

Symposium on Improving Intergenerational Governance

Thursday 23 March 2017
Banquet Hall, Parliament, 9.20am

Introduction by Professor Wendy Larner, Provost, Victoria University of Wellington

Deputy Prime Minister The Honourable Paula Bennett, State Services Commissioner Peter Hughes, Members of Parliament, representatives from the public and private sectors, distinguished guests, fellow researchers, colleagues and students tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora koutou katoa.

I'm Professor Wendy Larner, Provost at Victoria University, and it is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the University, for what promises to be a very thought-provoking day.

Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies, for organising this symposium under the School of Government. And in particular, Head of School

Professor Girol Karacaoglu and Professor of Public Policy Jonathan Boston who have worked tirelessly to make this event happen.

Special thanks must also go to Victoria's Advancing Better Government theme steering group, for sponsoring this event.

I'm here today wearing both my institutional and academic hats.

As a human geographer with research interests in subjects of globalisation, social policy and governance, I'm absolutely delighted to be here. Intergenerational governance is a subject close to my own heart, and later in the programme you will hear more from me about the work I'm doing with my British colleagues in this area.

As Provost, it's my role to act as a sort of chief academic officer, where I look after research and education for the whole university. And so from this position, I'm very much interested in the roles Victoria can play through its teaching and research, in improving intergenerational governance.

There is a misconception that universities, all red brick and ivy, are historic institutions, monoliths too big to move with the times. This is fundamentally incorrect. Universities may be steeped in the tradition of higher education, but they have the power to reinvent themselves to respond to current and future needs. We saw this in early nineteenth century with the birth of the first modern tertiary institute, Humboldt University, and in the rise of civic universities later that century and into the twentieth.

I very much believe that universities are going through another of these qualitative transformations. And there's some interesting questions of what that will look like.

As it stands today, Victoria is committed to revitalising the civic university tradition with a national and international outlook. This vision—to be a global-civic university—means we are at once committed to the community in which we are

located, while contributing—through our teaching and research—to the resolution of international challenges.

Right now, the challenges facing humanity are immense. Every night when we watch the news, we are confronted with images of failed states and civic unrest and mass migration. We watch the devastation caused by natural disasters and the effects of climate change. Our biodiversity is being lost, we are warring with each other. Closer to home we are debating a raise in superannuation and dealing with a decline in housing affordability as we feel the effects of an ageing population.

I don't want to paint too grim a picture, but the serious and long-term challenges ahead will not disappear by burying our heads in the sand.

These very challenges are shaping society's present, shape society's future and will impact on the way we—as governments, businesses, education institutions and other organisations—operate.

One of the primary ways forward, is improving intergenerational governance.

It's important we have these discussions and debates now. The institutions we have historically relied on are increasingly being seen as fallible. For example, we tend to locate the pillars of democracy in the state, the market and in civic society. In other words, public services are delivered and regulated by the public sector, private sector or community organisations. But we know this doesn't hold out in practice.

Think of the internet and social media platforms, how are we going to govern these? ... through states? through markets? through civil society norms? The traditional modes of regulation are failing here and we need to think of new ways to do so.

While the challenges of governing in this increasingly digital, and increasingly complex age are becoming apparent, the solutions are even further from view.

One way we as a university can contribute to improving intergenerational governance is through our role as critic and conscience of society.

We have amongst our staff, world-renowned scholars who are leading new research in their fields. They are constantly connecting with other academics and other organisations around the world to develop their research and ultimately enrich our understanding of the world.

Through the privilege of academic freedom, our researchers have the power to speak truth to power, call leaders to account and generate public debate.

They are in a position to provide evidence and advice, challenge the status quo, identify risks and vulnerabilities, and propose solutions.

This very symposium, which creates the platform for knowledge sharing and debate from a range of informed groups, is an example of that.

As I mentioned earlier, this symposium comes under Victoria's Advancing Better Government theme. In a similar vein to today's symposium, the theme's group held a conference last year to discuss how we design legislative and regulatory systems to protect the interests of ourselves and future generations.

There are other channels through which Victoria researchers can foster a shift towards improving intergenerational governance.

Alongside Advancing Better Government are seven other academic themes that identify areas where Victoria can most effectively contribute to local, national and global challenges.

And later today you will hear from the co-chair of one of the other themes, Enhancing Sustainability and Resilience ... as Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Sustainability) Associate Professor Marjan van den Belt discusses sustainable development on a finite planet.

Another such way Victoria can contribute to improving intergenerational governance is through its learning and teaching.

These same scholars who are undertaking cutting-edge research, are also standing in front of a lecture theatre of bright young minds.

These students are our future leaders and thinkers, decision-makers and agitators, influencers and creators. So when we think about improving intergenerational governance, it is vital that universities take an active role in generating and propelling this shift.

It is our mandate to prepare students for the workforce. Teaching knowledge content and industry-relevant skills are not enough to ensure they will thrive because no one can predict how the workforce will evolve. The jobs of our future students, quite possibly, aren't even invented yet.

And so through our educational practices and research, Victoria is imparting in our students the adaptability, innovation and courage to tackle the future head on.

In particular, we recognise that in order to meet the global challenges of the future, we need to play our part in preparing the next generation of leaders and thinkers to be first, informed, and then given the skills to think critically.

We encourage them be open-minded, empathetic and active global citizens.

We teach them the skills to identify and analyse risks, provide evidence and advice ... to present their opinions, argue their point and find compromise. We encourage them to be creative and have the courage to find solutions.

The lecture theatre is not the only platform from where we can influence change, but it is an important one.

Today, you will hear from a range of speakers in areas traversing commerce, science and law.

Because if you consider the kinds of complex problems we're grappling with, they're founded in, and influenced by, a Gordian knot of intertwining issues.

Similarly, they are not problems a single person, government or nation can solve. We have to think in long-term, collaborative ways. Which—some of you may be thinking—goes against the grain of the growing nationalism and isolationism we're seeing, across cultural and religious lines.

It is foolhardy to think that the crises we are facing recognise such boundaries. Climate change does not stop at a nation's border, economic growth is not immune to external influences.

Despite this trend of looking inwards, there have been attempts by the international community to meet these challenges in the establishment of long-term goals. We've seen this recently in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement.

But how are these long-term goals to be met?

Too often, our focus remains on the immediate issues. Particularly when our digital environment depresses our attention spans, as it provides us with instant information, a 24-hour news cycle and an unsleeping social media.

And when it comes to governance and regulation, it is far easier ... and often more popular ... to make short-term gains and push aside long-term consequences.

A determined and shared effort will be key to fostering a widespread shift towards embracing intergenerational governance.

It is appropriate then, that today we're here to share knowledge and ideas, and draw on the expertise of others.

I think that is one of the advantages about being in New Zealand. We are small enough, that when we have these conversations, we are forced to think hard about how we work with people other than those who are like us. It allows us to have hard conversations, across cultural, political and religious lines.

It's fitting, likewise, for these conversations to take place in the heart of the capital city. Not only because it is the home of government and government departments, but also the judiciary, research institutions, businesses, the diplomatic community and cultural and environmental organisations, all of whom innately assume a global mindedness necessitated by their capital city location.

Victoria takes to heart its position as a capital city university. It allows us to create opportunities, like this symposium, where we can bring together scholars, politicians and decision-makers of the capital city community, in order to address far-reaching and complex problems.

It is also very much our belief to look beyond our immediate location.

A priority area for us, is establishing and strengthening connections with the international academic community. Doing so allows us to enhance our ability to contribute to thinking on major societal, economic and environmental issues, such as intergenerational governance.

This position is further strengthened through our capabilities, and continual development, of digital learning and teaching technologies.

One such example of this is Victoria's partnership with the online course provider edX. We are the first New Zealand university to sign up to edX, a platform through which we can deliver online courses and classes from some of the world's top

universities ... and effectively, engage with students in a way that meets their needs in an increasingly digital world.

While many of the long-term challenges I have mentioned are global in context, they have unique ramifications in our cultural context.

How we think in terms of intergenerational governance does not have to be exclusively forward-looking. This holds particularly true in New Zealand where Māori have long-standing and profound connections with place, which hark back to earlier generations.

Issues such as climate change may force us to think about what kind of world our children and grandchildren will inherit, but at the same time, we need to ask ... what does it mean for Māori when our rivers are being polluted and rising sea-levels are eroding our coastlines?

Improving intergenerational governance is by no means, an easy task. But I'm heartened by having such esteemed and knowledgeable guests here today, including students who represent the next generation of leaders and thinkers.

I very much look forward to hearing your ideas on how we can all work towards improving intergenerational governance ... for the betterment of our children, our grandchildren and our planet.

Thank you.