

Starting Cohort 4: Grade 9 (SC4)
Waves 3 and 4: Edition of rejected
school, vocational preparation, and
vocational training spells

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**Starting Cohort 4 of the National Educational Panel Study
Waves 3 and 4: Edition of rejected school, vocational preparation,
and vocational training spells**

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Introduction

After leaving the general school system, the adolescents in Starting Cohort 4 continue to be interviewed on an individual basis. One core element of these non-classroom-based interviews is to collect life course data: In the first wave outside of the school context, the adolescents' life course information is collected retrospectively up to the point of this first interview. Starting with the interviews in the second wave outside of the school context, the life course is continued from the previous interview using "Dependent Interviewing".

The first group concerned were the *adolescents that left the general school system at the end of grade 9* (hereinafter "school leavers from grade 9"). It was the first time in wave 3 that these school leavers were interviewed about their life courses. From wave 4 on, their life course information was updated.³ This document refers exclusively to the school leavers from grade 9 and describes how the life course data from waves 3 and 4 was edited by the Research Data Center at LfBi - upon proposal of the authors - for this group in the Scientific Use File.

Adolescents, who leave the German general school system at the end of grade 9, essentially have three options for continuing their education:

- They can descend into a fully qualifying apprenticeship, which can take place either within the dual system (workplace training combined with classroom learning at a vocational school) or as a school-based program at a vocational school.
- They can descend into the non-fully qualifying sector that offers vocational preparation schemes, which include a diverse range of measures from fully school-based programs to programs featuring some workplace components.
- Or they can pursue a higher-level school-leaving certificate (for example at a "Berufsfachschule" or a "Kolleg"). In that case, they do not enroll in a vocational training program or vocational preparation scheme.

Accordingly, the three activity types (1) vocational training, (2) vocational preparation, and (3) general school are crucial when collecting the life course information of school leavers from grade 9 in Starting Cohort 4. This information is collected in three separate survey parts. However, the school leavers from grade 9 had significant difficulties assigning their activities to one of those three areas. In particular, during the first non-classroom-based interview in wave 3, they frequently assigned their activities to the area of general school even though they were attending a school in the context of a vocational training program or a vocational preparation scheme. It was only due to growing experience that the respondents were able to correctly identify the various areas of the vocational education and training

³ For school leavers from grade 9, we collected their life course data outside of the school context (wave 3) starting the day they left the general school system and ending the day of the interview. The histories within the general school system were collected retrospectively in wave 4 for this group. For school leavers from grades 10 to 13, the histories within the general school system were already collected in the first wave outside of the school context.

system. This becomes evident in a relatively high rate of rejections and corrections, especially with regard to reported school spells, in wave 4 (approx. six months later) when the school leavers from grade 9 were interviewed about their life courses for the second time in the non-classroom-based survey context: respondents in wave 4 rejected about 33 percent of all ongoing school spells from wave 3. At the same time, they reported new spells in one of the three activity types (vocational training, vocational preparation, general school) for about 84 percent of the rejected school spells.

In the editing process described below, probably misidentified activities in the three spell types were identified and corrected. For the version SUF SC4:4.0.0, this data edition had to be performed by the users themselves using a do-file provided with the Scientific Use File (see SUF SC4:4.0.0, Technical Report 2) by the NEPS team at the WZB. Starting with version SUF SC4:6.0.0, this edition is already implemented in the data.

Respondents of Starting Cohort 4, who left the general school system at the end of grade 10 or later, seemed to have less difficulties assigning their activities to the areas vocational training, vocational preparation, and general school. This may in part be due to modifications of the survey instrument. These modifications were made to facilitate the assignment to the three areas. For instance, school leavers from grade 10 were interviewed about their life courses for the first time in wave 5. In the following wave 6, they rejected only about 4 percent of all ongoing school spells from wave 5. Therefore, the editing process was only performed in waves 3 and 4 for school leavers from grade 9.

General comments on how rejections in NEPS life course surveys are handled

When can respondents reject previous spells?

During the life course survey, there are two points at which respondents may reject spells that were collected in the previous wave and ongoing at the date of that interview:

1. *As part of “Dependent Interviewing” within the individual life course modules:* If the respondent reported an ongoing activity in the previous wave, the information on this spell is displayed in the following wave, and respondents are asked to report how that spell evolved. At the same time, this is the first opportunity for respondents to reject this spell.
2. *As part of the data revision module:* After respondents have provided the information for each of the various life course modules, all spells are tested for temporal consistency with the help of a data revision module. This review is the second opportunity for respondents to cancel spells collected in the current survey wave and spells that were ongoing at the time of the previous wave.

Both types of rejections occur in panel surveys, and they are indeed expected to occur. From a cognitive psychology perspective, respondents may repeatedly experience difficulties remembering or assigning past activities.

How are rejected spells edited in the scientific use file (SUF)?

The edition of rejected spells is based on the principle that respondents can provide the best information about their current activities at the time of each interview. As a consequence, this information is considered more reliable than information provided in the subsequent wave about these same activities at the time of the previous interview. That is why, in the current edition of the NEPS life course surveys, spells rejected in a subsequent wave are terminated at the point of the last interview and marked as rejected. Rejections during “Dependent Interviewing” within the individual life course modules are marked with the variable value *disagint*=1. Rejections and cancellations during the data revision module are marked with the variable value *spms*=-20.

Special editing of rejected school, vocational preparation, and vocational training spells for school leavers from grade 9 in Starting Cohort 4

The general rules for handling rejections are also applied in the life course data of Starting Cohort 4. However, due to the aforementioned problems of school leavers from grade 9 to assign their activities to the spell types “school”, “vocational preparation” and “vocational training” in wave 3, it can be assumed that the information from the following wave 4 is more reliable. At this point in time respondents had a much better grasp of the vocational education and training system. So to account for this situation, the data of school leavers from grade 9 is edited in a special way.

Identification of relevant rejected spells for special editing steps

This special editing procedure refers exclusively to rejected spells

- of the types “school”, “vocational preparation”, or “vocational training”,
- which were collected in the first non-classroom-based survey wave of school leavers from grade 9 (wave 3),
- for which a “corrected spell” of the type “school”, “vocational preparation”, or “vocational training” could be identified in the following wave (wave 4).

These conditions were also allowed to apply to multiple spells reported by one respondent. If one of the three conditions did not apply to a specific spell, this spell was not edited in any special manner, and the editing steps were the standard ones for rejected spells.

Identification of “corrected spells” of the types “school”, “vocational preparation”, or “vocational training”

The term “corrected spells” refers to those spells of the types “school”, “vocational preparation”, or “vocational training” that were newly collected in order to correct contradictions in the longitudinal modules or cancellations in the review module.

Example:

In the *spSchool* module in wave 3, one respondent reported that she was currently enrolled in vocational school. In the subsequent wave (wave 4), this information is supposed to be continued. In wave 4, however, the respondent says that she assigned the school spell incorrectly during the school module of the previous wave, because the program she is doing is actually a vocational preparation scheme. This is why she rejects the school spell (during “Dependent Interviewing”) and reports a new vocational preparation spell (*spVocPrep*).

The standard procedure for continuing life courses in the NEPS surveys does not provide an opportunity for correcting information collected in previous waves. Corrections are limited to the time period between the current interview and the previous one. This means the beginning of a newly added spell cannot be dated earlier than the previous interview date. In the standard procedure, re-assignments of activities to other spell types can only be made by adding a new spell, for which the earliest possible start date would be the date of the previous interview.

However, in deviation from the standard procedure for continuing spells in the life course, respondents in wave 4 had the opportunity to also date spells to a start date prior to the previous interview date. As a result, this wave allows the direct comparison between the start dates of the rejected spells and the start dates of newly added spells. This comparison was used to identify “corrected episodes”.

This means that newly added spells only become relevant as “corrected spells” during the editing process if the following criteria are met:

- The episode was added during the second non-school-based interview of school leavers from grade 9 (wave 4).
- The episode falls under the spell types *spSchool*, *spVocPrep* or *spVocTrain*, and the respondent rejected at least one previously reported spell of the type *spSchool*, *spVocPrep* or *spVocTrain* in the same wave (either as part of the ‘dependent interviewing’ or in the data revision module).
- The start date of a newly added spell is no more than 2 months prior or after the start date of the rejected spell. If there are multiple rejected spells, the start date of the newly added spell must equal (plus/minus 2 months) the earliest start date of the rejected spells. A time frame of plus/minus 2 months is tolerated because the retrospective collection of information may vary, for instance due to holidays and vacations.
- The end date of the newly added spell is either equal to or later than the date of the previous interview.

Editing steps

Whenever the abovementioned criteria for the existence of a relevant rejection and a “corrected spell” were met, the following editing steps were performed:

- The rejected spell was deleted entirely in the *biography* file (and not terminated at the date of the previous interview).
- The deleted spell remains in the longitudinal module data sets, however, and is marked with the variable value *tf50164=2*.
- The start date of the identified “corrected spell” was replaced with the start date of the deleted rejected spell in the biography file. This was done to ensure that the correction does not cause any gaps in the life course.
- In the longitudinal module data sets, the original date information of the corrected spell remains as it is; the “corrected spell” is marked with the variable value *tf50164=1*. As a result, the corrected start date of the corrected spell is only found in the *biography* file.

Because the corrections in this editing step are only related to the *biography* file, data users, whenever they are referring to the longitudinal module data sets, are still able to trace the respondents’ original information from each of the waves. This also means that it is possible to undo this editing at any time.