



# Generational insights into new labour market landscapes for youth

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LABOUR MARKET LANDSCAPES FOR YOUTH**

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# INTRODUCTION

This research report analyses how young Australians are managing their transition from education to work. It is based on data from the Life Patterns project, a two-decade longitudinal research program of the Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne. This report focuses on the experiences of cohort two, the generation that left secondary school in 2006 (as also referred to as Generation Y) in order to map their integration to the labour market. The analysis explores what Furlong (2007: 102) describes as ‘the grey area between employment and unemployment’ to understand the nature and quality of young adults’ working conditions. We agree with Furlong that simplistic binaries constructed around the distinction between employed and unemployed no longer provide an accurate picture of the contemporary landscape of the labour market for youth. The report also draws on the experiences of cohort one, who left school in 1991 (corresponding to Generation X). We offer some inter-generational comparisons as a way of analysing issues of continuity and change in education and work in the last quarter of a century.

We acknowledge that young people’s lives encompass more than just education and work. Elsewhere we have provided a critique of a concept of youth transitions that is based solely on the transition from school to work (see Cuervo & Wyn 2014, Wyn 2009) and have documented the significance of family and social relations, and health and wellbeing in the lives of both cohorts (see Andres & Wyn 2010, Cuervo & Wyn 2011, 2012, 2014, Wyn & Andres 2011). However, in this research report we concentrate almost exclusively on the spheres of work and education in a period of uncertainty that has come to be defining for young people. The analysis of the nature and conditions of work, and the structural forces that shape it, is critical for those concerned with the study of youth. As MacDonald (2009: 167) asserts:

In considering the topic of young adults and precarious work, therefore, we are able to focus on particular, youth-related questions about changing transitions as well as broader sociological ones about change (and continuity) in the sphere of work and employment in late modernity. Because of youth’s status as harbinger of the future, the nature of the younger’s engagement in ‘new’ forms of employment has relevance beyond the sphere of youth studies.

The longitudinal character of the Life Patterns research program enables us to construct a dynamic view of young people’s lives. Longitudinal studies allow for the possibility of tracking developments over time and space, providing a unique opportunity to gain clarity about issues of continuity and change in people lives that are more difficult to apprehend in studies focused on a single point in time (Miranda 2010, Tyler, Cuervo & Wyn 2011). Longitudinal studies also make it possible to confirm or dispute predictions about youth transitions enabling a re-assessment of patterns of transition, particularly in times of rapid social change (Longo & Deleo 2012). As young people are investing in their education well into their twenties, their goals of achieving a secure, meaningful job can take up to a decade after leaving secondary school (see Andres & Wyn 2010). This means that meaningful analysis needs to have a view of their transitions over time.

# BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

Previously we have provided an in-depth analysis of changes in the Australian economic and labour structure, including the deregulation of labour relations, the collapse of the youth full-time labour market and the impact of the financial recession in the early 1990s on young people’s options and opportunities (Cuervo & Wyn 2011, Wyn 2009). These economic and employment changes brought a closer alignment between education and youth and labour policies, reflecting a view of education a tool for the development of human capital to support the country’s productivity. These developments also resulted in increasing pressure on young people to continue with further and tertiary studies to remain competitive in increasingly insecure labour markets. Previous analysis of Life Patterns data also shows that participants in both cohorts placed a strong emphasis on gaining the educational credentials that they believed would enable them to successfully integrate into these labour markets. National data however, shows that despite the high investment by young people in education the nexus between education and employment is becoming more complex, with precarious and insecure work also affecting those that have completed tertiary studies (ABS 2009a, Carroll & Tani 2011, FYA 2013). International studies reveal the tenuous relationship between education and work (Ball 2006, Chauvel 2010, Brown, Lauder & Ashton 2011).

Beck’s book, *The Brave New World of Work* (2000), offers an analysis of these changes in the labour market, identifying the shift from a Fordist to a Risk regime; from a work society to a knowledge society. He identifies a scenario where job security, standard hours of work and a job for life are becoming a thing of the past. Beck argued that the new landscape of work is characterised by ‘a destandardized, fragmented, plural “underemployment system” characterized by highly flexible, time-intensive and spatially decentralized forms of deregulated paid labour’ (2000: 77). At the core of Beck’s and other scholars’ views of the changing nature of work is the rapid change to the economic base of developed countries, involving a shift from the primary and secondary production sectors to a knowledge society based on the service sector; the globalisation of economic production and trade; flexible and deregulated labour relations; technological advances in production and communication and changes in the occupational structure.

Some scholars interested on labour and youth studies are wary about claims of a clear distinction between past and present contexts of work. For example, MacDonald (2009) asserts that while the growth of job insecurity might have been exaggerated, what is needed is a better understanding of which social groups are exposed to precarious work and job insecurity<sup>1</sup>. Campbell (2013: 17) argues that the current period is, in broad terms, a resurgence of precarious labour market conditions (e.g. lack of formal social welfare support, unregulated labour relations and scarce

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald (2009: 168) cites Fevre’s (2007) study of labour force in the US and UK where he criticise social theorists Beck, Sennett, Castells and Giddens in their view that employment has become more precarious and insecure. For Fevre, ‘it has not been employment that has become insecure and flexible but social theory’ (p. 531).

collective representation) similar to those in the earlier periods of capitalist development in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> For Campbell, the employment anomaly is situated in the post-war experience (1945-1975) of 30 years of employment stability in developed countries. This period of job security was based on 'strong trade unions and the consolidation of reasonably comprehensive social protection', which set minimum labour standards (Campbell 2013: 17). Pollock (2002) also believes that the abnormal period was the post-war era, with full-employment and stability, and the current labour market conditions for youth, particularly for those in semi and unskilled sectors, represent a return to early twentieth century standards.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Quinlan (2012), analysing Great Britain and Australia's labour market conditions and Kalleberg (2009) studying the United States, asserts that precarious work has been present since the existence of paid employment.

Whether the current situation represents a return to an older labour paradigm or not might still be under discussion, but there is a widespread agreement among youth and labour market scholars that the current landscape of work is increasingly dominated by flexible, casual, precarious and insecure patterns of employment. In his analysis of young people's life chances in an environment of work scarcity and unemployment in France, Chauvel (2010: 75) believes that France is seeing 'the emergence of a immense *génération précaire*, youth who paradoxically are middle-class in terms of education and underclass in terms of socio-economic position'. He is concerned with the fracture *générationnelle* (generational rift) between early baby bombers and younger generations, with the former acquiring a position of 'insiders' and the latter becoming 'outsiders' within the labour market (75).<sup>4</sup> Chauvel argues that one of the greatest challenges for young people and society at large is not just the sacrifices a young person has to sustain in order to gain secure employment but the 'scarring effects' of uncertain and precarious labour markets. (Other studies also provide evidence that precarious, temporary work has deleterious effects on future work prospects because it reinforces a vicious cycle of low-skill jobs with few chances of training or up-skill for better employment (see OECD 2004, Spoonley 2004).) It is worthwhile quoting Chauvel (2010: 84) at length about the 'scarring effects' on younger generations in France:

For those who entered the labor market under difficult economic conditions, the periods of unemployment they faced, the necessity to accept less qualified jobs with lower wages, and the consecutive delays in career progression, imply negative stimuli for their own trajectories (decline in ambition, lack of valued work experiences) and could appear as a negative signal for future potential employers... the cohorts who entered the labor force after 1975 and experienced an economic slump and mass unemployment have been early victims of new generational dynamics, and they retain the long-term scars of their initial difficulties in the labor market.

<sup>2</sup> However, later in his paper, Campbell argues that major differences exist between both periods. He points out to major differences such as a more diversified workforce, including a greater participation by women, new forms of work participation, stronger labour regulation and social welfare system than more than a century ago.

<sup>3</sup> To complicate matters, Goodwin and O'Connor (2005) argue that universal smooth and linear school to work transitions during the 'golden age' of the post-war have been exaggerated, and that complex trajectories into the labour market were already a reality for young people.

<sup>4</sup> Chauvel (2010) is also concerned with the impact that long-term employment precariousness has on youth and the related sustainability of the French regime. In his popular book, *The precariat: the new dangerous class*, Standing (2009) also alerts to the alienation of important sectors of society through precarious work and the possibility of this, heterogeneous, group to be seduced by politically extreme messages. Looking into the Australian case, Wilson and Ebert (2013: 270-71) believe that 'job precarity' can translate into 'political precarity', a precarity that the depoliticisation of work instils, where workers feel that no political force represents them and there is nothing at stake for them in society.

Genda's (2005) analysis of Japan's 1990s recession also concludes that a generational rift has occurred, whereby middle-aged and older workers jobs were protected by slashing youth employment (with the view that once senior workers retired, young people will access those jobs). Chauvel's and Genda's analyses point to the vulnerability of young people in contemporary labour markets. Through a sociological approach, looking at the Australian case, Wilson and Ebert (2013: 264) affirm that the 'general rise of precarious work has increased the vulnerabilities and levels of distress, not only for individuals, but for whole societies'. Dwyer and Wyn's (2001) analysis of the education and work trajectories in the 1990s of cohort 1 in the Life Patterns study reveals the non-linear character of their transitions, their strong investment in education and the precarity of their employment experiences. Seven years out from secondary school, it is timely to analyse the employment experiences of the second cohort, including the nature of their working conditions, exploring the context of labour beyond the rigid categories of employed and unemployed. In the next section we present a brief description of the Life Patterns research program.

# THE LIFE PATTERNS PROGRAM

This research report draws on the Life Patterns longitudinal research program. This program follows the lives of two generations of young Australians. The first stage of the project commenced in 1991, following a cohort of young people who had just completed their secondary education. During 2005 and 2006 a new cohort of Australian students in their final years of secondary school was recruited, with the aim of following this new cohort in their own right and also to compare their experiences with the first cohort. The research has consistently explored the areas of education, work, social and personal relationships and wellbeing and health. It has looked at the goals and aspirations of participants as they make their way through different social institutions (such as education, work, and family). The Life Patterns program employs a mixed-method approach, involving surveys and interviews that generate quantitative and qualitative data. The data from surveys and interviews enables us to fill in the gaps from each technique. The longitudinal approach allows for a greater visibility of continuity and change in participants' lives. Thus, rather than a unique snapshot in time, the Life Patterns research program has the advantage of rendering visible the dynamism and messiness of life – particularly in these last two decades of rapid social change in Australia.

The cohort 1 sample was derived from 29,155 school leavers in Victoria. In 1996, the sample was reduced to a more manageable size of 2,000 participants, keeping gender, socioeconomic and location consistency. From 1996 to the year 2000 annual surveys and individual in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of between 50 to 100 people were conducted. From the year 2000 surveys were conducted bi-annually. Cohort 2 was recruited in 2005 and 2006, with a sample of 3977 students from Victoria, NSW, ACT and Tasmania. Members of cohort 2 are surveyed annually, and a sub-set is interviewed bi-annually. Attrition is one of the greatest challenges for any longitudinal study and this program is not an exception. After attrition, cohort 1 has 284 participants from Victoria, and cohort 2 currently has 626 participants from Victoria, Tasmania, the ACT and New South Wales. Despite the greater attrition of men than women, the sample has broadly retained consistency in terms of location and socioeconomic background. In 2011, 67% of cohort 1 were women and in 2013 cohort 2 had similar proportions of men and women (68% women and 32% men). Amongst cohort 1 participants, 85% have completed a tertiary degree compared with 77% of cohort 2. This means that we have what we have previously labelled a 'success file', a slightly higher percentage of young people who have tertiary and further education qualifications than in the wider population (Cuervo & Wyn 2011). Rather than being a disadvantage to this study, the over-qualification of our sample resonates with some of the issues at stake in this report.

This report draws on data from both cohorts, primarily using survey data from the first seven years after leaving secondary school to analyse the relevance of work in young people's lives (and particularly in relation to education). Surveys contain closed questions of various types, usually requiring a yes or no option, and a Likert scale, which asks respondents to tick one answer on a five-point scale or a response to a series of options. They also include open-ended questions with spaces for respondents to write their own answers. For instance, in the 2013 cohort 2 survey participants were asked a series of questions about the link between education and work and their current personal circumstances. This series of questions included six statements to which the participants could agree, disagree or mark not applicable. The statements included, 'My tertiary qualification helped me get the job I have now' and 'There are very few jobs available in the area related to my field of study'. These questions were followed by an open-ended question that enabled participants to write at length about any issue concerning this topic. Participants in both cohorts have also been interviewed in different waves during the first seven years out of school.

# EDUCATION

Generations X and Y are the most educated in the history of Australia (Cuervo & Wyn 2011, Cuervo, Crofts & Wyn 2013). National data corroborates this claim. Between 1976 and 2001, post-compulsory education increased from 9% to 24% for women and 16% to 23% for men (ABS 2005). By 2009, 48% and 41% women and men aged 20-24 years respectively held a further and higher education degree (ABS 2010a). Tertiary education for Generations X and Y has become a normative aspect of their lives.<sup>5</sup>

Participants in the Life Patterns research program reflect the significance of education in their life with 85% of participants in both cohorts having done some form of further study. We acknowledge that there is a significant minority that have not continued studying after leaving school (15%). Nonetheless, by 2013 three quarters of cohort 2 participants (77%) had completed a tertiary education degree. This high level of tertiary education participation amongst Life Patterns participants has a gender and spatial parity, including in the latter a strong involvement of non-metropolitan participants who have been prepared to leave their rural communities to attend further and higher education institutions in regional and urban centres.

These generations of Australians display the belief that post-secondary school credentials are a strategy for securing stable employment and a job in their field of study. They share this approach with young people in other countries, including the US. Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011) refer to this increasing investment in post-compulsory education by young people in United States as the 'neoliberal opportunity bargain'. That is, a belief that in a knowledge economy those individuals that invest in education will be rewarded in the labour market with better employment opportunities. It is the notion that the economy of the XXI century is 'a world of smart people doing smart things in a smart way', where the idea that 'learning equals earning' is accepted by young people (Brown, Lauder and Ashton 2011: 5).

Throughout the surveys and interview waves of the Life Patterns program, participants have reflected the importance of further education as a strategy to achieve employment security. At the age of 23 years, we asked both cohorts 'what is the link between doing post-school study or training and getting a better job in the future?' Their responses revealed generational parity with 47% of cohort 1 and 44% of cohort2 participants stating a 'very strong' belief in this link. Participants in both generations say that a second degree is a worthwhile investment to achieve labour market competitiveness and security. In 2002, at the age of 28-29 years old, 58% of participants from cohort 1 had completed

<sup>5</sup> In 2011, 57% of Australians aged 15-64 years hold a non-school qualification (a 10% increase since 2001) (ABS 2012a). Among those working in Australia, 66% hold a 'non-school qualification', with the 'highest proportion of workers with a non-school qualification were 24-34 years old, with 77%', including at least a third (36%) whose highest qualification was a Bachelor degree or higher' (ABS 2010b). In other words, there are more people than ever in the history of this country holding a post-secondary school degree.

or were studying for a second qualification. In 2013, at the age of 24-25 years old, four out of ten participants in cohort 2 stated that they were planning or currently doing further studies after their first tertiary qualification and a quarter of participants that have done some study felt that they 'need another degree to help me get work in my chosen area of study'. As this female participant from a major urban centre, who studied administration, stressed in 2013: *'With more and more people gaining a university qualification, in order to stay competitive in the job market, I believe I will have to go back and do further study.'*

## **Links between education and work**

However, the relationship between further education and work is not as strong as neoliberal policies in the last two decades have assumed. Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011: 5) affirm that the 'neoliberal opportunity bargain' has failed to deliver on the 'promise of education, jobs, and rewards' for the majority of the American youth. They argue that competition for good quality jobs has globalised and young middle class professionals have to compete with professionals around the world in a 'global auction', particularly from countries with emerging economies (e.g. India). Chauvel (2010: 76) argues that social attainment for new generations of French youth is constrained by the fact that 'education has become both more necessary and less sufficient as a condition for social success'. Investing in post-compulsory education is a must for youth but 'the "returns to education" cannot be taken for granted'. Like many other researchers (see Ball 2006, Jones 2005, Pusey 2007), Chauvel argues that within this environment of weaker links between education and secure employment, family solidarity has become critical for youth access to a good standard of living.<sup>6</sup> The comparative analysis of Australian and Canadian youth who left school in the early 1990s by Andres and Wyn (2010) also demonstrates the weakening of the link between education and work. While young people in both countries invested strongly in post-compulsory education to gain labour market competitiveness in the 1990s, it took them at least a decade to find satisfactory work.

Data from cohort 2 shows that for approximately a third of participants, the quest to secure a job in their field of studies remains elusive. Figure 1 describes the links between study and work for cohort 2.

<sup>6</sup> Analysis from the ABS (2009b), indirectly, reports this solidarity between parents and their offspring by asserting that in 2006, almost one in four people aged 20 – 34 were living at their parental home (and almost half of those who leave before their mid-30s return home at least once).

**Figure 1. Link between study and work, for cohort 2, aged 23- 25, in 2012 – 2013, (FoS = Field of Study), (%)**

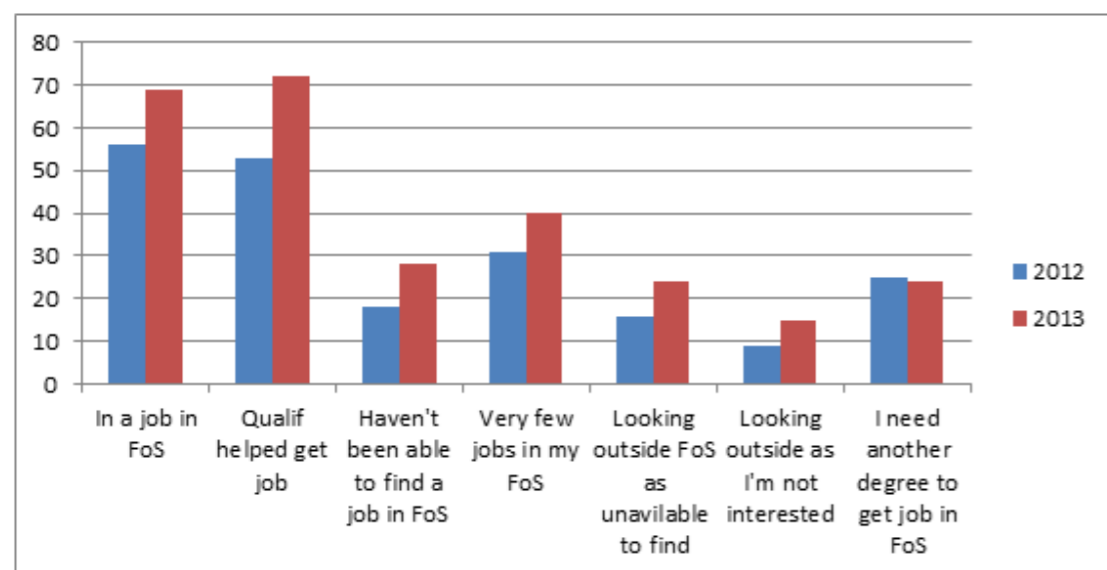


Figure 1 shows some positive signs in terms of the strength of the link between education and work. In the last two years (2012-2013) there has been an increase of at least 10% of participants working in their field of study and of 15% who found a job that related to their education qualifications.<sup>7</sup> However, there has also been almost a 10% increase of participants who are concerned with the scarce availability of work in their field of study and with those looking outside of their field because they cannot find a job.

For example, this female participant who studied veterinary science and lived in a regional centre commented on her attempts to find work that would enable her to use her qualification: *'I have been able to find a job in the relevant area but in searching found that jobs were limited. For a time I contemplated completing a second degree to broaden my options.'* Other participants also found difficulties in finding a job in their field of study. For example, this male participant, who lives in a regional city and studied mechanical engineering aid: *'After finishing my degree I spent almost a year trying to find work in my field of study. I was then able to find work in my field or study but know of many fellow students who went through the same course as I who have not yet found work in our field of study.'*

While figure 1 shows that the pathway from study to work is not a smooth process, it is important to distinguish among different sectors in the labour market. Current data for cohort 2 shows that participants in the field of teaching and nursing, skilled trades, and law, medicine and accountancy were more likely to find work in their area of study than those in the creative industries, administration and technicians. As this female participant from cohort 2 commented in 2013: *'There will always be a need for doctors in our society and therefore there will always be jobs in my field of work. However training positions in Tertiary Hospitals will become more competitive as the number of university graduates in my field increases.'*

<sup>7</sup> However, national data about the relevance of post-schools qualification to gain a job in the same field of study states that those that hold a higher education qualification are more likely than those with a vocational qualification to achieve this (68% vs. 58%) (ABS 2012a). While this national data is for the general population, our participants in cohort 2 at the age of 24-25 years show no great difference (TAFE 71% vs. Uni 69%).

### Establishing a career

Over the years, participants in both cohorts have been asked if their current job was in their preferred career area or a stepping stone to a job. Beck (2000) asserts that in late modern society individuals should expect to hold different jobs in different career sectors over the span of their working life. Dwyer & Wyn (2001), examining the first decade of Life Patterns cohort 1 participants lives after leaving school, arrived at a similar conclusion about the difficulties of replicating previous generation's pathways of work where jobs were seen in terms of 'career' and where an individual could expect to work for extended periods for the same company or in the same occupation. Other youth sociologists have also found that career pathways have become more uncertain and a job for life is increasingly difficult to achieve for young people (Andres & Wyn 2010, Mortimer 2009, Stokes 2012). In particular, the initial period of working life for young people is characterised by the combination of study with a high horizontal mobility between jobs that are precarious, casual and non-standard (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). Figure 2 shows responses from participants in both cohorts during their twenties to the question about the relationship between their work and career.

**Figure 2. The job is 'my career area' or is a 'stepping stone towards my career area', both cohorts, aged 22 to 28, for cohort 1 1996-2002, for cohort 2 2009-2012, (%)**

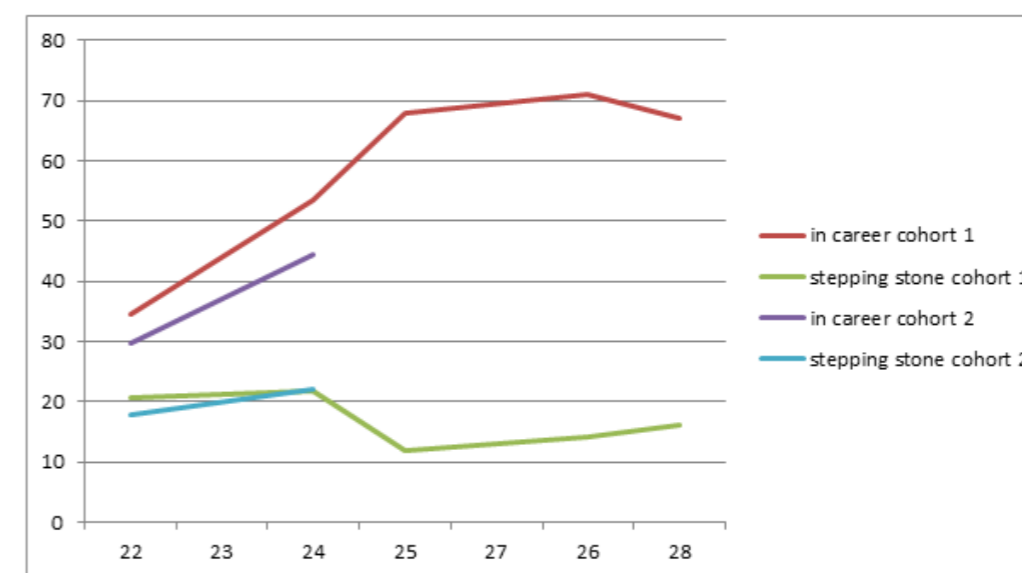
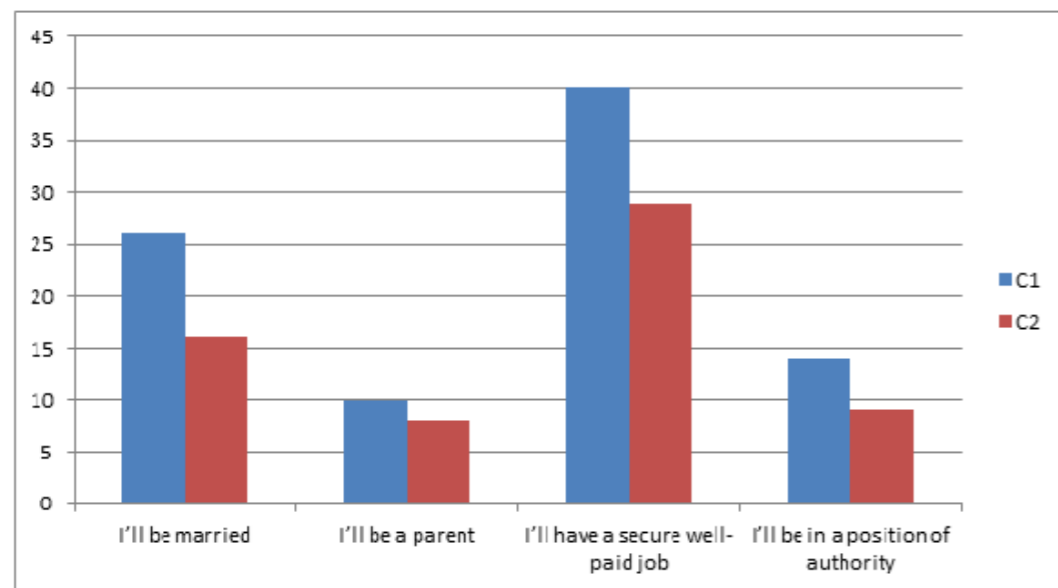


Figure 2 reveals that participants in cohort 2 are finding it harder than their cohort 1 counterparts to get a job that could be defined as in their preferred career area. As mentioned above, differences can be found within the type of industry an individual is seeking to work in. Nonetheless, the data reveals that overall there is a tenuous link between education and work and that young people over a period of a quarter of a century have been finding it difficult to get a job in their preferred career area. The latest cohort has grasped the reality that achieving a tertiary education qualification does not correspond directly with job security better than their predecessors did. When asked at the age of 23 years about what may happen in the next five years, cohort 1 expressed a greater confidence that they would have arrived at certain markers of transition in their lives (including job security) than cohort 2. Figure 3 shows these differences in expectations of transition between the cohorts.

**Figure 3. Likelihood of the following in five years?, by 'very likely', aged 23, in 1996 and 2011, (%)**



In the first half of their twenties, work seems to dominate their aspirations and priorities in life. Nonetheless, two differences stand out: firstly, at the age of 23, cohort 2 participants are less likely than their predecessors to predict that they will be married in the next five years, reflecting a cultural shift in which young people are delaying marriage in favour of concentrating on other aspects of their lives, such as work, for the time being. Secondly, cohort 2 participants at age 23 are less optimistic about being in a 'secure well-paid job' in five years time than cohort 1 participants were. In other words, they anticipate that it will take longer to achieve these goals than cohort 1 did, reflecting greater awareness of the social and economic conditions that surround them. Andres and Wyn (2010) showed that participants in cohort 1 over-estimated the difficulties in achieving these goals, taking them at least a decade to gain a secure job and form a family.

### ***What happens when study is completed?***

It is important to distinguish within the data among those participants that have already obtained a university or TAFE qualification and those still studying or have not pursued a post-school study pathway. For both cohorts, in their mid-twenties those participants that had completed their tertiary studies were more likely to be in a full-time job than those still studying or without a tertiary education qualification. However, especially amongst cohort 2 participants, those who had no post-school qualification were more likely to be in a permanent job than their more educated peers, as a result of their earlier entry into the labour market. However, permanent status does not mean that they are in full time work, have good pay, work standard hours or have good future work prospects. Table 1 describes these patterns.

**Table 1. Employment, by level of education, aged 24-25, in 1998 and 2013, (%)**

		Completed study	Still studying	Non PSS or discontinued
Full time employment	C1	80.1	49.6	59.4
	C2	65.3	36.8	66.2
Part time employment	C1	6.7	17.9	13.1
	C2	17.5	27.8	24.3
Unemployed	C1	3.8	5.6	8.8
	C2	4.3	4.8	7.9
Permanent employment	C1	69.2	58.5	71.9
	C2	57.5	41.7	73.0
Sessional/casual	C1	6.1	18.5	8.8
	C2	18.4	28.6	13.8

Note: 'No PSS' = No Post-School Study

Table 1 also shows two distinctive characteristics of the Australian labour market in the last quarter of a century. Firstly, unemployment is higher among those with no tertiary education credentials in both generations – revealing the importance of education in achieving a foothold in the labour market. Secondly, Generation Y participants are more likely to be involved in casual or sessional work than their predecessors in Gen X at the same age. This could reflect a greater consciousness by this younger generation about the meaning of casual work and/or an increasing casualisation of the labour market (for the latter argument see Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter 2009). However, it is a concern to see that, at the age of 25, almost two out of ten cohort 2 participants' with a tertiary education credential are still involved in casual work and only two thirds have achieved a permanent job.



# THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF LABOUR

Given the increasing precariousness of the Australian labour market over the last two decades, the fact that almost a fifth of cohort 2 participants with tertiary education credentials are still involved in casual work should not come as a surprise. The publication *Australian Social Trends* by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2009a: 18) provides evidence that casual work is becoming established as a new form of employment, affecting mostly young people aged 15-24 years (in 2007, 20% youth and 14% for other employees were casuals).<sup>8</sup> In this report, the ABS shows that casual workers are less likely to choose when to take holiday leave and to work extra hours to take time off. The report also states that casual workers are also more likely to work part-time than other employees (71% vs. 18%) but at the same time have greater flexibility in the times of the week they work (mostly due to the part-time character of their job) (ABS 2009a: 19). Casual employees are three times more likely to have earnings that varied from pay to pay and twice as likely to work hours that varied from week to week than other employees. These patterns of work represent a significant change between generations X and Y.<sup>9</sup>

While the high numbers of young people in casual work and in underemployment may reflect their status as students, the trends reflected here point to a trend towards increasing uncertainty in the labour market. Chronic patterns of precarious work for young people are of concern for them, their families and society at-large. White and Wyn (2013: 161) argue that youth experiencing 'precarious employment and long-term unemployment are the most marginalised and excluded in society'. National data on precarious and irregular work, shows that the younger the worker the less control she has over these hours of work and rates of pay.<sup>10</sup> For instance, 35.4% of young people aged 20-24 years had a job where 'earnings varied week to week' compared to 16.8% of those aged 25-34 years and 16.1% for all ages (ABS 2012b). Similarly, 28.4% of those aged 20-24 years 'had a say in start/finish time' of their job compared with 39.2% of those aged 25-34 years and 39.8% for all ages (ABS 2012b).<sup>11</sup>

8 The ABS (2009a: 18) defines casuals as 'employees (excluding owner managers of incorporated enterprises) who are not entitled to paid sick or holiday leave'. This ABS report also shows that casual employment in Australia has risen from 21% of employees in 1992 to 25% in 2007. Nonetheless, Wilson and Ebert (2013: 268) state that 'Australia's casual labour force... represents one of the largest contingent labour forces in the OECD', including the 'growth in full-time casual work' in recent years. While permanent work in 2007 was still the predominant type of employment in the Australian labour market, this accounted for only six out of ten persons in the workforce (Campbell, MacDonald & Baxter 2009 – the authors argue this percentage, 61%, would be even slightly lower if one takes out of the equation the 4% of fixed term employees that are counted in the permanent category).

9 This is not the only new trend in the youth labour landscape of Australia: the steadily increase of underemployment is another significant change materialising in the last few decades. The Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded in February 1978 an underemployment rate of 3.1% for young people aged 15-24 years, doubling to 6.0 by November 1989 and reaching 15% by August 2013 (ABS 2013).

10 Women are also one of the 'losers' in the increasing precarisation and casualisation of the labour market. While they have increased their participation in the workforce in the last thirty years, women are more likely to be employed in casual and part-time jobs than men (ABS 2009a) – in many instances, revealing a dual role of workers and carers that responds to the persistence of gender stratification in society (see Vosko, MacDonald & Campbell 2009, and also Cuervo, Crofts, Wyn 2012, 2013 for an analysis of gender inequality based on Life Patterns data).

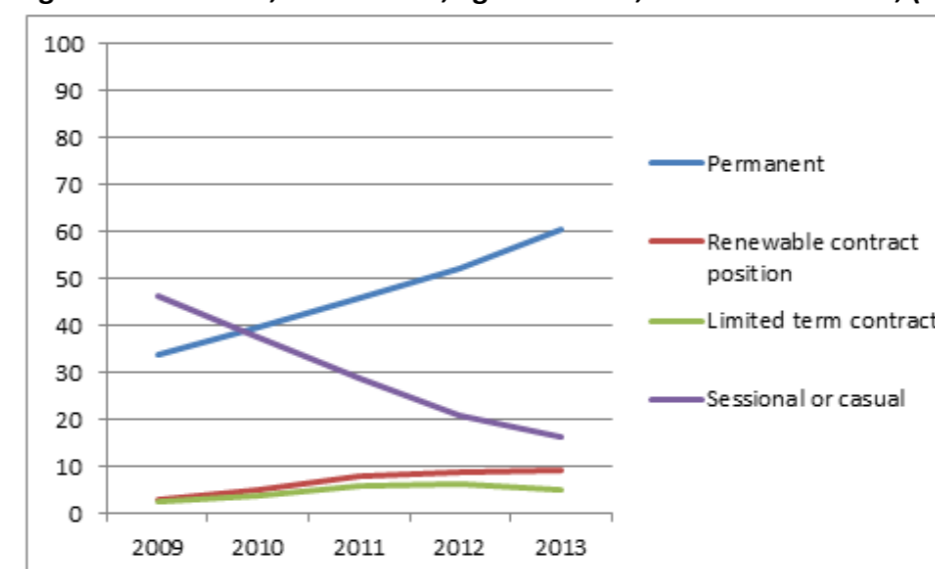
11 Data gets worse the younger the worker, 42.6% and 18.5% of young people aged 15-19 years with jobs where 'earning varied week to week' and 'had a say in start/finish time' respectively.

## *Precarious and irregular work as the norm?*

The quality of jobs undertaken by young people is also a significant issue. The traditional categories of 'employed' or 'unemployed' no longer provide a useful framework for analysing youth labour markets (Furlong 2007). There are many gradations between employment and unemployment, including underemployment, precarious employment and casual employment. These gradations reflect the significant restructuring of the Australian, and global, economy and labour market. The deregulation of the labour market in the late 1980s and early 1990s and changes in industrial relations agreements have transformed the dynamics of work in Australia. The transformation includes the fragmentation of working hours and the rise of casual work in an increasingly 24/7 economy, which profoundly shape the lives of young people (Stokes 2012, White and Wyn 2013, Woodman 2012).

Longitudinal analysis of Life Patterns data reveals that participants tend to secure more secure employment over the years. In 2013, six out of ten participants in cohort 2 have a permanent job. Figure 4 shows this trend.

**Figure 4. Job status, for cohort 2, aged 20 to 25, from 2009 to 2013, (%)**



Despite this, by their mid-twenties, 40% of participants in cohort 2 had still not achieved a permanent job. Members of cohort 1 had a similar experience: at the age of 26, 38% of participants were not in a permanent job. A lack of a permanent employment position has significant implications for job security. A recent independent inquiry into insecure work in Australia sponsored by the Council of Trade Unions (ACTU 2012: 14) defines insecure work as:

poor quality work that provides workers with little economic security and little control over their working lives. The characteristics of these jobs can include unpredictable and fluctuating pay; inferior rights and entitlements; limited or no access to paid leave; irregular and unpredictable working hours; a lack of security and/or uncertainty over the length of the job; and a lack of any say at work over wages, conditions and work organisation.

Insecure work can be experienced by all workers. However, it is often associated with certain forms of employment, including casual work, fixed-term work, seasonal work, contracting and labour hire.<sup>12</sup>

Campbell (2013) argues that insecure work is more than just non-permanent, casual or part-time work. It involves insecurity of income, benefits, working-time, employment and representation. However, Campbell argues that these forms of labour arrangements have become part of the common landscape for workers under a neoliberal consensus promoted by employer associations and conservative think tanks.

Their central contention is that the problem of insecure work is falsely labelled; most of it is better described as 'flexible' work. They argue that the forms of flexible work, such as casual work, are part and parcel of the diversity of modern labour markets, welcomed both by employers and individual employees, and they should not be restricted by protective regulation or trade union action. Indeed, they advocate further labour market deregulation and further restrictions on trade union action in order to increase labour market flexibility and improve prosperity. These arguments are largely free of any supporting evidence but remain dominant in the public discussion. This position invokes flexibility but clearly confuses flexibility for employers with flexibility for employees. (Campbell 2013: 19)

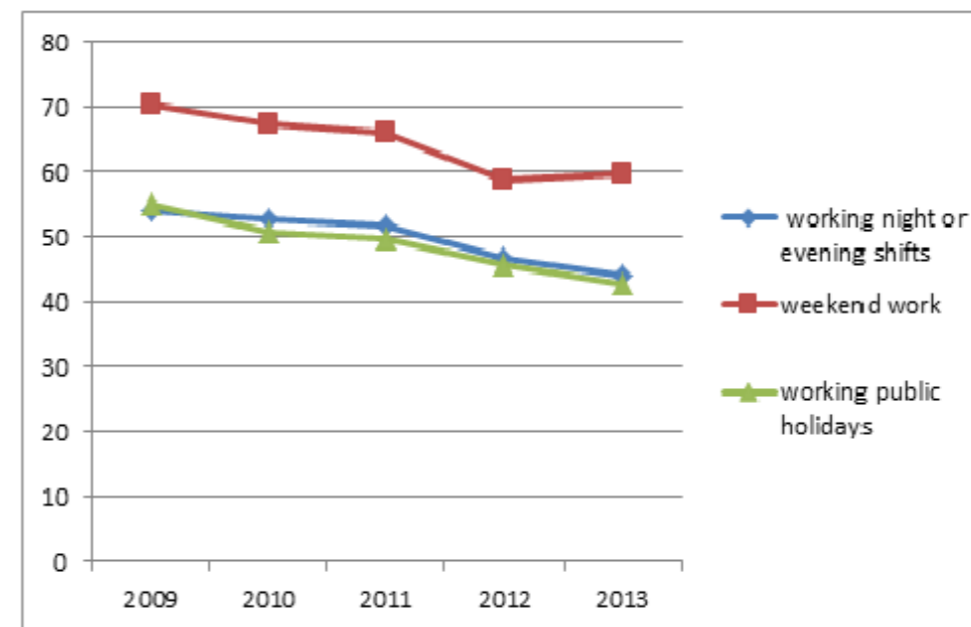
Insecure work also refers to the high variation in routines of work. Standardised working-time arrangements, once at the core of employment relations between workers and business, have been eroded by neoliberal pressures, including weakening state protective regulation and greater control by management of working patterns (Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter 2009: 61). Working-time insecurity involves working hours that are 'irregular in number and timing, involving non-social periods and multiple starts', 'overly short', 'overly long' and can impact workers 'control of work (and life)' (Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter 2009: 72).<sup>13</sup> Woodman's (2012, 2013) analysis of the impact of precarious work on the lives of Life Patterns participants in cohort 2 found that young people studying and/or working (generally irregular hours in precarious, casual jobs) find it hard to synchronise time with friends and family, generating challenges for balancing life.<sup>14</sup> Life Patterns data reveals that of participants currently working in 2013, 73% have a job that involves irregular hours. Figure 5 shows the trend towards irregular hours over the last few years.

12 See also Campbell, Whitehouse and Baxter (2009) for a good historical analysis of the last two decades of employment types in Australia. In this analysis, Campbell and colleagues state that casual work is the most vulnerable employment condition for a worker because of its lack of protection to unfair dismissal, no right to notice and lack of entitlements such as annual leave, sick leave and payment for public holidays. For the authors, 'casual work is most accurately regarded as a particularly degraded form of temporary employment' (p. 64).

13 Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter (2009: 72) argue that casual employees are at the forefront of working-time insecurity exposure, with employers being able to 'determine the number and timing of hours and to alter these at short notice'.

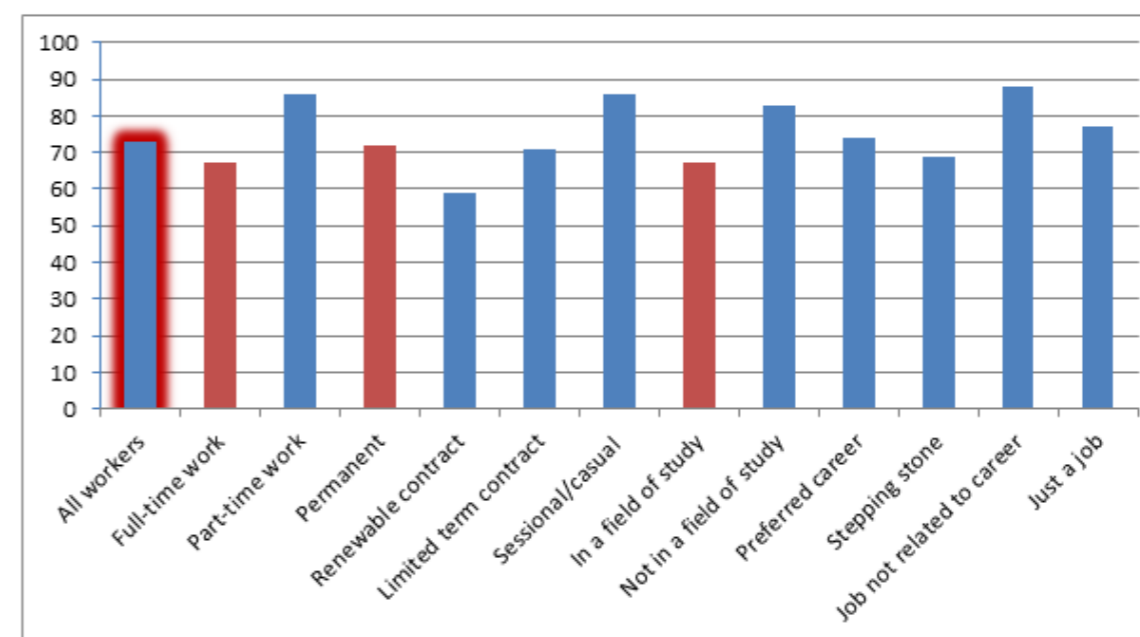
14 Balancing different spheres of life, particularly work and family, has been a common problem for Life Patterns participants of cohort 1 (see Cuervo & Wyn 2011, Wyn et al. 2010). National data states that this is also an issue of worry for many families. For example, in 2007, couple families where both parents worked, 49% of fathers and 67% of mothers felt rushed from trying to balance work and family responsibilities (ABS 2009a: 6).

Figure 5. Irregular hours of work, for cohort 2, aged 20 to 25, 2009 to 2013, (%)



Figures 4 and 5 show that the experience of non-permanent employment and irregular hours of work is declining over time for individuals. Our data also reveals that young workers in part-time employment<sup>15</sup> and/or in jobs that are not strictly related to a career or their field of studies are the most vulnerable to work involving non-standard shifts, reflecting the normalisation of precarious work in the youth labour market White and Wyn (2013).

Figure 6. Non-standard shifts for different categories, for cohort 2, aged 24-25, in 2013, (%)



15 National data shows that part-time workers are more likely to be employed in casual jobs (ABS 2009b). For young people aged 20-24 years, 16.8% of full-time workers had a casual job compared to 69.7% of part-time workers holding a casual job. For young people aged 25-29 years, 11.4% of full-time workers had a casual job compared to 54.5% of part-time workers holding a casual job (ABS 2009b).

Figure 6 shows the so-called “winners” in the labour market competition – those holding a full-time, permanent job that is in their field of study – also struggle to move beyond the area of non-standard shifts. Figure 7 shows the relation between level of education and irregular hours of work.

**Figure 7. Non-standard shifts by level of education, for cohort 2, aged 24-25, in 2013, (%)**

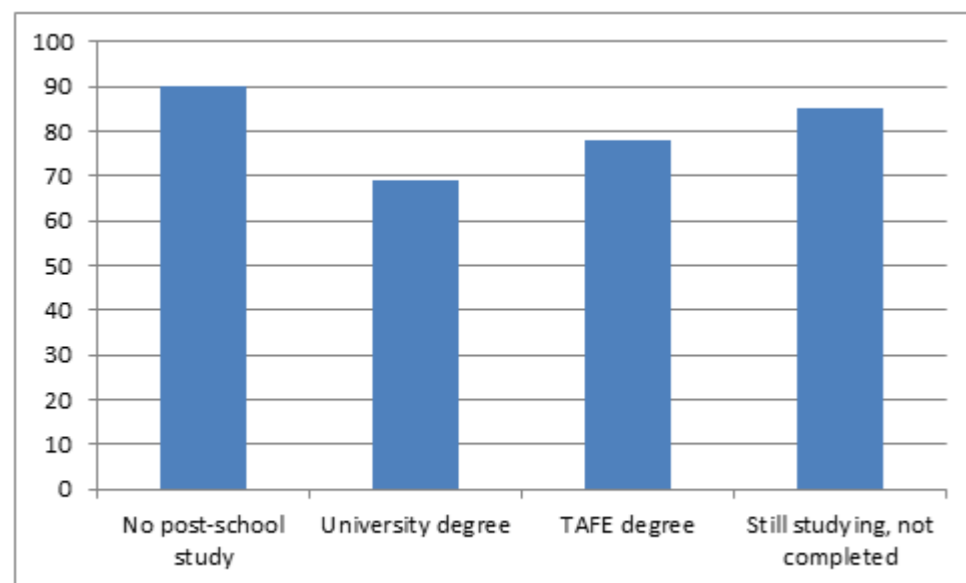


Figure 7 shows that young people with a tertiary education credential are more likely to be working in jobs that do not involve irregular hours than those that do not have this qualification. Nonetheless, the percentage is still high: almost 70% of participants holding a university degree are working on weekends, evenings or public holidays.

The level of education is not the only variable that affects the likelihood of having to work irregular hours. The type of work and industry an individual does have also an impact on employment. Young people working in the hospitality sector and retail (96%), in skilled trades (88%) and creative industries (e.g. music, publishing, journalism) (84%) were more likely to be doing non-standard shifts than those in education and health sector (60%), in administrative and business jobs (56%) and in professional (e.g. lawyers, accountants) jobs (70%). Beyond the different variables and aspects of the labour market and education that might affect the type, quality and mode of work, one thing is clear: the employment trend from previous generation standard week of work of 40 hours from Monday to Friday 9 to 5 is almost a thing of the past.

### Working conditions

When they were aged 23, we asked both cohorts in 1996 and 2011 respectively, to rate the importance of conditions at the time of deciding on a job. Their responses reveal greater inter-generational similarities than differences and some of the differences are more a result of a different way of understanding and addressing the labour market. Figure 8 depicts their assessments of the conditions that are ‘very important’ for when deciding on a job for the future.

**Figure 8. Importance of the following in deciding on a job for the future, by ‘very important’, for both cohorts, aged 23, in 1996 and 2011, (%)**

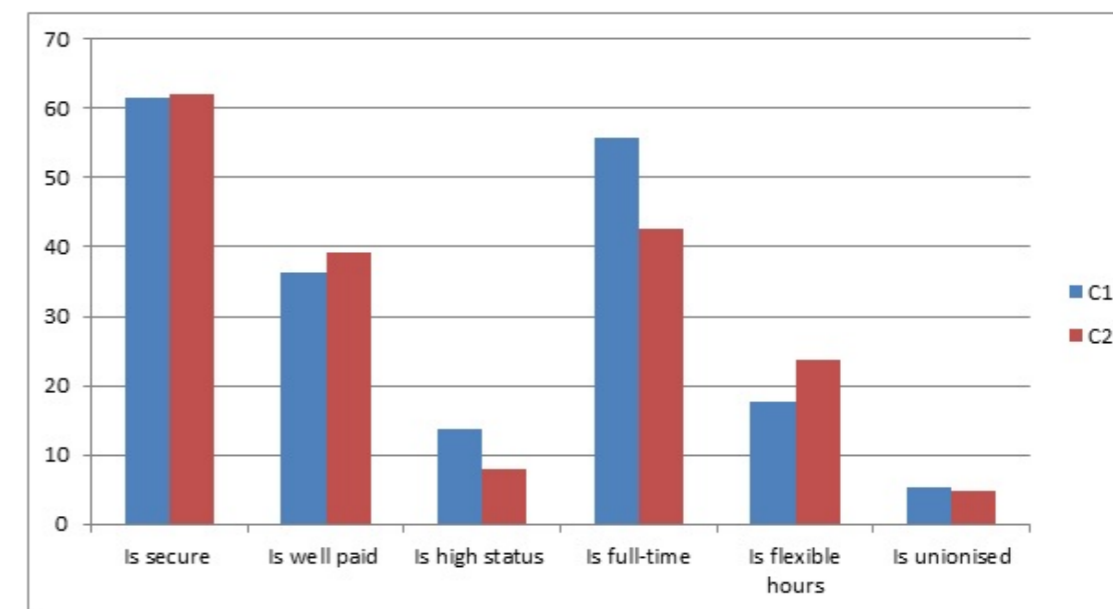


Figure 8 shows that security at work is paramount for both generations. However, compared to cohort 1, participants in cohort 2 place less emphasis on getting high status jobs and having full time work, and place more emphasis on job flexibility.<sup>16</sup> This difference in the acceptance of ‘flexible hours’ by participants in cohort 2 reflects Andres and Wyn’s (2010) conclusion that young people are actively shaping their world and responding to uncertainty in the employment market. Wyn and colleagues (2008) argue that unlike their parents’ generations, these young people valued horizontal mobility over the tradition upward social mobility of the past. Having the right set of dispositions and skills to move across industries has become as important as moving upwards in your employment sector or company.

Over the years we have asked participants in both cohorts about their satisfaction with various aspects of their lives, and concerns about their working conditions. Table 2 provides a generational comparison of working conditions at the age of 24-25 years.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell (2013), Kalleberg (2009) and Wilson and Ebert (2013) point out that ‘flexibility’ at work is a preferred option with employers in their restructuring strategies (including the ability to reduce labour costs) rather than with workers willingness to have a high degree of flexibility at work and intermittent jobs

**Table 2. Conditions of current work, by ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’, for both cohorts, aged 24-25, in 1995 and 2013, (%)**

	Completed study	Completed study	Continuing study	Continuing study	No PSS	No PSS
	C1	C2	C1	C2	C1	C2
Pay is good	61.6	70.0	60.1	59.0	62.0	66.7
Chances for promotion are good	48.4	46.0	39.8	38.5	34.0	52.2
Job security is good	68.6	64.4	60.2	60.1	67.1	63.9
Is what I expected	63.9	59.8	53.3	49.2	45.0	60.6
Psychologically stressful	54.9	50.0	41.5	39.7	47.7	44.4
Physically stressful	27.0	27.8	24.5	26.4	34.0	33.3

Table 2 raises a plethora of issues in relation to the link between education and work and about young people’s expectations of this relationship. In general, at least a third of participants in both cohorts were not completely satisfied with their working conditions. At least 50% of both cohorts disagreed that ‘chances for promotion are good’ in their current job. Neither has the issue of ‘job security’ improved over the years. Table 2 shows that job security remains a significant concern. (Our longitudinal analysis shows that over the years, for both cohorts, having a ‘secure job’ has been rated within the top three priorities in life – family and social relationships are the other top priorities.)

In terms of the relationship between level of education and employment conditions, for those that have already completed study, work conditions show remarkable similarities across the 15 year span of these cohorts. The exception is that cohort 2 is more likely to consider that their pay is good. The same can be said for those that are ‘continuing study’ but not for those that did not do any post-secondary school studies. The latter present the greater differences, perhaps signalling the important restructures in the labour market (e.g. decline of youth full-time labour market and the manufacturing sector, and rise of credentialism). Within this group, cohort 2 participants appear to be more attuned or realistic of the increasingly precarious conditions of the labour market. As Andres & Wyn (2010) observe, cohort 1 participants were the first generation of Australians in the post-war era to encounter a new set of labour rules. Their comments in interviews and surveys reflect their frustration with a changing labour market and the high unemployment of the times.

*‘I don’t think that doing my degree meant that it was any easier to get a job. There are just too many people in my field who are all holding degrees to fill the small amount of jobs available and this number is getting smaller thanks to the criminal cuts in funding’* (Female participant, from cohort 1, at the age of 25 in 1998, working as a nurse)

*‘The increase of industries to utilise contractors/ contract work rather than employ their own full time staff [has been a problem in my workplace]. I have moved from contract to contract for over five years. I also feel that being in the right place at the right time is crucial for getting a lot of work.’* (Male participant, from cohort 1, at the age of 27 in 2001, working in hospitality and tourism)

Qualitative data from the Life Patterns participants confirms that psychological and physical stress (identified in Table 2) are becoming increasingly significant for young people, in the context of labour market environments dominated by insecurity and uncertainty. These measures show that, in their mid-twenties, at least four out of ten young people feel psychologically stressed and a quarter physically stressed as a result of their work. Wyn, Cuervo and Landstedt’s (2014) analysis of cohort 2 participants’ wellbeing in the first six years after leaving school shows that combining study, work and experiencing financial hardship has contributed to poorer mental health outcomes. That is, social conditions, including work, shape how youth is experienced, and how well young people are able to be (Wyn, Cuervo and Landstedt 2014). Working conditions have also had a significant impact on the wellbeing of some members of cohort 1. For example, in 2012, in their late thirties, a third of cohort 1 participants stated in the survey that they ‘fear the amount of stress in my job will make me physically ill’. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011: 1) affirms that ‘physical and psychosocial aspects of work, though more subtle and gradual, can nonetheless have a significant impact on health over the longer-term’.<sup>17</sup> Butterworth and colleagues (2011: 569) analysis of HILDA data found out that ‘individuals with a propensity to work in poor quality jobs had poorer overall mental health’. That is, individuals working in jobs with ‘low control, strain, low security, low marketability, dissatisfaction with their employment opportunities and unfair pay’ report poorer mental health than those working without these conditions (2011: 570). In sum, the precarity and uncertainty of the modern context of labour has significant implication on young people’s lives that go beyond security at work to impact on their wellbeing.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, we are not trying to make the point that people that are in paid work tend to have poorer health than those outside paid work. Actually, the contrary happens: 63% of people aged 15 years and over rated their own health as excellent or very good compared to 50% of those who were unemployed (ABS 2011). Butterworth and colleagues (2011: 564) affirm that work not only provides a source of income but enhances individuals’ opportunity to participate in a community and socially connected with others, and that ‘being employed bestows health benefits’.

# CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research report confirms that the world of work described by Beck (2000) and other social theorists in the last two decades has become a reality for many participants in both cohorts. Beyond historical disputes, a range of empirical studies show that the current Australian labour market is highly casualised – comprising at least 20% of the total workforce (e.g. ABS 2009a, Campbell 2013). The analysis of two cohorts of Life Patterns data reveals similar trends. The contemporary landscape of work has significant effects on young people, as traditional school to work transitions enjoyed by previous generations in the post-war era (mostly the generation known as Baby Boomers) have become relegated to history. Young people are now expected to participate in formal education well into their twenties. They confront significant uncertainty in their career paths, and must actively engage in managing their employment journey, including the possibility of having to gain a new set of skills to change career pathway later in life. Contemporary contexts of work for young people leaving school are dominated by increasing casual and precarious job and non-standardisation of the work-day, with an expectation that achieving a secure job will take longer than it took their parents.

Contemporary work contexts, dominated by flexible and deregulated labour relations, increasing casual and precarious jobs and non-standardisation of the work-day have significant implications for some social groups. Research reveals that while not all members of society are subject to non-secure, stable work, it is young people, women and those less educated that are more likely to be in part-time, casual and precarious and non-standard jobs (ABS 2009a, Campbell 2013, Chauvel 2010, Furlong & Kelly 2005, MacDonald 2009, OECD 2004, White & Wyn 2013). The evidence presented in this research report confirms young people's significant exposure to precarious work, including the vulnerabilities experienced by young women in particular to greater vulnerability of job insecurity and disadvantage (see Cuervo, Crofts & Wyn 2012). Further, Wyn (2013: 4), in her critique of neoliberal policies that continue to link further education and secure, rewarding employment unproblematically argues that:

Until recently it seemed that only the 'marginal' and the 'disadvantaged' who failed to bridge education and work experienced 'difficult transitions' (the poor, those living in rural areas and Indigenous young people). These 'exceptions' have always proved the 'rule' – that is, that education works. It is assumed that if young people in these marginal groups would mimic the educational participation patterns of their more privileged peers, they would naturally find good, secure and worthwhile jobs.

As argued by Wyn (2009, 2013) and by other data analysis from the Life Patterns research program (see Andres & Wyn 2010, Cuervo & Wyn 2011, 2012), this report provides evidence for the view that 'difficult transitions' have become a reality for a greater proportion of young people and not just for those historically labelled as disadvantaged.

Nonetheless, this report confirms the broader pattern for young people with higher educational credentials to perform better than their non-educated peers in the labour market (see Cassells et al. 2012). In their mid-twenties, participants from both cohorts that have completed tertiary education were more likely than those still studying or without a tertiary education qualification to be in full-time jobs. But as Figure 11 shows, both generations know that career opportunities are scarce. Casual and non-standard work is accepted as a reality for young people in cohort 2 with at least one fifth employed as casuals and three quarters working irregular hours. This non-standard pattern of work is not just a matter of 'youth' – or the need to work in 'difficult' jobs until demonstrating their employability. A quarter of participants in cohort 1 were also involved in part-time work, irregular hours of work and shift jobs by their mid-thirties (with women who were also parenting being the most affected). These heterogeneous and precarious types of work justify both cohorts' ambitions and anxieties of gaining secure work as one of their top three priorities over the years, regardless of their educational qualifications or social background. The impact that work has on participants' health and wellbeing is another critical aspect showed by our data (see Wyn, Cuervo & Landstedt 2014) and deserves further exploration in the future.

Overall our data reveals that there are many similarities in attitudes and life priorities between the two cohorts of Life Patterns participants. The main difference between them is that Generation Y anticipates a more unstable path through the job market and are cautious of planning their work or family lives too far into the future. While the Australian economy has retained its economic stability and avoided falling into recession with the Global Financial Crisis, the consequences for today's youth is the alienation from the knowledge, memory and possibility of long-term stable employment. This is a generation socialised into a precarious work environment, where flexibility and adaptability are key individual assets and horizontal mobility more likely than vertical mobility. On the other hand, members of Generation X had to learn through a painful process that a job for life is not available and that securing a stable position in the labour market might take up to ten years after leaving school. Analysis of the next few years in the lives of Generation Y will be critical to find out if precarious work and its impact on individuals' wellbeing and society at-large remains as strong as with Generation X.

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This phase of the Life-Patterns program has continued the tradition of a strong participatory approach to research, through regular written and verbal feedback by participants, which shaped the progress and outcomes of the research program. We deeply appreciate the generosity, willing engagement and honesty of our participants.

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