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## Article

# "The quality of early education and care must be improved": Five questions to C. Katharina Spieß

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Prof. Dr. C. Katharina Spieß, Head of the Education Policy Department at DIW Berlin

#### FIVE QUESTIONS TO C. KATHARINA SPIESS

## »The Quality of Early Education and Care Must Be Improved«

1. Professor Spieß, Germany is an industrial nation which essentially profits from its know-how. Nevertheless, the amount spent on education is often debated. Is enough money being invested in education in Germany? If you think about how important education is for the competitiveness of an economy like Germany's and we look at what we are investing in education in Germany, then we are actually already doing a great deal in this sector. But considering the importance of education for the German economy, we are not investing enough in it and must put more into this sector in the years to come.
2. In which areas of education have you found the biggest investment deficits? If we look at what we are investing in the different areas of education in Germany, it becomes apparent that early childhood education is not receiving as much as we should be according to research findings in the field of education economics. Admittedly, we have made considerable progress by expanding the provision of children's day care facilities also for children under three. However, the issue remains that the quality of service provided in these educational and child care facilities is not as good as it should be in order to be able to achieve the really high returns on investment in education. Therefore, I very strongly advocate investing a great deal more in the quality of early learning than we have done to date.
3. What's the situation like at universities? We are also doing relatively well in Germany by international standards as far as our expenditure on tertiary education is concerned. However, here, too, we have various shortfalls. One example is that in Germany the number of educationally disadvantaged people entering higher

education is very low in comparison with other European countries. Here, we are speaking about low intergenerational mobility, i.e., educationally disadvantaged groups with the same level of performance are less likely to be represented at universities. In this respect, I would call for further measures to be implemented and also the funding for these measures to actually be made available.

4. How is German investment in education to be evaluated by international standards? By international standards, according to calculations by the OECD, at 5.3 percent of GDP, Germany's expenditure on education is below the OECD average. There are also other calculations which show Germany in a slightly better light. But this also indicates that it is very important to look at the different areas individually. We know, for example, that particularly in elementary and lower secondary education we are not doing very well by international standards. And our spending is below average here. In the pre-school sector, in other words, in the field of early education, it should also be borne in mind that there is a relatively high level of private investment and/or expenditure.
5. Germany is taking austerity measures. Where's the money going to come from? The education sector is very much dependent on public expenditure. Here, the Länder are very strongly represented and, in early childhood education in particular, the municipal authorities. The national government is also very actively involved now. Ultimately, it is a question of all public actors having to set priorities. Education is key to being able to make savings again in the short, medium, and long term. It is false economy to cut costs here if we also want to make good human capital available for future generations.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg.

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