

30 June 2024

Dear UK Party Leaders,

We, as individuals from across civil society, business, and the academic community, write to express our concern about the lack of political will to address unfairness and inequality in the UK.

We believe that this is not only morally wrong, but is causing deep damage to our society, economy and democracy, and undermining the fight against the climate crisis.

The evidence, summarised in a report published today by the Fairness Foundation, 'The Canaries', shows that, from education and work to housing and poverty, Britain is a deeply unfair country. It also suggests that without decisive action, unfairness and inequality will only increase over the next five years, creating a vicious cycle that will block any prospect of progress on cross-party priorities such as economic growth and spreading opportunity. To take one example, the average person in the South-East of England is £195,400 wealthier than their counterpart in the North of England; this gap is projected to increase to £229,000 by 2029.

Whichever party forms the next government must take urgent action to change this worsening trajectory. Failure to act now will make us less healthy, productive, efficient, resilient and cohesive.

Reducing unfair inequality will not only unlock progress on these policy priorities, but will pay for itself over time. For example, improving housing quality will save the NHS and the social care sector £1.5 billion per year; investing in early years education will generate a 30% return for the Treasury; and every extra pound invested in HMRC enforcement will yield £18 in additional tax revenues.

Action to build a fairer Britain is popular with the public - 85% are concerned about inequality - so is politically expedient as well as morally necessary.

We call on the next government to heed this warning and to make tackling unfair inequality a top priority for the next five years, for all of our sakes.

Yours sincerely,

Will Snell, Chief Executive, Fairness Foundation

Frances Crook, Trustee, Fairness Foundation

Julian Richer, Retailer, Philanthropist and Author, and Chair, Fairness Foundation

Ruth Lister, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, Loughborough University

Danny Dorling, Professor of Geography, University of Oxford

Stuart White, Associate Professor, University of Oxford

Kate Pickett, Professor of Epidemiology, University of York

Richard Wilkinson, Emeritus Professor, University of Nottingham

Bobby Duffy, Professor, Policy Institute, King's College London

Geraldine Van Bueren KC, Professor Emerita, Queen Mary University of London

Sarah Bracking, Professor in Climate and Society, King's College London

Peter Taylor-Gooby, Emeritus Professor, University of Kent

Colin Crouch, Professor Emeritus, University of Warwick

Neal Lawson, Director, Compass

Gary Stevenson, Economist, YouTuber and Author

Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, Women's Budget Group

Andrew Dixon, Chairman, Fairer Share

Robert Palmer, Executive Director, Tax Justice UK

Paul McDonald, Chief Campaigns Officer, Health Equals

Sarah Edwards, Executive Director, JustMoney Movement

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