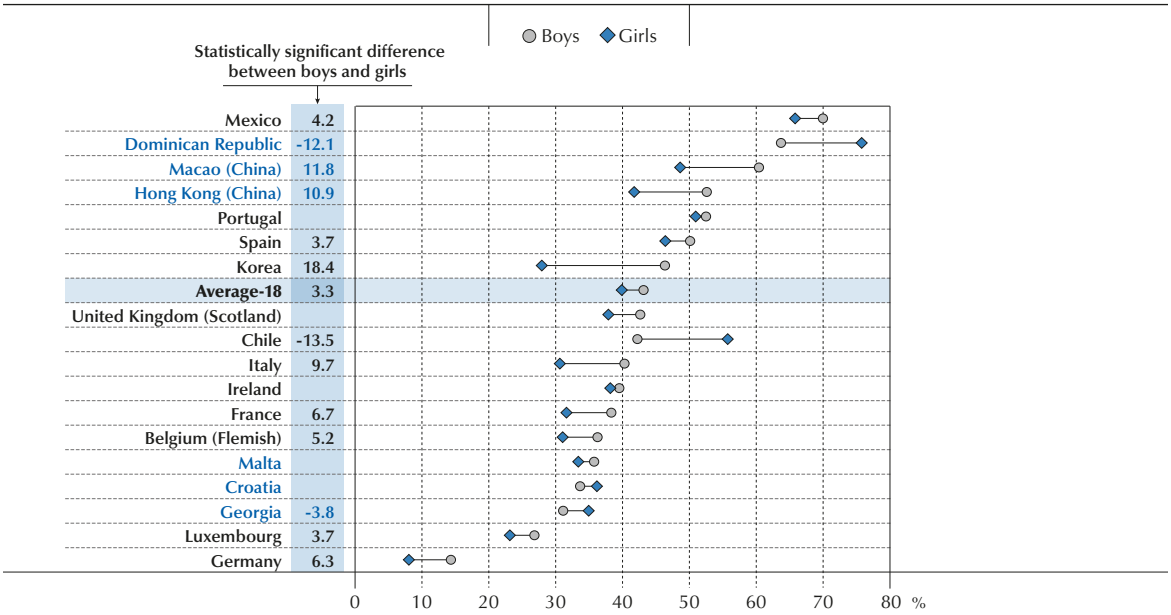
PISA 2015 data provide information on whether parents expect that their children will pursue a career in a science-related occupation, broadly defined as a career that requires studying science at the university level (OECD, 2016a). These data can identify the background characteristics of both children and their parents that are more closely related with expectations, and the degree of alignment between students' expectations and those of their parents (see also box III.10.2 for more data on students' occupation expectations).

...

Across countries that distributed the parental questionnaire, parents were more likely to expect a science-related career for their sons than for their daughters, especially in Asian countries. For instance, in Hong Kong (China), Korea and Macao (China), the share of parents who expected a science career for their sons was at least 10 percentage points larger than the share of parents who expected the same for their daughters. But in Chile, the Dominican Republic and Georgia parents of female students were more likely to have expectations of a science career for their child than parents of male students (Figure III.6.5).

Figure III.6.5 ■ **Parents who expect a career in science for their child, by student's gender**

Results based on parents' reports

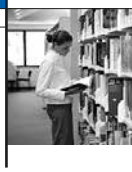


Note: Statistically significant differences between boys and girls are shown next to the country/economy name (see Annex A3).
Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of boys whose parents reported that they expect a science-related career for them.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.6.13.
StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933471248

Gender and gender roles are not the only factors that can explain differences in how parents form their expectations. Parents are also influenced by their own life experiences and social context. Across countries, 57% of parents who reported that someone in their family (including themselves) works in a science-related career expected the same for their child, while only 36% of parents in families where no one works in science expected their child to work in a science-related job. Moreover, parents with a university degree were more likely than less-educated parents to expect that their children will seek a career in science. The difference between parents with a university degree and those who have not attained that level of education is particularly large in Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Korea, Malta, Portugal, Scotland (United Kingdom) and Spain (Table III.6.13).

The expectations of children and parents are strongly aligned. After accounting for the child's socio-economic status and performance in science, children whose parents expect that they will work in science were more likely to expect a career in science for themselves (Table III.6.14).

A possible consequence of failing a high-stakes test is the obligation to repeat a year of school. Repeating a grade is arguably the most visible demonstration of academic "failure". As such, it can adversely affect a student's expectations for himself or herself – and the expectations of others for the student – for a long time. Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (2003) found that students in the city of Baltimore who had repeated a grade early in their schooling were more likely than their peers who had been promoted to drop out of school in adolescence, even if the former group of students performed better at school than their classmates who were promoted. The students who had repeated a grade, they explained, suffered from a weaker attachment to school. Table III.6.11 shows that, in the majority of countries and economies, students who had



repeated a grade are less likely than students who had not repeated a grade to expect to complete university, even after accounting for differences in gender, socio-economic status and performance in science and reading. This relationship is not causal, as students who had repeated a grade might differ from those who had not in ways that are not measured by PISA.

What these results imply for policy

- Expectations shape students' careers and can contribute to students' well-being. Schools should provide academic and career counselling to all students so that they develop ambitious – yet realistic – expectations about their education and career prospects.
- Disengagement among boys needs to be tackled so that more boys can develop expectations that are aligned with their academic potential.
- Where inequalities in education and career expectations are prevalent, opportunities for social mobility are limited. In systems that separate students at an early age, disadvantaged students are over-represented in the lower tracks and tend to develop low expectations of further education. Easing transitions between tracks could reduce the effects of differentiation on inequalities in expectations, skills and opportunities.

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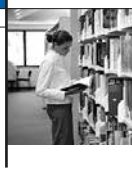

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