

Who pays for lifelong learning?

Louise Watson

Lifelong Learning Network, University of Canberra

The common policy response to the demands of global capitalism is to emphasise the importance of lifelong learning in developing a national skills base. The fastest-growing industries appear to be “knowledge-based” and economic returns are increasingly obtained from a range of intangible inputs, one of which is workers’ skills. Economic rewards are flowing to people with high skills who engage in continuous education and training.

Education participation is highest among people who are employed and a large amount of work-related external training is financed by employers and individual workers. These trends are consistent with the lifelong learning policy agenda that emphasises self-funded participation in both formal and informal learning. But workers in low skilled jobs receive less opportunities and less financial support for participation in training than workers in high skilled jobs. The new economy appears to be generating inequality in the distribution of educational opportunities between people with high skills and people with low skills. This may undermine the OECD’s policy goal of achieving lifelong learning *for all*.