

Does Inequality Matter? A POLICY FORUM

Tuesday 16 November 2010

Rutherford House LT3, Victoria University of Wellington, Pipitea Campus

This forum is being hosted by the Institute of Policy Studies, School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington, in association with the Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Otago



Keynote Address

Professor Richard Wilkinson, a distinguished British social epidemiologist and co-author of *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*.

Purpose

The issue of whether inequality matters – economically, socially, politically and/or ethically – has long been a matter of vigorous debate. This debate has been enlivened recently by the publication of *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* by Professors Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. In this important but controversial book, the authors argue that certain kinds of inequality, and in particular income inequality, have many detrimental consequences. Amongst other things, societies that are relatively unequal generally have worse social outcomes, for example with respect to life expectancy and health status, the levels of violence and crime, the degree of trust, and educational performance.

The aim of this one-day policy forum is to assess critically the main arguments advanced in *The Spirit Level*, and consider whether inequality (especially income inequality) really does matter to

the fabric of a society. In so doing, the forum will address a range of issues, including:

- philosophical and political perspectives on inequality/equality;
- manifestations of inequality in New Zealand and their implications across a range of different spheres, including health, education, crime and punishment and social mobility; and
- the policy implications of reducing inequality, including the costs and benefits of different ways of tackling inequality.

In addition to Professor Wilkinson, the forum brings together a number of leading New Zealand academics, researchers and policy analysts with expertise on the many and varied dimensions of inequality.



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Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtago
NEW ZEALAND

To register
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Programme

8.20 am Registration

8.30 am Welcome Professor Jonathan Boston

Session 1 Why Inequality Matters

Chair Professor Jonathan Boston

8.35 am Professor Richard Wilkinson, **Keynote Address** (via audio-visual link to the United Kingdom)

9.30 am Questions and discussion

10.15–10.30am Morning Tea

Session 2 Critical Reflections on *The Spirit Level*

Chair Dr Paul Callister

10.30 am Professor Tony Blakely, *Methodological issues: is the thesis robust?*

11.00 am Dr Xavier Márquez, *Philosophical and ethical issues: is inequality unjust?*

11.30 am Professor Andrew Bradstock, *Political issues: is there a constituency for equality?*

12.00 noon Questions and Discussion

12.30–1.15 pm Lunch

Session 3 The New Zealand Context

Chair Professor Andrew Bradstock

1.15 pm Ben Gleisner, *Trends in income inequality and their relationship to other socio-economic outcomes*

1.45 pm **Sectoral dimensions**

Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman, *Inequality and health*

Dr Paul Callister, *Inequality and education/human capital*

Dr Gabrielle Maxwell, *Inequality and criminal justice*

Dr Matthew Gibbons, *Social mobility*

2.45 pm Questions and discussion

3.15 – 3.30 pm Afternoon Tea

Session 4 Policy Issues and Implications

Chair Professor Jonathan Boston

3.30 pm Associate Professor Bob Stephens, *If reducing inequality is important, what are the issues, costs and policy options?*

Discussants Des O’Dea and Dr David Bromell

4.20 pm Questions and discussion

5.20 pm Summary and conclusions



Keynote Speaker

Richard Wilkinson is Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham Medical School, Honorary Professor at University College London and Visiting Professor at the University of York. He has played a formative role in international research on the social determinants of health and wrote (with Kate Pickett) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (Penguin Books, 2010).

List of Contributors

Tony Blakely is a research professor, epidemiologist, and public health medicine specialist at the Wellington School of Medicine and Health Science, University of Otago, and Director of the Health Inequalities Research Programme and the Burden of Disease Epidemiology, Equity and Cost-Effectiveness Programme. He has an extensive research background, with his main research activity focusing on ethnic and socio-economic disparities and trends in mortality and health, tobacco, neighbourhoods, cancer control, longitudinal studies, healthy eating and health services and, more recently, the burden of disease and cost-effectiveness approaches to prioritisation of health services.

Jonathan Boston is Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Institute of Policy Studies at the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington. He has published widely in the fields of public management, tertiary education, social policy, comparative government, New Zealand politics, and climate change policy, including 24 books and over 170 journal articles and book chapters.

Andrew Bradstock is Howard Paterson Professor of Theology and Public Issues and Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago. Previously he co-directed the Centre for Faith and Society at the Von Hügel Institute, St Edmund's College, Cambridge, and was Secretary for Church and Society with the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom.

David Bromell is a Principal Advisor with the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, a Senior Associate of the Institute of Policy Studies at the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington and the author of *Ethnicity, Identity and Public Policy: Critical Perspectives on Multiculturalism*, Institute of Policy Studies 2008, and 'Recognition, redistribution and democratic inclusion' in R Openshaw and E Rata (eds), *The Politics of Conformity in New Zealand*, Pearson 2009.

Paul Callister is Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Institute of Policy Studies at the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington. As an economist, he has over the last two decades undertaken research for a wide range of public and private sector organisations, addressing local, national, and cross-national issues, including research around education, the labour market and ethnicity.

Matthew Gibbons is an Analyst at the New Zealand Treasury. He has researched intergenerational income and occupational mobility for a Treasury working paper and holds a doctorate in politics from the University of Waikato.

Ben Gleisner is a Senior Analyst at the New Zealand Treasury, in the Workforce Attachment and Skills team. He works on welfare-related policies, including input to the Welfare Working Group process, and has recently led a project investigating inequalities in living standards.

Philippa Howden-Chapman is Professor of Public Health and Deputy Head in the Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington. As well as teaching in the area of health and public policy, she is Director of the He Kainga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme and the Principal Investigator for the Housing, Insulation and Health Study, the Housing, Heating and Health Study, the Tokelau Extended Housing Study and the Housing (Dis)ability Study.

Xavier Márquez is a Lecturer in Political Theory at Victoria University of Wellington. His research interests range from ancient political thought (especially Plato and Cicero) to more general questions about power, democracy, and expertise. He is currently writing a book about Plato's political thought.

Gabrielle Maxwell is a Senior Associate of the Institute of Policy Studies at the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington and prior to taking up her current position was Director of the Crime and Justice Research Centre at Victoria University. As a psychologist and criminologist, the main focus of her research over the last two decades has been criminological, with a focus on the youth justice system in New Zealand, restorative justice, family violence, programmes for children and youth at risk, police practice and the functioning of the courts and criminal justice policy.



Des O’Dea is a lecturer in health economics in the Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington. His areas of expertise include health services modelling, capitation and population funding formulae, and research into the links between income and health.

Bob Stephens is a Senior Associate of the Institute of Policy Studies at the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington and recently retired as Associate Professor of Public Policy at Victoria University. As a foundation Member of New Zealand Poverty Management Project, he developed a poverty measure suitable for the current economic and social policy environment in New Zealand, and has been involved in several international comparative studies, including the level of financial assistance for dependent children, child support, lone parents, social assistance, and transparency of the budget process.
