

This is the first edition of Volume 28 of *Research, Policy and Planning* and is published at a time of widespread concern about the future of social welfare across Europe and no little interest in the plans of the new coalition government in the UK. It is fitting, therefore, that we open with a paper by Sylvia Godden and Allyson Pollock offering their view on the future of social care in the UK (given the fast-changing policy landscape, it is worth noting that the paper was accepted in May 2010). In charting the development of the welfare state, the authors demonstrate how successive administrations have contributed to the shift from collective to individual responsibility and conclude that social care will continue to command low priority, be paid for by private contributions and with private insurance playing a part (it will be interesting to see how the greater emphasis on public provision in Wales and Scotland fares as financial stringencies increase). Robin Jackson's article focuses this theme in an exploration of how the economic recession may adversely affect the quality of services for people with intellectual disabilities. Key factors contributing to the predicted deterioration include the commercialisation of social care, uncertainties about regulation and a decline in the power and influence of advocacy services.

As finances bite and the demands of the workplace intensify, the pressure to recruit the most able trainees and to provide the highest quality preparation for practice is only likely to increase over the next few years. Jo Moriarty *et al.*'s article is, therefore, especially timely. The article draws on data from the Department of Health-funded evaluation of the social work degree qualification in England to identify possible improvements in qualifying education. The authors argue that a concentration on applicant performance at A-level may result in insufficient attention being paid to non-academic qualities, much-needed in adult and children's services. Improved partnership between employers and universities is called for, including more opportunity for involvement in selection and teaching.

Janet Warren's article adds to the growing literature concerning the participation of children and young people in social work research. Specifically, it seeks to further the emerging debate about involving young service users in the development of research proposals. The author employed a series of workshops to involve nine young carers in planning a funding application to undertake participative research of young carers' assessments. It is concluded that, although time-consuming, such participation in the early phases can result in more robust and relevant research.

Against the backcloth of apprehension about and anticipated decline in social care services, Dominique Rawlings' research report serves as a useful reminder of how local activities and groups can have a positive effect on people's lives. The report is based on an evaluation of the 'Proud2B' groups set up in Hampshire for people with a learning disability from minority ethnic backgrounds. The author highlights how difficult expressing cultural choices and needs can be for someone with a learning disability, especially in areas where diversity is low. The groups are intended to celebrate and explore members' and other cultures and the research concludes that participation can have a positive effect on members' lives in terms of enhancing self-confidence and self-advocacy skills.

The issue is completed by five book reviews, spanning a broad range of topics of interest to the readership – critical practice in social work, social work with people with learning difficulties, parenting the adopted child, anti-social behaviour, and kinship foster care. It is always satisfying to be able to publish a review penned by a doctoral student and Cecilia Love is to be congratulated for her contribution to this issue's compilation. If you would like to review a book for a future issue of the Journal, please contact Peter Scourfield, Book Reviews Editor.

With best wishes from the editorial team: Sue Harrington, Greg Mantle, Andy Pithouse and Peter Scourfield.