



Interview with Professor Johanna Wyn

Johanna Wyn is the Director of the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne. She specializes in longitudinal research about the dimensions of young people's lives, including education, work, wellbeing, relationships and family. Johanna was instrumental in the development of the Mind Matters program to promote mental health and wellbeing within Australian schools.

From your research, what is life like for students in the 21st century?

Based on our experience, student life is likely to be one of really working hard to balance multiple commitments, balancing complex university and study timetables with other commitments including work. It's possible that it's quite a fragmented experience, many students don't attend lectures because there's no compulsion to do so, so they are trying to catch up with that and they're only attending workshops or tutorials. And they're also experiencing that other reality that it's a very diverse student body, so maybe harder to find people like themselves amongst the groups they are interacting with.

We're finding that precarious work is very widespread, it means people are doing small jobs, they are doing contract work, they don't have long term contracts, so it is contributing to the sense of it being very hard for young people to take advantage of their education in the labour market, and that is a big change.

Because things are changing so much, students are experiencing the reality that it's more difficult than it used to be, to see how you would use your qualification. Even if you are studying in a professional degree like medicine or education, it can still become a little bit difficult to see exactly how you will use your qualifications in rapidly occupational structures.

It's an interesting paradox actually that young people are not necessarily benefitting in the ways we might think from their education. Usually the formula has been that if you increase levels of education amongst a population then you will see a concomitant change for the better in terms of wellbeing, in terms of jobs, in terms of a whole range of things, and although there's no question that education benefits people, we are seeing overall as there are more young people going into education we are not seeing levels of mental health rise, we are seeing a kind of drop, so we are noticing that there is something important here that we need to try and understand, how is it that we are increasing levels of education but we are not yet managing to see levels of wellbeing go up as a result of that.

Professor Johanna Wyn

Director

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