

Longitudinal study gives valuable insights into the lives of New Zealanders in their mid-20s

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The *Competent Learners* study has followed a cohort of young New Zealanders from their final months in early childhood education to age 26. Twin reports just released give valuable insights into the roles of learning, work, health and relationships in their lives. Most were in paid work. Sixty percent were in relationships, and 21% of the women had a child.

Formal learning since school was important for work, and it gave wider benefits. Informal learning was also common. As a group, the 26-year-olds were better at finding new ways to do something or solve problems than they had been at 20. They had high expectations that work would include ongoing learning, and nearly a third wanted more learning opportunities in their work.

“There’s a big emphasis now on the importance of life-long learning” said Dr Cathy Wylie, the study leader, “and these latest reports show just how essential it is. The paths from school to work are no longer straightforward for the majority. When these young people looked back, they often wished they had thought more about the paths they took – and quite a few wished they had taken school more seriously.”

Most were happy with their lives, but a fifth had some health problems, and 22% sought treatment for mental health —up from 14% at age 20 —perhaps reflecting greater self-awareness or social acceptance of mental health issues.

Most saw New Zealand society as tolerant, but poverty levels were seen as being too high, and income differences too large for many. Most were optimistic about their own futures —an optimism they didn’t share for the world or for the state of the environment.

Friendships were important, and many of their closest friends were from school. Informal activities were more common than formal activities. “We found some differences related to education levels and income in how young people spend their time and what matters to them, but more differences related to gender” said Dr Wylie.

The two reports are:

Pathways, labour market experiences, and learning at work and beyond at age 26

Shaping adulthood relationships, values, and experiences of the Competent Learners @ 26

Available at <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/competent-learners-26-summary-key-findings>

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