

Welcome to this special themed edition of *Research, Policy and Planning* (RPP). Increasing longevity and falling birth rates are increasing the numbers and proportion of older people throughout the world. The United Nations notes that the ageing of populations is ‘unprecedented, a process without parallel in the history of humanity’ (United Nations, World Population Ageing 2009, 2010, p.xxiv). Demands and expectations are both increasing and this is creating pressure on health and care systems. In the UK, the percentage of people aged 65 and over increased from 15 per cent in 1985 to 17 per cent in 2010 and by 2035 is projected to have risen to 23 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2012). But whilst the demographics are clear the responses needed are contested and by no means universally agreed.

The shift of vision and expectation from one of dependency to independence, participation and wellbeing – with older people exercising choices and being active partners in service design – means that including older people themselves in designing, providing and delivering future services and arrangements for older people should be a key part of any solution. The need to use scarce and reducing resources more economically, efficiently and effectively emphasises the need for change.

This edition presents four principal papers reporting on projects in which the various authors have been involved and exploring a number of key issues for all who are interested in the challenges and opportunities of our ageing society.

The first paper, from **Woolham *et al.***, gives us the views of older people themselves. It draws its data from a large community survey of older people aged 55 years and over living in Coventry. It looks at the meaning of independence, inclusion and wellbeing to older people and reports that although most survey participants were able to function independently, participate in ordinary community life and enjoy reasonable physical and mental health, many others experienced a series of significant barriers to inclusion and wellbeing. The paper concludes that there is no automatic convergence between independence, inclusion and wellbeing at the level of the individual and that to address this more socially inclusive, rather than individualistic, forms of independence may be more appropriate goals for local public agencies.

In the second paper **Davis & Ritters** look at active ageing through wellbeing – the role of information in ‘that little bit of help’. Information and the ability to act on it are seen as vital parts of the choice and personalisation agendas in health and social care. This is particularly important as older people are encouraged to do more for themselves in an era of budget reductions. Understanding how, where and why people access services and information is therefore key to developing supportive policies for an ageing society. This paper describes some of the literature and focuses on two projects, in which the authors were involved, aimed at widening access and improving information. LinkAge Plus was a Department for Work and Pensions funded project, trialling a variety of different approaches to widening access. The Stratford-upon-Avon Early Intervention Project in Warwickshire, part of the Department of Health’s Common Assessment Framework for Adults Demonstrator Site Programme, trialled a digitised self-assessment process for wellbeing linked to local sources of help. The paper concludes that as the funding gap for adult social care continues to grow, and support systems become ever more complex, the need for effective information strategies becomes more urgent.

**Baldauf & Lindley** then address, in the third paper, the issue of active ageing and age management. Their paper mainly presents the findings of case studies on good practice in age management in health and social care organisations and local authorities which were conducted as part of the European study on Activating Senior Potential In Ageing Europe. They focus on selected dimensions of age management including recruitment, training, career development, flexible working and health promotion. They highlight good practices that relate to wider age management approaches and developments over time and end with a brief note on the results of quantitative longitudinal studies which have examined the impact of extending working lives on individuals’ health.

Lastly, the paper from **Hughes *et al.*** explores local authority commissioning and contracting arrangements for home care, staff training opportunities and the range of services provided for older people. It utilises data from a national postal survey. Implications for the development of high quality services are discussed in terms of user need, service flexibility and training for staff providing direct care.

It is suggested that within the commissioning process key drivers of the development of more personalised high quality home care services are regular dialogue with service providers, greater health and social care involvement in a joint commissioning process, alignment of contracting arrangements to reflect service outcomes, and specification of training requirements within the setting and monitoring of home care contracts.

Reviews in this issue of *Research, Policy and Planning* cover the range of publications relevant to RPP, across social services for children and for adults. Major research reports can take time to be published in book form, thus justifying an early review if the issues are topical. This certainly applies to the research commissioned a few years ago from the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York by the Department of Health, and which has now produced its end of grant report. The research addresses government concern regarding young people with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) still not achieving 'markers of adulthood': employment, independent living, social lives and adult relationships. In policy terms the study links to the Autism Act 2009 and the Autism Strategy 2010 and it investigated the problematic issue of transition from children's social care and educational services to services for adults. Our reviewer has, as she indicates, some direct experience of the issues.

Another type of publication is the conference report. The review of contributions to a 2009 conference, as edited and supplemented for publication three years later, gives a mixed verdict. The topic – service user involvement in social care – is of longstanding interest and current policy concern, but its treatment here is seen as somewhat partial and essentially retrospective. An historical perspective on current practice and policy concerns can turn out to be very timely. This is the case in the review of the study which revisits Professor Peter Townsend's research in the late 1950s on residential homes for older people. The book links the earlier research with a 2005-6 follow-up, and with substantive conclusions setting both studies in a context of other research on care for older people.

An analytical perspective on a current policy phrase – children's wellbeing, supplemented by limited but focused empirical research, provides the basis for our reviewer's recommendation of a study that deserves to be influential despite the passage of a few years and major children's policy shifts in the meantime. Textbooks for researchers and students are bread and butter for publishers but RPP readers can also be helped by their advice and illustrations of good practice. They can even help remind us of the limitations of some research in social services. The two reviewed here evidently try hard to reach their audience and are well established examples of the genre.

Finally, we have been asked to add a few words to provide some clarity to readers and subscribers about a potential move to author charges and to request feedback from members. Many readers will be aware that the Finch Report recommended that academic journals move from 'pay-to-view' arrangements to open access, with costs being met by researchers who will be expected to pay to have their work published. Currently, all but the latest three editions of RPP are freely available from SSRG's website, with the most recent editions being available to members only. Editorial Board members have discussed how RPP should respond to the Finch recommendations and have recommended that, for the time being at least, no changes be made, though they will continue to assess if changes would be in the best interests of the journal, its authors and its readers. The Editorial team would be very interested in the views of readers about how RPP should respond to the Finch report and would welcome any feedback.

We are sure that the challenges and opportunities of ageing societies will provide many more occasions for discussion and for highlighting good practice. We hope you find this edition an interesting and useful contribution. In closing, we would like to add our thanks to the RPP team for their help in getting this edition off the ground.

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