Welcome to this edition of *Research, Policy and Planning* (RPP) which presents four main papers, three of which continue a theme of previous editions (see RPP 29(3) in particular) with thoughts about the effectiveness of recent policy initiatives in adult social care to develop personalisation in England for social care service users. The fourth paper is welcome not least because it presents research findings from another continent on a policy programme in Quebec, Canada to prevent the recruitment of young females for sexual exploitation by gangs.

The first paper, by **Zamfir**, presents findings from an English-based literature review in 2012 of the effectiveness of personal budgets in the promotion of personalisation. The paper provides a review of findings from published papers and reports that have focused on researching the effectiveness of personal budgets to promote personalisation (choice, control, autonomy and independence) for older people in England. Zamfir's conclusions are that personal budgets and self-directed support as a means of facilitating personalisation has generally made little improvement for many older people. However, the review did find some evidence that personal budgets could improve older people's outcomes, but that only if the budget amount is sufficient and the right level and type of support are available. In line with previous research including that considered by Zamfir, the review also proposes that more work still needs to be done to develop adequate care markets, support and brokerage services, training of frontline staff (not least in how funding is allocated to budget holders) as precursors to personal budgets and self-directed support being effective means of facilitating older people with choice, control, autonomy and independence.

In the second paper, **Slasberg *et al*.** build on the argument and evidence they presented in 29(3) on the failure of self-directed support (SDS) to deliver the national policy goals of, specifically, personal budgets and, more generally, personalisation. They argue that only those service users who are currently benefiting are those able to receive a cash payment and then able to create and manage their own support systems. Their conclusions, therefore, are that SDS as currently implemented is counter-productive and even damaging to the promotion of personalisation. This is not only in terms of wasted resources through the growth in bureaucracy but also in terms of driving further wedges between practitioners and service users. In their view, the successful promotion of personalisation requires four things: a new partnership between the state and service users based on service user rights; a radical and more comprehensive review of social care funding (beyond, they suggest, the narrow boundaries adopted by the Dilnot Commission); a new approach to social care user eligibility and assessment; and, fourthly, major changes to the existing prevailing institutionalised and bureaucratic culture in social care so that it becomes a more enabling and personalised one.

The third paper by **Clifford *et al*.** provides an interesting counterview to that of Slasberg *et al*. as to whether it is possible to accurately allocate resources to meet social care needs in pursuit of the policy goal of personalisation. Indeed, the paper is in many respects a response to Slasberg et al's previous paper in RPP 29(3). Clifford *et al*. argue that resource allocation systems (based upon measures of need) are effective ways of estimating the cost of individual service users' care packages. The paper presents three studies that suggest that it is possible to assess service users' needs and to predict accurately the resultant care costs. In Clifford et al's view, it is possible to model the relationship between need and cost and that this can be standardised with sufficient accuracy to support the (fair) allocation of budgets at the individual level. As such, Clifford *et al*. argue that resource allocation systems can, indeed, support the facilitation of personalisation as well as having wider policy applications including being able to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of social care innovations, to quantity future costs, and to measure the impact of changes in social care provision.

Hamel *et al*. provide the final paper for this edition of RPP. As mentioned above, it is a rare but welcome departure for RPP to publish research findings from another continent, North America. Hamel *et al*. report on research into the effectiveness of a policy initiative in Quebec, Canada, to prevent the recruitment of young females by gangs for sexual exploitation. It reports on the use of 'concertation' mechanisms to initiate more effective preventive actions to deal with the complex problems associated with youth sexual exploitation. Concertation is described as 'a collective process in which stakeholders cooperate to coordinate services and activities. [As such], it differs from a partnership in that it does not necessarily rest on a formal contractual agreement… [but is a] structured relationship between autonomous and willing stakeholders who share information, discuss problems, and agree on common objectives'. The paper suggests that creating effective concertation is a challenge that requires time and personal commitment, especially in negotiating the relative positions of those involved. In addition, the paper argues that concertation must never be thought of as a given but is the result of complex social processes. A more general conclusion is that one needs to take care to ensure that new programmes or policy initiatives do not unintentionally divert resources away from existing organisations or programmes.

Reviews in this issue of *Research, Policy and Planning* cover two related edited texts by Martin Davies on social work; one on policy, law, theory, research and practice for social work with adults, the second covering the same areas for social work with children and families; both are seen to be useful texts for practitioners, policy makers, academics and students.

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.

Guy Daly
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