

'Young People Suffer from Growing Inequality between Young and Old'

This is the conclusion from research reported by Professor Alan France and other speakers at a conference on the topic of 'Engaging Young People in Lifelong Learning: Asia and European Policies and Practices', at RMIT. The conference is being held under the auspices of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) Lifelong learning Hub, co-hosted by the EU Centre at RMIT, the Schools of Education and GUSS at RMIT, Monash University and the Asia Europe Foundation.

The research examined the situation in various nation states: the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway, Spain, Poland, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, China, Denmark, Malta, Malaysia, Philippines and Japan. It considered topics such as the impact of the recent economic crisis on trends in young people's (aged 16 to 24-30) engagement in education, work and welfare, and their implications for youth policy developments.

Speakers commented that the deregulation of the labour market regulation, and the growing privatisation of post 16 education and the expansion of welfare to work programmes, has contributed to, rather than easing the inequality.

While young people's engagement in education continues to grow in these countries, their insecurity, debt and uncertainty about their future also continues to grow. More students are having to work to get through the education system and getting rid of debt is becoming increasingly difficult. Youth employment is increasingly precarious, low paid and with negative experiences for many - and qualifications alone are not enough.

In all countries, access to lifelong learning opportunities in the transitions of young people is increasingly important if they are not to be discarded at an early stage of their lives.

Conference participants also gained insights into the value of engaging young people in governance of educational programs, and linking local initiatives with wider national and even international initiatives.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals to 2030 offers a framework for sharing policy and practice insights across national borders.

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