

Editorial

Welcome to the long delayed second edition of Volume 33 of *Research, Policy and Planning*, which contains three very different, but extremely interesting papers.

The first, by **Randall Smith and colleagues**, explores the origins and meaning of (adult) social care in England. The article reveals that though the term 'adult social care' is ubiquitous in English policy and academic literature, there has never been a definition of the term in legislation. The authors suggest that the term 'social care' is 'indeterminate'. Without clear definition, the term is mutable and unstable. The authors draw parallels between the indeterminacy of social care and other indeterminate concepts such as 'choice' (deconstructed in the work of Clarke *et al.* (2006), and health care, examined by Herlitz (2017). Smith and colleagues point out that this can have serious consequences, since false assumptions can be made, and competing definitions laid out which make it possible for the term to acquire different meanings over time which create acute problems when practitioners and managers attempt to translate policies into practice.

The second paper, by **Susan Lowe and Hashum Mahmood**, focuses on childhood health inequality and obesity. As the authors point out, obesity is an increasing problem throughout the UK and obese citizens are at greater risk of a range of serious and life-threatening diseases. The authors' particular focus is on deprivation and obesity among school-age children in Birmingham. Using National Child Measurement Programme data for Birmingham, and the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, the authors compare Reception and Year 6 school records. Their analysis suggests that obesity inequalities are widening and calls for local, practical, preventive public health measures to address the problem.

The third paper, by **Francesca Pozzoli**, offers a critical analysis of one aspect of the current NHS vision: the introduction of Personal Health Budgets (PHBs). Based on a considered, critical analysis of key policy documents, and on semi-structured interviews with members of the Personalised Care Group for England, the author challenges 'received wisdoms' about the benefits of PHBs, and the potential implications for the NHS of introducing personal budgets into a service in which clinically defined need rather than individual choice is the main arbiter of service provision.

In addition to these three original articles, this edition also presents some lively reviews of social work and social care literature. Books reviewed for this edition reflect the range of research and especially policy issues to be found in the social care debating chamber. Martin Powell reviews a very wide-ranging contribution by Peter Beresford and Sarah Carr, who follow up an earlier publication on a participatory approach to welfare with this collection of essays which purportedly represents a paradigm shift in analysis and discussion of social policy. The book is not without limits, flaws and inconsistencies in relation to its aspirations and its contents, in the view of our reviewer. However, it must be accounted stimulating, if cautiously so, and mindful of the slippery conceptual nature of 'knowledge' – a topic being investigated and debated from times even before books were invented.

Powell's own book on current social policy, in the form of the mixed economy of social welfare, is reviewed by Guy Daly. This is more overtly an updated student textbook, and not a polemic. There is a thesis, though, as our reviewer points out. The state arguably dominates less now than in the past but is far from absent from welfare provision. The distributional consequences of these changes are not easy to map, but the schematic framework provided by Powell represents a way to start the process.

A participatory passion even colours part of the *Short Guide to Health and Social Care* by Jon Glasby, reviewed by Paul Dolan. In offering guidance to a prospective student, who might well be from outside the UK, Glasby highlights the impact of events from his own social work training days, linking them with the revolutionary idea of a social model of disability, and its implications for adult social care services.

A social model is implicit in the final review by Emma Pinfield. These are of two books offering guidance in responding to eating disorders among adults. Neither of these books, intended for service users and possibly professionals, follows a medical or evidence-based model, and they both espouse self-help techniques. They would be valuable aids at a time of austerity in specialist professional services, and they are written from lived experiences: but are hardly enough on their own.

Postscript

Finally, over the last few years, readers will have noticed that *Research, Policy and Planning* has experienced a significant fall in the number of submitted papers, which has seriously delayed our attempts to publish the anticipated three editions per year. This trend is one that the Editorial Team and Board have been unable to reverse, despite sometimes strenuous attempts to encourage the submission of papers. There are, of course, several reasons for this position, and two seem to predominate. First, the 2009 banking crisis led to a decade of public sector austerity and, along with other consequences, the stripping out of research capacity in local authority adult social care and children's services. As a result there are now far fewer researchers and planners working in these settings who might submit their work to us. Second, university researchers increasingly are encouraged or required to publish their work in 'high impact factor' academic journals, to enhance their portfolios for each Research Excellence Framework cycle. *Research, Policy and Planning* does not have an 'impact factor'; largely because it is independent, and it cannot draw on the resources and marketing expertise of established publishing companies.

At the time of writing, this edition of the journal is probably the penultimate one. We hope to produce a final themed, historical and policy-related issue. However, the Editors have decided, after serving in this role for over 8 years, to step down. No replacements have been identified. We will continue to explore all possible avenues so as to ensure that access to past editions of the journal is maintained, including seeking an institutional repository for all volumes and editions to ensure they remain publically accessible. We are immensely grateful to those who have published their work with us over these last few years, to our readership for their support, to our Editorial Board for their guidance, and to Shelley Nix for her enthusiasm and unflagging efforts to organise peer reviews and coordinate publication of each issue.

John Woolham, Guy Daly and Paul Dolan