

The University of Hull

**THE GLOBALISATION DISCOURSE, NEO-LIBERALISM AND ITS
IMPACT ON THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF SOCIAL
WORKERS**

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by

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ABSTRACT

This research is concerned with the implementation of the new degree in social work following the Care Standards Act of 2000. The degree was introduced against a backdrop of extraordinary changes in the provision of welfare, the practical delivery of social work services and the education of social work students within a higher education setting which itself has undergone profound changes. It examines the political and economic changes which have impacted on the welfare state and how those in turn, have affected what is taught to social work students and how it is taught in our universities. By exploring the implementation of the degree in Wales insights from academics and government officials were analysed to gain a better understanding of the policy drivers which lay behind the implementation of the degree and its impact on the various 'players'. Nine participants were interviewed from different settings including the University, the Care Council for Wales and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales. People's accounts revealed a sharp difference in perception as to the way the degree was introduced, the nature of partnership working and the ultimate effectiveness of the new degree in improving the skills and knowledge of future social work practitioners. Several implications for policy and practice are presented. The analysis suggests the need for a broader debate as to what is taught on social work programmes and how it might be assessed, which should involve academics, practitioners, service users and government officials. The task is to create a curriculum which offers a less predetermined understanding of practice characterised by uncertainty, without losing a concern for safe practice. This may require a shift of authority towards practitioners' situated judgements and away from predetermined outcomes, both in respect of programme planning and policy guidelines on the specification of standards. A new alliance is proposed to encourage a more authentic engagement with the process from practitioners, service users and social work educators.

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Chapter 1

Indeed we have only the most general ideas of what we are trying to produce, what constitutes the essential skill of the social worker, and consequently still more varied ideas as to how to set about it' (Younghusband, 1959, p.28)

Some years ago I was visiting a student half way through his practice placement. He was a very able student, intelligent and very committed. During the meeting I was listening to his detailed account of how he had acted as the responsible adult in a police station, late at night for a young person who had been arrested for a serious sexual assault. He knew this young man who was in care to the local authority. At one point I asked him a challenging question regarding young people, the nature of offending and what was going through his mind whilst preparing to go to the cells to see the child, hoping for something on the nature of crime or masculinity and young male offenders (which we had talked about earlier in the year) but he responded that he was mentally going through his portfolio to see how many competencies he would be able to tick off by the end of the night. Initially, I was disappointed but then intrigued. Competencies had been introduced on to the former Diploma in Social Work in the early 1990's (CCETSW, 1989) and this student was perhaps the third intake to have worked with them. I had always had misgiving from the very beginning as to how such a complex task as social work could be disaggregated and worried how we might continue teaching critical social work theory and practice within a more prescriptive, outcome based curriculum. There is no doubt that social work practice, along with many other examples of human services activities, includes routinised skills and procedures but this is not the totality of its nature. In the context of what has been called new public management where policies and procedures are more frequently becoming couched in terms of technical-rational accountability and economic efficiency, non-

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measurable elements will not be counted, since they belong to the domain of professional mystery or mythology (Hood, 1991).

As the new degree began to become a reality I became more perplexed as to how social work education delivered from a critical perspective could survive. This was partly because my thoughts about social work seemed to be taking me farther and farther away from what is possible to teach and still call it social work. Although the simplicity of teaching students to “do” social work is attractive I am doubtful of such a notion. The question nagged as to how we were to educate our future practitioners which might fuel in them some kind of radical practice which acknowledges the political location of the most marginalized instead of seeing people's problems as individual pathologies best administered by professionals trained not to notice the state. My interest in this project then, is one based on a certain anxiety as to where social work was heading and, more importantly, my role as a teacher of social work. I also have to declare a position. I come very much from a stance which has a belief in critical practice for social work which might be summed up as follows:

- a recognition that large scale social processes, particularly those associated with class, race and gender, contribute fundamentally to the personal and social issues social workers encounter in their practice;
- the adoption of a self-reflexive and critical stance to the often contradictory effects of social work practice and social policies;
- a commitment to co-participatory rather than authoritarian practice and educational relations. This involves workers and service users, as well as academics as co-participants engaged with, but still distinct from, one another;
- working with and for oppressed populations to achieve social transformation.

It is true that I was also becoming increasingly concerned with current practices of professionalism and everything to do with it and particularly the degree to which discourses that create professional certainty and infallibility were becoming embedded within the

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social work curriculum. I was anxious to make the links for students between well-being and social justice and to keep them aware of the multiple and diverse viewpoints that occur in the social world.

At about the time of my encounter with the above student, the privatisation of social services was well established with local authorities selling their residential units, the introduction of the purchaser/provider split and the enlargement and commercialisation of the non statutory sector. At that point, I made little meaningful connection between these seemingly disparate events but gradually a muddy realisation emerged that there were some extraordinary forces at play that were not only changing social work and welfare delivery but the university sector and the nature of social work education itself. It is true that for many years the business of how professional human services' workers learn and apply knowledge and skills has been a source of contention and political dialogue and there is little doubt that it is a complex process but the introduction of the new degree in social work and the start of my doctorate studies brought together the different, unsophisticated strands of my thinking to a head. This dissertation then, is the result of an exploration into some uncharted waters that I knew little about involving a journey through a previously hidden literature base that doctoral studies gave the opportunity to explore and gain insight.

What we teach social workers and why involves some difficult thoughts: a curriculum may be more than one thing at once involving contradictory pressures; it may be a focus where dominant discourses are being resisted and where, at the same time approaches to teaching and assessment are taking place which undermine the fundamental values of social work.

What became very clear was what we teach and why, has to be seen within a complex web of broader social policy developments. Clarke (2004) is right when he says;

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Big conceptual shifts, and the big arguments around them, tend to arrive late and simplified in the field of social policy. They appear as new truths that we can ‘apply’ – but shouldn’t mess with. As elsewhere, I think that subordinations exist to be contested and resisted (p.3).

With that in mind, this study will pursue three separate but intertwined themes which are not intended to offer a linear account of an unfolding story but of a journey of exploration which explores the contradictions and ambiguities in any such account yet which tries to offer an understanding of the present and some suggestions for the future. Firstly, the study examines the changing political climate, especially the advent of neo-liberal thinking and the globalisation of capital, in which the delivery of welfare and the role and function of social work itself has changed beyond recognition from that of even thirty years ago. Secondly, the thesis will explore the impact of these fundamental shifts on the structure of social work education and training, especially the introduction of a more technicist approach to learning and, thirdly, how these significant changes in social work education have impacted on higher education institutions their staff and students and what the future might hold for all involved: social workers, the users of services, and the academics who teach the next generation of workers. To gain more insight into these themes the study will conclude with an empirical investigation into the policy imperatives which lay behind the introduction of the new social work degree in Wales and conclude by offering some thoughts as to a strategy for the future.

1.1 The Business of Social Work

One of the most significant developments within both the delivery of social work services and the education and training of social workers has been the intrusion of a business ethos (Harris, 2003; Beresford, 2006; Beresford and Holden, 2000; Farnsworth and Holden, 2006; George, 1998; Leonard 1997; Clarke et al, 2008; Ferguson, 2008). The study will

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explore how that came about and attempt to identify some of the key dimensions. This theme will start from the premise that the forces reconstructing social work lie outside of social work itself and will begin with an analysis of the changes in international markets and the global economy which have exerted pressures on the direction social welfare policy takes. Chapter 2 explores the issues of globalisation by attempting to understand the nature of the phenomenon. For Tony Blair, for example, globalisation is presented as part of the natural order: “I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalisation. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer” (Speech to the Labour Party Conference, 2005; cited in Cole, 2008). I think it important on this occasion to ignore the former Prime Minister’s advice and engage with a concept that perhaps does require a rigorous intellectual examination. For example, it is important to consider whether or not globalisation is a new phenomenon or alternatively the result of a cumulative process that has been going for many centuries. Meiksins-Wood (1998) for example, argues that what we are seeing is capitalism at a point of maturity. Others like Cole (2005) see it as a phenomena as old as capitalism itself which simply alters its form at various points in its history. What is beyond doubt is that the current form of globalisation has a new and seemingly unstoppable imperative. Many writers argue that that is the result of neo-liberalism which has created a political environment allowing a more aggressive form of capitalism. Cole (2008), quoting Martinez and Garcia (2000), identified five defining features of the global phenomenon of neo-liberalism:

1 *The rule of the market*

- The liberation of ‘free’ or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the state no matter how much social damage this creates;
- Greater openness to international trade and investment;

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- The reduction of wages by de-unionising worker's and eliminating workers rights;
- An end to price controls;
- Total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services.

2 Cutting public expenditure

- Less spending on social services such as education and healthcare;
- Reducing the safety net of the poor;
- Reducing expenditure on maintenance, e.g. of roads, bridges and water supply.

3 Deregulation: reducing government regulation of everything that could diminish profits

- Less protection of the environment;
- Lesser concerns with job safety.

4 Privatisation: selling state owned enterprises, goods and services to private Investors

- Banks;
- Key industries;
- Railways;
- Toll highways;
- Electricity;
- Schools;
- Hospitals;
- Fresh water.

5 Eliminating the concept of the 'the public good' or 'community'

- Replacing it with 'individual responsibility';
- Pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of healthcare and social security by themselves (p.88).

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As George and Wilding (2002) argue, “this ideology [neo-liberalism] shapes and conditions political debate and perceptions of political possibilities” (p.44). They go on to suggest that in this open and competitive market, states must be ultra competitive and offer incentives like a flexible workforce and a low tax and low inflation environment. For example, as Gordon Brown said in a speech to the CBI in 2005:

My vision is of a Britain made for globalisation....the location of choice and the place for business to be... And just as we have met our inflation target in every year since 1997 we will meet our inflation target in future years so that business can plan ahead, invest for the future with confidence, grow and prosper. And as I made clear...seeking discipline in public sector pay, I will resist inflationary pressures from wherever they come, safeguarding Britain’s fiscal position today and for the future”
(Speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the CBI conference in London, 28 November, 2005; cited in Cole, 2008)

Chapter 3 goes on to explore these themes in more detail and examines how these forces may have contributed to a redefinition of the relationship between social work and the state. The chapter will also offer an analysis of the origins and philosophy of the British welfare state before bringing the account up to date with a discussion as to how the increased privatisation of public services came about and how these services, traditionally delivered by the state, have impacted on the profession of social work itself. Following on from that, Chapter 4 offers an elucidation as to what impression these developments have had on the positioning of social work as a profession and the subsequent impact on social work education. The chapter continues with an account of the history of social work education from its early beginnings to the establishment of the new degree in social work following the implementation of the Care Standards Act in 2001. In particular, the chapter explores in some detail the development of the competency movement and offers a discussion as to its origins and a critique of its effectiveness in professional education. Why so many professional groupings (nursing, teaching, medicine as well as social work) pursued an integration of competence in their education and training programmes is an interesting question. Perhaps, it is linked to the search for the essence of practice: the pot of gold at the

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end of the rainbow. Foucault (2002a,) has criticised the search for essence on the grounds that the continual regression to some notional point of origin is a fruitless task as the process serves to privilege some whilst excluding other versions of knowledge in favour of those who control its production.

The implementation of the new degree in social work, however, can not be understood without a brief analysis of the current state of higher education. The introduction of the new degree placed a major challenge before social work academics which will be explored in some detail. Although, in principle, the degree was warmly welcomed the manner and nature of the degree received some criticism which Chapter 4 attempts to highlight but that discussion has to be contextualised within a changed university environment in which there have been major developments such as in quality assurance procedures, a tension between research and teaching, resource shortages and the marketisation of higher education itself. Simultaneously, there are drivers from the funding councils to widen participation, to increase employability and to develop strategies for e-learning (Taylor et al 2002; Peters and Roberts, 2000; Maskell and Robinson, 2002; Jary and Parker, 1998).

With the former qualification, the Diploma in Social Work, it was social work academics that essentially designed the curriculum and implemented strategies to deliver the programmes and assess the students rather as for any degree in a university. However, the notion of participation in the new degree, fifteen years later, is far more complex with a multiplicity of partners and stakeholders: academics, agency partners, users and carers, students plus staff from other higher education departments for inter-professional education. An interesting question to be examined is where the real balance of power might

lie between these often competing forces as given that universities hold legal accountability for their programme, questions may be asked about the limits to influence by other groups. This is a particularly pertinent issue in Wales as the Care Council insisted on the centrality of employers in the degree construction and its management. In Wales, The Care Council stated quite clearly that the new degree must have employers in the driving seat:

The establishment of the partnership has been agreed as part of the project to reform social work training.... in order to ensure that the new degree is located within a workforce planning process with employers taking a lead role. (Social Services Inspectorate for Wales 2004).

1.2 Empirical Study

The study proposes to contextualise the discussion I have just outlined by examining in detail the development and introduction of the new three year degree in social work in Wales by conducting an empirical study to explore the policy initiatives which lay behind its introduction. This element of the research also proposes to enquire as to why a particular structure was chosen and whether or not alternative models were considered. Finally, the research will consider the effect, if any, of the introduction of the degree on the higher education institutions in Wales.

The key component of this study is to examine the policy drivers which lay behind the introduction of the degree in social work in Wales and its impact on the design of the degree and the people who deliver and receive it. As mentioned earlier, Wales pursued a path quite distinct from England in the following specific ways:

- Care Council for Wales (CCfW) developed a set of standards for practice monitored through a unique funding scheme;
- They developed a more prescriptive approach to annual monitoring;

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- Decisions on approval of the degree rested with the CCfW advisor on the day of validation;
- The centrality of employers in the design and partnership process;
- The requirement to map the National Occupational Standards (NOS) across the three years of the degree;
- The requirement to link the NOS to 84 specific learning outcomes.

The policy changes that have impacted on social work practice and social work education seem remote and, on occasions, confusing. The empirical study is an attempt to search out some explanations by examining in some detail the implementation of the new social work degree in one country of the United Kingdom. By focussing on four discrete areas it is hoped to shed some light on what the various policy, political and educational imperatives really were and whether or not the changes brought about by the degree will ultimately succeed in 'producing' more effective social workers who might still retain a critical perspective towards their practice. In addition, the study will seek to explore the perceptions of those involved i.e. the academics and the government officials as to the experience of implementation and any possible impact it might have had on the various 'players'. The empirical study will use the themes below as a starting point for a series of interviews with key personnel in Wales including Care Council for Wales's staff, university academics and staff from the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales in the hope that fresh insights will be revealed. It is important to note that there have been few studies on the implementation of the new degree and none have actually asked those involved in the process for their views and observations.. The themes chosen are as follows:-

1. The political imperatives: - What were the key drivers behind the degree? What was the rationale for ensuring the centrality of employers in the process; the changed format of practice learning?
2. The philosophical imperatives: - Why the model that incorporated the National Occupational Standards linked to prescribed competencies was adopted. To what extent were other models considered?

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3. Implementation: - Did the degree proposal change in process? What was the role of the main 'players' in the project?

4. Impact: - What effect has the new degree had and will it be fit for purpose? For example, what kind of workforce is the new degree aiming to 'produce'? Will the reforms help? If so, in what ways?

1.3 Summary

For me, the core mission of social work is to promote social justice through social work practice and policy making. To this end, much social work education has committed itself over the years to teaching theories that prioritize social structural analyses and which promote collaborative approaches to action. This study aims to explore the fresh challenges arising from modern practice which includes the capacity of social workers to respond to new public welfare approaches and the delivery of social services. It is an interesting question to ask whether or not the new social work degree will fit people for these new challenges and whether a more 'technicist' approach as envisaged with the new degree might actually enhance the capacity of social workers to respond to the contemporary. Or prove limiting.

Chapter 2

The Globalisation Discourse: Myth or Reality?

What has been accomplished has been a successful translation of an economic doctrine into the language of experience, moral imperative and common sense. (Apple, 2000, p.22)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin to explore the arguments and try to give meaning to what empirically have been significant changes to welfare policy and the delivery of personal social services. A major feature of government welfare policy over the last twenty five years has been a shift in emphasis from state to market. With limited supporting evidence, the positives of the market have been contrasted with the negatives of state intervention. This chapter explores the background to this development and argues that under 'globalisation' the trend has been for the market increasingly to be freed to be profitable and for the state to bear subsequent costs.

The conventional reading of globalisation is that national governments have been compelled to accept economic policies that rest on low and stable inflation, low wages and flexible labour markets in order not to frighten off globally mobile investment and to compete on equal terms in a global economy. The capacity of national governments to follow the economic policies of their choice, the argument goes, is restricted by a new world market place dominated by increased volume of trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) and cross border flows of capital. Trans-national corporations (TNC's) have been globally mobile and the lower labour costs of developing countries have encouraged them

to transfer their production from the developed world (Jordan, 1998; Beresford and Holden 2000; Sykes and Holden, 2005).

This interpretation of globalisation has been challenged by some commentators who suggest that instead of being powerless in the face of globalisation, nation states like the UK have encouraged and reinforced it. If they had wished, it is argued, they could have challenged these processes either individually or as supra-national blocks like the EU. The argument continues that globalisation has been appropriated as an excuse to prioritise market determinism and political responses have been fashioned by it and, as a result, have had a fundamental effect on social and economic policy. In particular, it has reinforced and accelerated traditional tendencies for social policy to be subordinated to economic policy (George, 1998; Holden, 2003; Farnsworth and Holden, 2006).

2.2 What is Globalisation?

As early as 1916, John Dewey wrote:

Every expansive era in the history of mankind has coincided with the operation of factors which have tended to eliminate distance between peoples and classes previously hemmed off from one another. Even the alleged benefits of war, so far as more than alleged, spring from the fact that conflict of peoples at least enforces intercourse between them and thus accidentally enables them to learn from one another, and thereby to expand their horizons. Travels, economic and commercial tendencies, have at present gone far to break down external barriers; to bring peoples and classes into closer and more perceptible connection with one another. It remains for the most part to secure the intellectual and emotional significance of this physical annihilation of space. (Dewey, 1993, p.110)

Today, the economic and commercial tendencies that Dewey noticed have taken another form with an additional shift to the tertiary sector of the economy especially the delivery of public services including social welfare and transport, for example. Within the broader social sciences there is an extensive literature on globalisation but it is only comparatively

recently that theorists of social welfare have linked theories of globalisation to an explanation for changes in how public services are delivered (Ferguson 2008; Deacon et al 1997; Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996; Hoogvelt, 1997; Trevillion, 1997; Mishra, 1998, 1999; Ohmae, 1996). Unfortunately, much of this literature tends to present globalisation as if it were a unified body of theory instead of representing different positions and arguments within it. This uncritical and rather one-dimensional view tends to reduce the complexity of events by overstating the economic aspects of social life whilst simultaneously underplaying the political and to ignore much inconvenient and sometime contradictory evidence. In this view, globalisation was understood as a 'single uncontradictory phenomena which gives rise to inevitable outcomes everywhere and is uncontrollable by nation states either individually or as a collective force' (Hall, 1998:11). Although this version of globalisation has been largely discredited in the academic literature it continues to be perpetrated in some quarters and, within the UK has played an important role in legitimising a neo-liberal approach to public service delivery. Globalisation, then, can become an ideological device that states and governments employ as an excuse for imposing certain policies that would otherwise fail to gain public acceptance or support. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the admission of the ideological role globalisation plays should lead us somehow to deny its reality. (Papastehpanou, 2004).

As Giddens (2001) points out:

a few years ago, there was some doubt, particularly on the left, about whether globalization was a reality. The un-persuaded would write 'globalization' in inverted commas, to demonstrate their essential scepticism about the idea. This controversy has moved on. Discussion continues about how best to conceptualize globalization, but few would any longer deny its influence - as signalled by the role of global financial markets, new developments in electronic communication and geopolitical transitions [...]. Discussion of globalization is no longer concentrated on whether or not it exists, but on what its consequences are. (p.3)

Giddens is right when he alludes to the fact that the business of how to conceptualise globalisation is an area fraught with disagreement. The term globalisation has become a shorthand way of referring to a number of powerful phenomena and their effects upon the economic, cultural and political dimensions of social life throughout the world. Although there is no widely agreed definition of the term, Waters (1995) is typical when he describes it as:

A social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding. (p.3)

Holm and Sorenson (1995) see globalisation as ‘the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across borders’ (p.11). It is probable that the acceptance of ‘globalisation’ derives from the ubiquity of what Holton (1998) calls ‘globe talk’, a term he uses to refer to the widespread use of phrases like global culture, global village and so on.

This use of globe talk has a rather seductive quality as:

So many different aspects of life in so many different parts of the world seem to be connected with processes that transcend territorial boundaries that the centrality and coherence of globalisation take on an obvious ‘taken for granted’ character. (Holton, 1998, p.4)

This ubiquity of the term also contributes to the notion that it exists in a simple format which is problematic as there is no one single unified theory. This can lead to an acceptance of the term without the necessary rigorous scrutiny of its various theses, or of the evidence which supports them. The theoretical status of the various accounts is variable and often uncertain. For example, there is a rather circular quality about the form of reasoning which defines globalisation in terms of the distinctive social and economic changes taking place in the world and is, in turn, evidenced by reference to these changes.

Theorists of economic–technological explanations of globalisation contend that its effects are increasingly manifest throughout the economic, political and cultural domains of societies and propose that globalisation ‘proceeds most rapidly in contexts in which relationships are mediated through symbols’ (Waters, 1995, p.124). Thus, in economic terms, the symbolic role of money (as a token of value) together with the technological changes which enable computerised trading have facilitated the development of a global financial market. Consequently, nation states and their citizens are presumed to be subject to the vagaries of international capitalism and the pressures arising from the rapid industrialisation of the developing world market for capital, commodities and labour. This market is seen as being one in which there are increasing differentiation of production and divisions of labour on an international scale, where production can be moved around the globe to find the cheapest labour supply and raw materials. The power of trans-national companies is further seen as being promoted and protected by the World Bank, The World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For example, the OECD recently proposed a Multilateral Agreement on Investment which would give companies legal redress against anyone, including governments, who sought to prevent their ‘legitimate’ activities. Thus opposition to companies’ activities on the grounds of environmental damage, for example, could result in punitive legal activity thus discouraging anyone from resisting (Pugh & Gould, 2000).

Although economic determinism as outlined above is presented as the sole engine of social and economic change, others represent globalisation as a seemingly mysterious all enveloping process that underpins every current change in society. For some writers like Fukuyama, (1992) globalisation marks a victory of free market economics over the world

economic and political systems. However, this free market influence is not always welcome as the homogenisation of markets by trans-national companies – the ‘McDonaldisation’ or ‘Coca-colonisation’ of consumption – may be perceived as damaging to cultural and economic diversity (Ritzer, 1993).

An alternative view is that globalisation brings a more positive awareness of difference and a growing appreciation of the inter-relatedness of cultures and economies where different foods and music are appreciated and which could then lead to a new world order devoid of conflict and based on a universalised ideal of human rights (Holton, 1998). Isin & Wood (1999), however, call into question the homogenisation thesis, arguing that ‘globalization often results in indigenisation of global symbols and hybridisation of various local symbols’ (p.105). To them, complexity is the most important feature of globalisation. Porter & Vidovich, (2000) argue that a paradoxical consequence of that phenomenon and the awareness of

finitude and boundedness of the planet and humanity, is not to produce homogeneity but to familiarise us with greater diversity, the extensive range of the local cultures (p.451).

Giddens (1998) singles out and focuses on what he sees as a positive effect of globalisation, namely, the freedom that stems from the enlargement of the economic, political and cultural horizons of people. Thus, he considers globalisation a ‘transformation of space and time in which the development of global systems and networks reduces the hold of local circumstances over people’s lives’ (Porter & Vidovich, 2000, p.449).

Bauman (1998) however is critical of such perspectives. He argues that the kind of freedom to which Giddens refers is accessible only for the few:

The global network of communication, acclaimed as the gateway to a new and unheard of freedom, is clearly very selectively used; it is a narrow cleft in the thick wall, rather than a gate (p.44).

In his latest book, Bauman (2005) argues powerfully that the knowledge economy effectively cancels the old modes and relations of production, as well as freeing the elites such that the rich are now able to create an unprecedented independence and separation from the poor. The poor are now even removed from the sight of the privileged classes and become so tied to their local circumstances that social mobility seems no longer to be a feasible life option for them. This localising trend, he argues, triggers a new social division and hierarchy. Habermas's (1998) analysis converges with Bauman's on this point. As Habermas writes, 'pauperized groups are no longer able to change their social situation by their own efforts' (p.315). Bauman goes on to suggest that globalisation is, in fact, the new world 'disorder'. He says:

In the globalizing world, order becomes the index of powerlessness and subordination. The new global power structure is operated by the opposition between mobility and sedentariness, contingency and routine, rarity and density of constraints. It is as if the long stretch of history which began with the triumph of the settled over the nomads is now coming to its end.....Globalisation may be defined in many ways, but that of the 'revenge of the nomads' is as good as any other (p.35).

Bauman's interesting analysis points out that the rules and norms of earlier living tied the controlled and controllers together – just like Bentham's panoptical model of social control – such that both 'sides' were interdependent meaning that the reproduction of the power hierarchy required constant presence and testing. He argues that the new global order has rendered redundant the reciprocal dependency the 'old' system required. Those at the top of the new hierarchy are able to move at a moment's notice leaving those at the bottom unable to stop those movements or even slow them down whilst, at the same time, tying the poor to their localities. Interestingly, the recent statistics on social mobility published by the

government would support the views of Habermas and Bauman which clearly show that social mobility over the last twenty five years has virtually ceased (Ferguson, 2008).

In contrast, in accounts of globalisation which focus more upon the social effects, it is the cultural consequences that are stressed, especially the changing awareness that people now have of the world and their place within it. This ‘intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole’ (Robertson, 1992 p.8) can permeate every aspect of social life and encompasses a growing awareness of the interlinking of our actions and subsequent consequences on a much broader stage. Another aspect of this is the supposed development of a more reflexive persona evidenced in the way that world citizens now use cultural symbols and consume products from all over the world (Beck, 1992). This idea about reflexive modernisation is a feature of both Beck’s and Giddens’ writings whereby they both note the condition of radical insecurity in which we now find ourselves. They both suggest that the political landscape has been re-drawn whereby policies formerly associated with the right have been appropriated by the left and re-shaped to satisfy a new audience. This can be seen in the appropriation of *Welfare to Work* in the current Labour Government’s *New Deal* programme as well as the concern with ‘what works’ (Mooney and Law, 2007). Not only is it argued that we have moved from the old dualities of right and left but the dualities of earlier times have been transcended like, for example, that between private and public ownership; capital and labour and that class antagonisms are so fragmented they are rendered obsolete. It is then claimed that there are no longer any sacred cows like public delivery of welfare services or that private providers should not be capable of delivering and managing education services.

Kristeva (1998) who adopts a postmodernist discourse argues that globalisation heralds a future in which diversity and hybridity will affect new forms of solidarity. She argues that if one is a stranger to oneself it creates a sense of solidarity among us because ‘we all belong to a future type of humanity which will be made entirely of foreigners/strangers who try to understand each other’ (p.323). This position, however, seems to disregard the complex politics of difference and normalises the experiences of one person as being those of all. It also misses pointing out the tensions and negative effects that material and symbolic competitiveness produces but tries to justify them through a very misguided and conservative pragmatism. This is evident by the fact that she mentions cultural difference as something we have to pay attention to but adds:

Still, we are fully aware of the risks that may come with such an attitude: ignorance of contemporary economic reality, excessive union demands, inability to take part in international competition, idleness, backwardness. This is why we need to be alert and always remember the new constraints of our technological world, of “causes and effects” (p.329).

Kristeva’s main suggestion, however, rather than being a sociological one seems more psychoanalytic —and a very dubious one—as the next quotation shows:

In order to fight the state of national depression that we have in France (and in other countries as well) as a result of globalization and the influx of immigrants, and also in order to oppose maniacal reactions to this depression (such as that of the National Front), it is important to restore national confidence’ (p.326).

Here, the association of national depression with globalisation and the influx of immigrants misses other important factors but does illustrate how the globalisation discourse permeates a wide variety of intellectual and political debates. Interestingly, whilst there may be considerable differences surrounding the meaning of and causes of globalisation between the various exponents there is a measure of agreement about its impact which is evidenced by a world:

In which time and space have become compressed because of the operation of modern transport, communications and the increasing internationalisation of economic activity. Thus, actions in one part of the globe have consequences elsewhere (Pugh 1997, p.101).

For some, especially Third Way advocates, the impact of globalisation has been compared to that of the weather ‘a self-regulating, implacable force of nature about which we can do nothing except look out of the window and hope for the best’ (Andrews, 1999, p.1). But critics of the Third Way such as Bauman argue in a similar literary vein:

Globalization is not about what we all, or at least the most resourceful and enterprising among us, wish or hope to do. It is about what is happening to us all. It explicitly refers to the foggy and slushy “no man’s land” stretching beyond the reach of the design and action capacity of anybody in particular’ (Bauman, 1998, p.39).

These meteorological metaphors illustrate the unanticipated and unintended character of globalisation which seems to illustrate that the phenomenon exists but that clarity is required in how the discourses are used and sometimes, understood.

Politically, globalisation is playing a major role in issues of state sovereignty, world order and, indeed, the delivery of public services. Culturally, it is intervening dramatically in the (re)shaping of identities and self-conceptions, creativity and responses to aesthetic experience. As a result of its multi-dimensionality and the haphazard force of its effects, for Bauman (1998), globalisation denotes the ‘indeterminate, unruly and self-propelled character of world affairs: the absence of a centre, of a controlling desk, of a board of directors’ (p.38).

2.3 The Historical Uniqueness of Globalisation

As argued earlier, much of the discussion of globalisation revisits a much older question, namely, the extent to which societies are converging; that is, becoming more alike

(Dahrendorf, 1959; Kerr et al, 1962). Debates about convergence have tended to coalesce around two positions: either the convergence is driven by industrialisation, or that capitalism is the dominant force driving it. There is a similar division within the discourses of globalisation between those who suggest that globalisation is a phenomenon which predates industrialisation and is strengthened by it (Robertson, 1992), and those who contend that it arises from modernisation (Giddens, 1990). Clearly, different perceptions about whether it is primarily a technical and economic process, or whether more emphasis should be placed on the social dimensions of globalisation will inevitably engender very different responses to the phenomena particularly in regard to the impact on the delivery of public services. The differences of position as to whether globalisation is a distinctively new phenomenon, a purely economic one, or one driven by technology are crucially important because they have considerable importance for the subsequent analysis of the role of nation states. For example, Wallerstein (1974) took the view that:

A European world economy originated in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, and that it can be termed 'a world system not because it encompasses the whole world but because it is larger than any juridicially defined political unit' (p.15).

The subsequent expansion of transnational economic activity has therefore 'transformed the capitalist world economy from a system located primarily in Europe to one that covers the whole globe' (Wallerstein 1990, p.36). This longer view of the origins of globalisation which counters the supposition that it is a modernist phenomenon is significant because it recognizes that nation states have co-existed alongside these developments often actively ameliorating the worst excesses of capitalism by dealing with the social problems associated with it and, most significantly, meeting those costs.

It is interesting how many of the postmodernist writers on globalisation stress the uniqueness of *this* time and *these* events as somehow having more importance than that which has gone before (Morley, 2004; Khan and Dominelli, 2000; Kesteva, 1998). This rather ahistorical perspective towards contemporary changes assumes a rather elitist if not conceited millenarian stance. As Pugh and Gould (2000) point out, apart from the references to the 'bourgeoisie' in the following quotation it would be hard to distinguish the description of globalisation offered by many contemporary writers from the changes described in the *Communist Manifesto* originally published in 1848:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation..... The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country (p.130).

Unfortunately, some proponents of globalisation theory display the postmodernist tendency to ignore history and consequently present highly selective accounts of the past assuming a stability and consistency that never was. For example, to argue that current transnational economic activity produces unique events is probably mistaken. It fails to acknowledge that in previous centuries economic activity like Canadian fur trading, the slave trade itself and the tea trade in Asia had extraordinary consequences that were massively disruptive to the people and cultures involved in them. Kesteva (1998), who was referred to earlier, suggested that immigration was a modern 'problem' brought about by globalisation compressing space within the world but there are two problems with this analysis. Firstly, there is little data that would suggest population movements are greater now than previously. In fact, during the last forty years, restrictive immigration policies and increased border surveillance in some areas have considerably reduced opportunities for economic migration. Secondly, while economic imperatives might be the most significant

factor in driving migration it remains the case that other factors such as famine and war are major causes of involuntary migration and that these numbers outstrip economic migration. For example, in the Middle East more than four million Palestinian refugees were displaced during the Palestinian/Israeli conflict from 1948-9. More recently, wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa have produced enormous numbers of migrants fleeing the various war zones. It would be stretching the thesis a little far to suggest that such events had anything to do with economic globalisation (Pugh and Gould, 2000). Having said that, there seems little doubt that ‘modern’ globalisation is:

an empirical phenomenon that has been primarily felt as a structural transformation of the world economic system operating in a complex dialectic with time and space compression effected by advances in technology and communication (Papastehanou, 2005, p.534).

New technology coupled with the de-regulation of money markets, the diminishing of protectionist policies and a compliant political atmosphere has meant that what was already a process is perhaps now able to manifest itself in a more bullish manner. Held et al (1999) argue that what distinguishes this new form of economic globalisation is the dramatic acceleration of internationalising processes alongside the shrinking of time and space. This combination of technological and economic change has led many to identify these changes in terms of an emerging techno-economic paradigm – a view held by the World Bank and the IMF – which explain globalisation in a functionalist and technical discourse. In its most extreme form, this deterministic version of globalisation has

at its core a view of a transformed economy in which hyper-mobile capital rampaged around the globe, collapsing time and space on its travels, and undercutting both nation states and their welfare systems (Clarke 2001, p.19).

This view of globalisation which Hirst and Thompson (1998) call the ‘strong globalisation thesis’ implies that the new highly competitive global economy cannot be controlled by nation states; that nation states can no longer control their own economies, that they can no

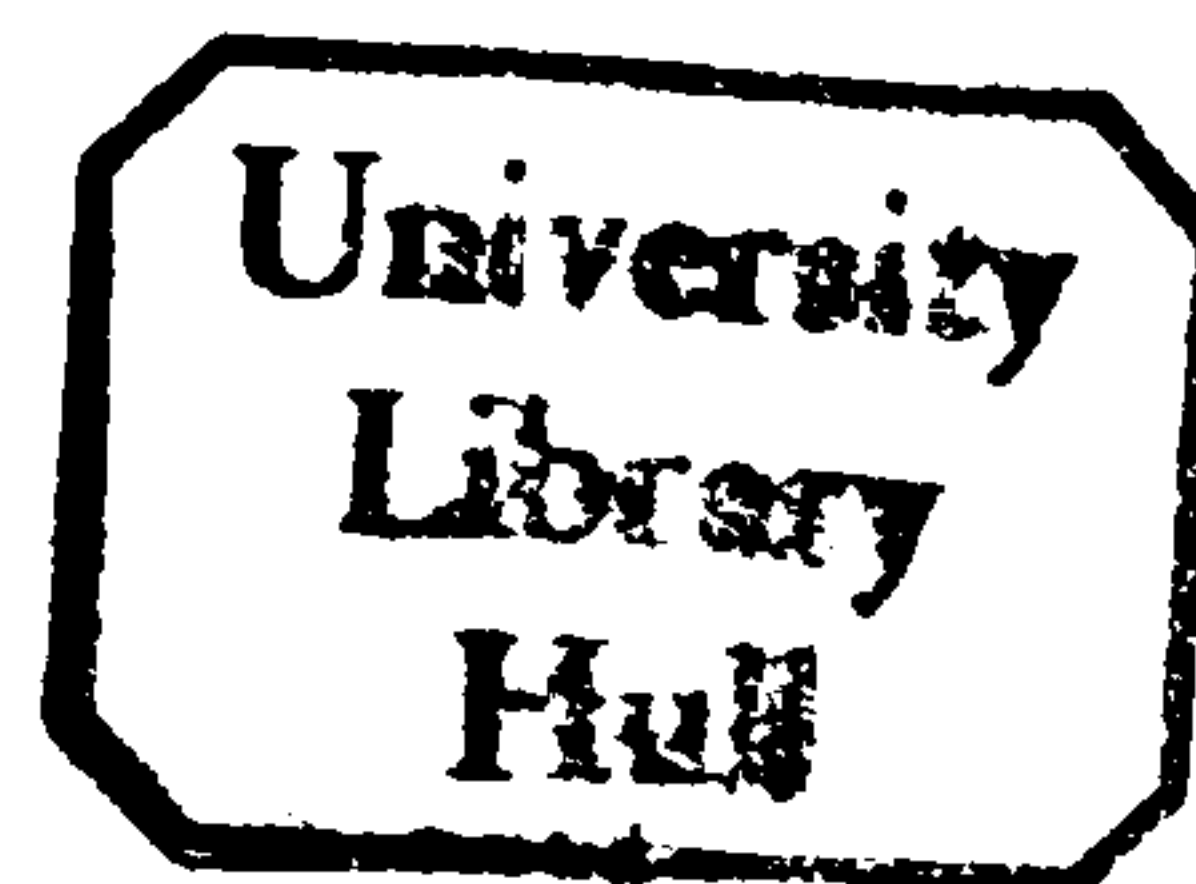
longer exist as autonomous agencies and that social democracy in its traditional form is no longer viable. This is a crucial debate in relation to the prospects for welfare delivery and public services in general which will now be explored in more detail.

2.4 Nation States, Powerlessness and the Welfare State

Trevillion (1997), amongst others, has argued the weakness of international governments when he said that, 'more recently, the capacity of most governments to resist global forces has diminished' (p.3). Globalisation is seen to somehow allow global capital to move around the edges of conventional capitalist controls and regulations. This heightened capital mobility, labour and financial de-regulation, it has been argued, have caused the end of the Keynesian welfarism of the post war years. Also to be consigned to the memory is the very essence of a positive agenda for the public services. I would want to concur with Hay and Watson (2004) when they suggest that the impact of globalisation on the British economy may be more rhetorical than substantive – but no less real for this. It has been the political discourse of globalisation (especially over the last decade) that has led to welfare retrenchment, labour market deregulation, the privatisation of public services and most crucially, the discourse that '*there is no alternative*'. This notion of governments becoming powerless against these globalising forces has led to what McQuaig (1998) has called the 'culture of impotence' which is not an established fact but rather a matter of belief:

Somehow, the notion that we can collectively achieve great things, indeed, that we can achieve even basic things that were regularly achieved centuries ago - like providing work, shelter and food for everyone in the community – these things are now considered beyond our reach (p.28).

She goes on to say that 'one striking thing about impotence is how unfashionable it is, except when applied to democracy' (ibid), and points out that similar claims of powerlessness would be derided in the business community where power and its



possibilities are exalted. McQuaig's work raises some interesting questions. If she is correct, then why would governments relinquish their power and act in this way? Or rather, why should they exercise it by acts of omission by making decisions not to intervene in the market? One reason for the perception that intervention is either not possible or desirable could be because of the recent reification of market forces and the free market ideal referred to earlier. Claims of powerlessness do, of course, also allow governments to disavow responsibility for social problems, but it is overly deterministic to suggest that they are simply unable to act because of economic circumstances which reduce the complexity of life to that one dimensional force – economics. The USA, for example, has been particularly successful in protecting many aspects of its economy behind non-tariff barriers and refusing to join environmental protection projects like Kyoto. Of course, one has to recognise its ability to do this is helped by its sheer size and military capability but it does illustrate that crude economic determinism fails to take account of the political dimension of world affairs, particularly the capacity for collective international action as EU and USA resistance to Microsoft's monopolistic dominance revealed and, more recently, extraordinary collective interventions by state banks in the world money markets. Also, immediately following the Second World War international collective action was able to bring about significant changes to the economic and social infrastructure of Europe and Asia.

Despite a good deal of intellectual scrutiny and criticism, the view of globalisation as an inevitability has played an important role in legitimising a neo-liberal approach to public sector reform in the UK. The term 'neo-liberalism' denotes new forms of political-economic governance premised on the extension of market relationships. In critical social

science literature the term has usurped labels referring to specific political projects (Thatcherism, Reganomics, New Labour), and is more widely used than its counterparts including, for example, economic rationalism, monetarism, neo-conservatism, managerialism and contractualism. Harvey (2006) defines neo-liberalism as being:

in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade....Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary (p.2).

Internationally, conservative and social democratic governments alike are involved in debates over welfare state processes. Whereas under Keynesian welfarism the state provision of goods and services to a national population was understood as a means of ensuring social well-being, neo-liberalism is associated with the preference for a minimalist state. Markets are thought to be a better way of organising economic activity because they are associated with competition, economic efficiency and choice. In conjunction with this general shift towards the neo-liberal tenet of 'more market', deregulation and privatisation have become central themes in debates over welfare state and public sector restructuring. (Ferguson, 2008; Larner, 2000; Beresford, 2006; Sykes and Holden, 2005). (That particular discussion will be developed further in the next chapter). It is interesting to see how the crude 'political logic of globalisation' which has been largely discredited in the academic literature continues to dominate the political discourse of globalisation. Hay and Watson (2004) argue that there are strategic associations between neo-liberal economics and the politically expedient crude globalisation thesis which trumpets the end of capital controls and the victory of the market. They go on to argue that it is just that view which has dominated 'New Labour's' current governance strategy which routinely deploys the discourse of globalisation as a justification for reducing government and dumbing down the

politically feasible. They argue: ‘the discourse of globalization has been appropriated in order to render economically necessary the politically contingent logic of neo-liberal convergence’ (Hay and Watson, 2004, p.2).

Perhaps the ‘strong globalisation thesis’ referred to earlier has become one of the myths by which we live. Although reductionist and one dimensional it has, nonetheless, become the fable by which we are governed and our public services managed. As Weiss (1998) argues:

political leaders have themselves played a large part in contributing to [the] view of government helplessness in the face of global trends. In canvassing support for policies lacking popular appeal, many OECD governments have sought to “sell” their policies of retrenchment to the electorate as being somehow “forced” on them by global economic trends over which they have no control (p.16).

In this new international competitive arena, nation states, it is argued, must become more competitive and out compete each other by offering investment opportunities, low inflation, low wages, welfare retrenchment and supply side rigidities. As Deacon et al (1997) comment on the 1997 IMF report: ‘international financial markets...serve to ‘discipline’ governments...encouraging the adoption of *appropriate* policies, and ultimately, rewarding *good* policies’ (p66; my italics). Critics of this position would argue that the strong globalisation thesis has a shaky statistical basis and that the extent of economic interdependence is seriously exaggerated. (Hirst and Thompson, 1999; Hay and Watson, 2004). In fact, there appears to be little evidence that we live in a truly globalised world. Hay and Watson (2004) argue further that there is no conclusive proof that economic globalisation, as articulated by the UK government, exists at all. Production relations continue to be territorially specific and occupy national economic space. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is often held up as a measure of the new reality but FDI flows today are

comparable to those of 1913. In fact the FDI flows were greater during 1967-1980 than for the following decade when globalisation was supposed to have taken off (Bairoch, 1996).

States are not neutral actors having things ‘done’ to them but are forces in their own right that enable changes to happen. As Scholte (1997) says, ‘States have played an indispensable enabling role in the globalisation of capital’ (p.441). If that is the case, then the impact of globalised capitalism will indeed shape the future of states hence its need to become involved in the shaping of that process. As Boyer and Drache (1996) argue, ‘the nation state, as mediating structure, makes the strategic difference between winning and losing in a highly volatile international economy’. Cerny (1997) takes this debate a stage further and suggests the state is perhaps the critical agent in the process of globalisation which, he argues, is essentially a politically driven agenda and not simply an economic one, which has had the effect of turning the ‘welfare state’ into the ‘competition state’. He goes on, ‘the competition state is becoming increasingly both the engine room and the steering mechanism of political globalisation itself’ (p.274). The notion, then, that the state is a defenceless paper boat tossed about on the sea of uncontrolled capitalism is probably a suspect notion. As Massey (1999) has argued:

We are all too frequently told today that globalisation in its current form is inevitable: that there is no alternative. We should be very wary of such propositions. Today’s form of globalisation is not an inevitable outcome; it is a project. Propositions of inevitability are not a description of the world as it is, so much as an image in which the world is being made (p.56).

Despite the fact that deterministic versions of globalisation are contested ideas they continue to be perpetuated by both governments and academics. Giddens (2001), for example, talks in terms of how the world has changed and how states (and parties of the

left) must bring into line their concerns about social justice, education and welfare and accept a changed world. He argues:

[the Labour Party] ...is closer today to the mainstream of social democracy than ever before. All continental social-democratic parties have introduced similar policy changes in recent years. And this is not surprising. The world has changed enormously over the past two or three decades. Socialism is no longer a viable economic doctrine; Keynesianism has become inoperative; globalisation has intensified; and the economic system has been transformed by information technology. A left of centre party today must concern itself with competitiveness and social justice and must indeed reconcile the two (Giddens 2001: p.29).

This view of globalisation has helped give legitimacy to governments to pursue welfare policies based on the pursuit of a privatising, market driven agenda geared to deliver the assumed needs of a globalised economy. In its April 1998 Green Paper on welfare reform, the new Labour Government argued that its policy reforms will follow a "third way":

The welfare state now faces a choice of futures. A privatised future, with the welfare state becoming a residual safety net for the poorest and most marginalised; the status quo, but with more generous benefits; or the Government's third way - promoting opportunity instead of dependence, with a welfare state providing for the mass of people, but in new ways to fit the modern world (Cited in Harris, 2004: p.78).

It might be argued that this discourse of globalisation appears to have been hijacked in order to render economically 'necessary' the politically contingent logic of neo-liberal convergence. In other words, changes in the welfare state are not a 'requirement' of a complex and shifting globalised economy but the result of purposive political action (Palier and Sykes, 2001). Having said that, there is little doubt that national governments are constrained across the range of domestic policy but probably as much by the pervasive ideology that underpins the modern globalisation movement – neo-liberalism. As George and Wilding (2002) argue, "this ideology [neoliberalism] shapes and conditions political debate and perceptions of political possibilities" (p.44). In this open and competitive market, states must seek to position themselves as competitive economic agencies and offer

incentives like a flexible (preferably de-unionised) workforce and a low tax and low inflation environment. Fiscal austerity, welfare retrenchment and the removal of supply side rigidities like trade unions and professional autonomy appear to be a necessary component of the ideology. Governments need to reduce deficits by slashing expenditure rather than raising taxes; indeed lower taxation is a prime policy of neo liberal economists and policy makers. As Mishra (1999) observes:

In most countries tax reform has shifted the burden downwards to the middle and low-income population while providing high-income earners with large` tax breaks. Thus, financing for public expenditure has been sustained in part through borrowing, resulting in higher deficits and in part by maintaining overall taxation levels but shifting to regressive taxation (p.42).

In other words, the modern globalised economy demands that the nation state has to prioritise the economic over the social. Whilst there is nothing new about these neo-liberal objectives, what is new is the financial deregulation and the mobility of money and capital which has transformed neo-liberalism from an ideology confined to a small intellectual elite in the United States to a policy imperative of global capitalism. As Blair said in 1997:

The key to new Labour economics is the recognition that Britain...[has]... to compete in an increasingly international market place....Today's Labour Party, new Labour, is the political embodiment of the changed world-the new challenges, the new policies and the new politics (Cited in Hay and Watson, 2004).

Hay and Watson (2004) go on to argue that throughout the period from 1995 to the election and beyond, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown delivered a series of high powered speeches that marked a significant departure from previous policy. This policy shift was situated within a discourse of globalisation which then reinforced the position the political leaders had come to adopt. They go on to argue that 'in this way, the distinction between the 'inevitable' and the 'desirable' was subtly and, we suggest, strategically blurred in order to increase the potency of the message being relayed' (Hay and Watson, 2004, p.290). The message was a clear one. The policies that had sustained the country since the Second

World War were no longer sustainable. The new reality was a move from a Keynesian welfare state to a disconnected market exchange model exemplified by fresh arrangements for welfare provision evidenced by the emergence of smaller, post-Fordist agencies characterised by commodified relationships through a purchaser/provider split, insecurity of funding (usually very short term) and employment, and within which the ethos and values of social work become marginalised (Scourfield, 2007). In addition, the clever use of language to articulate a new consumerism within welfare services using terms like ‘universalist values’, ‘equality’ ‘empowerment’ and ‘diversity’ made it difficult to contradict. Clarke et al (2007) suggest that:

[they] provide a linguistic repertoire on which managers, professional, user groups and other stakeholders can draw (p.53).

The popular and academic receptions of the discourse of globalisation that the current government has drawn could not be more different. The imagery that the government drew on received little if any critical analysis by the media but was subject to intense scrutiny by academics. Just as the ‘strong’ version of globalisation was being discredited by scholars the government presented it as popular ‘science’. The Labour party managed to present a rendition of globalisation into a single political message that ensured the necessity of its actions in re-shaping both political programmes and individual subjectivities. As Brodie (1996) has observed, ‘changing public expectations about citizenship entitlements, the collective provision of social needs, and the efficacy of the welfare state has been a critical victory for neo-liberalism.’ (p.131)

2.5 Summary

Globalisation may seem like a remote process, related only to the economic and commercial world but there seems little doubt that its presence has an undoubted impact on the work opportunities and living conditions of people around the world. Its presence also has an impact on how nation states think and act about welfare policies and the role of the state in that provision although, as I have argued earlier, the claims by the UK government that their thesis of a single world market with its attendant ‘logic of no alternative’ is at best tenuous which lacks an intellectual rigor or empirical evidence. More in evidence are policy imperatives associated with neo-liberalism. Either way, it will remain the task of subsequent UK governments to shape a welfare system which is compatible with a largely unfettered globalised monetary system and a free market ideology. The modernists conception of a welfare state rooted in mid 20th century thinking may well be seen as a product of by-gone age. There is also little doubt that the relationship between social work and the state has been re-defined by the increased privatisation of welfare services which has introduced a mixed economy of welfare, purchaser/provider splits within local authorities, and the encouragement of private providers to offer services traditionally delivered by the state. The next chapter will develop these themes by analysing the changing role of social work provision itself from the Second World War through to the present day.

Chapter 3

Redefining Social Work and the State

Social work's capacity to survive depends upon its legitimacy as an authentic 'humanising voice' rather than simply a conservative profession conveniently wrapping itself in the rhetoric of the market (Powell, 2001, p16).

3.1 Introduction

Having reviewed the debates around globalisation in the previous chapter the discussion moves on and begins with a background analysis of the policy developments from the 1945 Labour government through the period which saw the end of the post-war consensus on to the current position before embarking on a more detailed discussion on the restructuring of social work practice.

In the early days of the British post war welfare state there was a clear distinction between public, non-commercial activities which the welfare state was thought to exemplify and the private commercial activities driven by the profit motive of the 'free' market. The welfare state was seen as taking responsibility for issues that were intrinsically non-capitalist driven by a very different dynamic and discourse essentially protected from the market. My own experience of joining a social services department in 1976 would confirm that there were no private residential homes for children or elders and day care was delivered and managed by the local authority. Today, there is virtually no local authority provision left. As late as 1993 a book on public sector management could begin:

In this book we are mostly concerned with those services which are mainly or completely funded by taxation and which are not sold to customers at prices which produce profits. This is a very distinctive part of the economy because the 'normal' processes of producing goods and services do not apply. As well as public services not generally being run to make a profit,

there is no competition in the sense of firms trying to entice customers away from competitors. Because these features of a market are absent, many of the principles of management which apply to the private sector are absent. Other principles, such as equitable treatment and allocation of resources according to need, pervade the processes of decision making and management (Flynn, 1993, p.xi-xii).

As argued in the previous chapter, both conservative and social democratic governments around the world have been involved in debates over the last thirty years as to what welfare state provision should look like. Under Keynesian welfarism the state's role in providing public services was a method of supplying social support whereas neo-liberalism is associated with the preference for a minimalist state where the market is better placed to organize and deliver because it is associated with competition, economic efficiency and choice. In practice this has meant two things. On the one hand, it has meant the creation of new markets like electricity, public transport, water and so on or by the creation of new institutional arrangements which allow market forces to prevail as in health and social care delivery. The latter has been achieved by creating the purchaser provider split introduced by the NHS and Community Care Act in 1990 (Ferguson, 2008; Pollock, 2004). On the other hand it has involved the weakening of what are perceived to be barriers to the free operation of market forces whether in the form of trade unions or professional interest groups. In conjunction with this general shift towards the neo-liberal tenet of 'more market', deregulation and privatisation have become central themes in debates over welfare state restructuring.

Larner's (2000) view is particularly persuasive when she suggests that neo-liberalism is more of an ideological position rather than a clear corpus of ideas with an 'agenda' or list of actions 'to do'. She goes on to argue that neo-liberalism is more of a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals

from a distance. On the one hand, neo-liberalism problematises the state and is concerned to specify its limits through the invocation of individual choice but on the other hand it involves forms of governance that encourage both institutions and individuals to conform to the norms of the market. She goes on to argue that welfare agencies now need to be governed, not directly from above, but through technologies such as budget disciplines, accountancy and audit. She says;

Linked to this ‘degovernmentalisation’ of the welfare state, competition and consumer demand have usurped the traditional values of ‘public service’. Correspondingly, the citizen is re-specified as an active agent both able and obliged to exercise autonomous choices (p.7).

Pratt (2005) identifies three components of neo-liberal ideology relevant to this discussion. Firstly, *methodological individualism* which asserts that society is reducible to self interested individuals pursuing their own personal goals, so that in Thatcher’s famous comment that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families. Secondly, *rationality*, which is the sense that individuals act rationally in pursuit of their own self interest; and thirdly, *market supremacy* which holds that the unhampered market is the best way to organise society. Linked to this third element is the belief that although some people will inevitably get very rich, wealth will also trickle down to the poorer sections of society.

These three elements are crucial to the debate around how neo-liberalism has shaped the modern welfare state. The extreme individualism which Thatcher celebrated has contributed to what Lorenz (2005) has described as ‘neo-liberalisms erosion of solidarity’ by which he means how this atomisation of society has helped to marginalise and segregate the poor even further to the edges. The idea that individuals always act rationally in pursuit of their own self interest has underpinned the reconstruction of the clients of social services as ‘customers’ within a marketplace who are now being offered a ‘personalised’ service by

which the service user becomes a budget holder for his or her care package. The 2006 White Paper on community care set out a strategic objective which was ‘putting people more in control of their own health and care’ (Clarke et al, 2007). The rhetoric is at first difficult to refute, as was suggested in the previous chapter, but it hides a number of difficulties. For example, how social services working with much restrained budgets are going to be able to deliver what people want is a moot point. Other issues will be discussed later in this dissertation. The third claim that neo-liberalism allows a trickle down of wealth is also contestable given the increasing disparity between rich and poor (Ferguson, 2008). This is a crucial point because the issue of poverty is central to social workers for the simple reason that the majority of social services clients are poor. In 1997, Becker found that nine out of ten social work clients were in receipt of welfare benefits. The fact that fifteen years later the vast majority of social worker’s caseloads are represented by the very poor and marginalised suggests little has changed (Ferguson, 2008). As Jones (2002) argues:

Whether the client is old or young, able-bodied or with a special need, an offender, a single parent, an abused child or partner, black or white, clients are most likely to be poor and most likely to be drawn from those sections of the population which enjoy the least status, security and power (p42).

The current times are difficult and challenging for UK social work. Social work has a long tradition of seeking to be constructively critical often by challenging perceived wisdom and seeking reform and rights for oppressed groups (Noble, 2004). Alongside that, social work has a long history of a demonstrable commitment to issues of social justice (Paul, 2004). Further, social workers have traditionally sought to distance themselves from powerful interests by retaining a capacity to look beyond boundaries in the search for solutions to solving people’s problems. However, this chapter will discuss how and to what extent this

emancipatory practice has been eroded as a consequence of the impact and response of the marketisation of social work including the erosion of public services and the ethos and culture that goes with it. The election of the Labour government in 1997, far from reducing the commodifying effects of the market on welfare provision, has seen a reinforcement of them through a programme of ‘third way’ modernisation and reform. Social work has been in the thick of those reforms partly because of its alleged shortcomings in child protection and care of vulnerable adults but possibly also because of its perceived association with the old welfare order. This chapter will also suggest an argument that social work in the UK has been systematically reshaped and effectively re-branded within a modernised welfare state with the concomitant risk of becoming politically compromised and compliant. Similar trends can be seen in other welfare states like New Zealand and Scandinavia where hitherto a commitment to universalism had remained strong (Lorenz, 2001; Larner, 2000).

3.2 The Post War Years

The essence of the post war welfare state lay in its distinctiveness from the market:

A welfare state is a state in which organised power is deliberately used...to modify the play of market forces...first by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain ‘social contingencies’, for example, sickness, old age and unemployment which lead otherwise to individual and family crises; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standard available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services.
(Briggs, 1962, p.228)

Briggs’s sentiments were very clear. The delivery of welfare provision to its citizens should be done in a very different fashion from that which drives the market. This distinction which separated the role of the market from the welfare state gained general consensus across the parliamentary spectrum from 1945 to 1979. For most social democrats and some

neo-Marxists, private, commercial and public sector contexts were seen as analytically distinct (Harris, 2003). Marshall (1981) argued that citizens had collective obligations for each other's welfare through the agency of the state as a counterbalance to the often discriminatory effects of the market. Left to its own devices, he argued, free market capitalism would lead to injustice hence there was an obligation for the state to control the worst excesses of market capitalism. It is interesting to see how social democratic writers of the time like Marshall drew a keen distinction between the private *market* and public *services* with the latter seen as a means of exercising a counterbalance to potential inequalities. Ignatieff (1991) caught the sentiment succinctly when he wrote:

The history of the welfare state in the twentieth century can be understood as a struggle to transform the liberty conferred by formal legal rights into the freedom guaranteed by shared social entitlement. Given the tendency of markets to generate inequality, the state was called upon by its own citizens to redress the balance with entitlement designed to keep the contradiction between real inequality and formal inequality from becoming intolerable (p.29).

The post war consensus managed to transcend political party divisions and cemented a joint activity between state and local authorities to deal with the difficulties citizens might face in their lives. Marshall considered this convergence of principles to signal '*the end of ideology*' in an era which heralded a new time where people would indulge in a new form of community living as Britain saw the end of the '*naked cash nexus*' and moved to an era of equality and citizenship. He also regarded the provision of social work through the personal social services as one of those activities unsuited to delivery on the basis of principles derived from the market:

There are some services which, with strong popular support, governments have recognised as being intrinsically suited to organisations on the welfare principle, as public, non profit, non commercial services, available to all at a uniform standard irrespective of means. They include health, education, and the personal social services. These are welfare's strongest suit and the purest expression of its identity, clearly detached from the market economy... There will always be casualties to be cared for and it will be part of the welfare states responsibility to care for them, but, it is to be hoped, more as a personal social service than as poor relief.

Welfare fulfils itself above all in those services which are its own in every sense – health, education, the personal social services. (Marshall, 1981, p.135)

As the post war years passed, social work's range and responsibilities grew and ranged through a variety of fragmented departments of local government with administratively unique and legislative specific services for children and families (Children's Departments), for people with mental health problems and learning disabilities (Mental Welfare Services) and for older people and people with physical disabilities (Welfare Departments). One of the most striking features of this period, however, was the situation of social work and its delivery. Despite being a very fragmented service, local authorities had wide scope for interpreting central government legislation ensuring that it was a very localised provision (Harris, 2003). Perhaps a particularly significant feature relevant to the heart of this dissertation is the relative autonomy social workers had. In a well known study by Parsloe and Stevenson (1978) they noted 'the wide ranging freedom which social workers had to choose the style and content of their direct work with clients' (p.134). At that time social workers were regulated primarily not by bureaucratic procedures but by views of what constituted good practice established through the practice of supervision (Challis, 1990). Good practice was considered to reside in aspiring for a differentiated response to each client, by assessing the nature of the tasks one faced, making a judgement and deciding the most appropriate way to obtain resources. In an interesting study conducted some years ago, Hallett (1982) found that when she interviewed managers about their role they argued that supervision should be conducted as a meeting of two colleagues not as superior/subordinate. Her study showed that far from feeling threatened by social workers' autonomy and discretion they regarded themselves as guardians of the permissive supervision models of the time which made the space for social workers to operate. The

managers in Hallet's study seemed to see their role also as helping social workers to cultivate their craft which most managers held in high regard.

A consistent theme in both Hallet's work and that of Parsloe and Stevenson is that social worker's discretion and autonomy was embodied in casework which, despite later critical assault, held on to its position as the prime form of practice well into the 1980's. It is easy to understand why. When Florence Hollis (1964) wrote her seminal book on psychosocial casework which influenced the practice of so many social workers in the 1960's and 1970's and well into the 1980's, the ethos of social work was rooted firmly in an individualised model of practice in the sense that its primary perspective was that of the individual social worker, working and interacting with the individual client in his or her own particular family and social context. Entirely consistent with such an approach, there was little reference to the significance of the organisational or legal frameworks within which social workers practiced; what was seen as important was the provision of a theoretical framework within which to understand and interpret the client's problems which, in turn, was underpinned by a set of values with which to guide practice. Hollis's book was not the only one at the time to highlight the casework relationship or to explore the intricate questions of ethics and values, (see Biestek, 1957) but it is important to highlight her contribution as it exemplified the dominant social work ethos in post war Britain both in terms of the values it espoused and the theoretical perspectives that informed the work of a generation of practicing social workers of the period, not least because of the explicit links it made to the individual and the links with his or her environment. As Simon (1970) argued at the time:

In a society of paradoxes of poverty and affluence, of over population and brilliant technology, of deeply disturbing contradictions that arise from accelerated complexity that

produces dehumanisation, social casework makes its contribution by its commitment to the individual in society. The commitment to understand, to differentiate, to act for and with the individual gives social casework crucial importance in alleviating the human suffering related to society's problems (p.355).

But major changes were underway. One of the most fundamental was brought about by the Seebohm Report (Seebohm Committee, 1968). This brought together the disparate social work departments under one local authority structure that introduced generic social services departments offering a rationalised access to social work services. It also heralded the arrival of a substantially unified and higher profile profession of social work with a promise that it would also offer a more efficient way of organising and delivering services. This single development allowed the door to be opened on to a greater bureaucratisation of social work and ultimately the McDonaldisation of social work – a point which will be visited again later in this chapter – by creating a fertile ground for the adoption and subsequent growth of public sector managerialism that became such a hallmark of the post consensus period (Ferguson, 2008). As Langam (1993) noted, by the end of 1974 the introduction of targeting of services to particular groups had meant that:

Within six years of Seebohm the selective mentality of the old Poor Law had come to prevail over the universalist aspirations of the reports more radical proponents (p.54).

Not unrelated to such developments was a growing emphasis during the 1970's on short term, task centred, contract based and behavioural methods of social work intervention. Supported by a growing awareness of the perspectives and feeling of clients along with a fresh radicalising neo-Marxist social work literature (see Bailey and Brake, 1975) the work of Hollis and her contemporaries was challenged as to its validity and theoretical basis. This was not just a challenge from the radical left who argued that psychosocial case work wished out of existence people's social context but was also on the basis that there was little empirical evidence to demonstrate its effectiveness so that those who used it did so

more as a matter of faith. In addition, working in this way was always long term when there was an increasing emphasis on short term approaches that had been demonstrated to be more effective than long term work. Moreover, apart from being more economical in terms of the use of resources (because they were time limited) such methods had the advantage of requiring a much clearer specifications of intended outcomes and timescales. This in turn made their empirical validation easier and encouraged the development of a more standardised (McDonaldised?) approach to practice.

Although the development of social work education will be discussed in the next chapter it is important to point out that a key development that occurred at this point in time was the creation of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). As Lyons (1999) observes:

The government strengthened the regulation of social work education through the establishment of CCETSW...[which was] charged with promoting the growth, rationalisation and standardisation of social work education...The legislation was amended in 1971 to give the new council extended powers, and again in 1983 when the size of the council was significantly reduced and became less representative of the profession and more subject government influence, a trend continued into the 1990s (p.10).

This section has presented an account which has tried to argue that during the post war years social work was firmly located in the social democratic welfare state, as an essential lubricating component within democratic-welfare-capitalism. As McDonald and Jones (2000) point out:

The citizen was constructed as a member of a political community whose interests [were] collectively expressed by the system of governance reflected in the state. The citizen, by becoming a member of the body politic, established, along with other citizens, a general, collective or public will. This regime of governance provided the fundamental rationale for why the state undertook...the provision of services...delivered...by social workers...The model of government operationalised in an active welfare state provided both a niche and a role for the occupation of social work (p 8).

All that was about to change.

3.3 The End of Consensus

As pointed out earlier, a major feature of UK government public and social policy over the last twenty five years has been a shift in emphasis from state to market. While Labour governments since 1997 have demonstrated their own particular approach to social policy they have maintained a preoccupation with several concerns that Margaret Thatcher began to highlight in the late 1970's.

- The changing role of state and market in the provision and financing of welfare;
- The problem of dependency in welfare service use;
- The (negative) costs of state intervention and state welfare;
- The benefits of the market generally and specifically in public policy;
- The benefits of the pro-global market in welfare and market approaches to welfare
- The importance of (financial) cost of welfare and the need to highlight this

(Beresford, 2006)

These concerns came to prominence in UK social policy from the late 1970's which means that at the time of writing they have now been influential for at least as long as the founding principles of the welfare state. Those founding principles were summed up in the Beveridge Report as the vanquishing of the five giants of 'want, ignorance, squalor, disease and idleness' which translated into the creation of state policies for income maintenance, education, housing, health and employment (Beveridge, 1942). The principles also offered benefits that were to be free at the point of delivery, lifelong support and 'full employment', thereby breaking the poor law link between income and need (Marshall, 1950; Glennerster, 1992).

It is acknowledged that the post war welfare state fell short of its aspirations. Such arguments are well known: poverty continued, benefits remained relatively low which meant that a system of means testing was re-introduced. The quality of services was not always high and was often delivered in a paternalistic way. In addition, by its very nature the welfare state frequently fed rather than challenged inequalities by, for example, assuming women would provide care to family members plus there was a good deal of evidence that the relatively advantaged often benefited more from the welfare state than did the disadvantaged (Williams, 1989; LeGrand, 1982; O'Connor, 1996; Thompson & Thompson, 2005; Beresford, 2006).

The political right which emerged in the 1970's and which came to assume power with Margaret Thatcher was fundamentally opposed to traditional state welfare intervention. As part of its broader ideological position, the new right condemned large scale state welfare as costly, wasteful and bureaucratic, centralising and inefficient; extending the power of the state at the expense of individual freedom and choice; advantaging the dependent at the expense of the productive and undermining market principles and competition which in turn weakened the wealth creation aspirations of its citizens (Hayek, 1982; Marsland, 1992; Deakin, 1994; Beresford, 2006; Ferguson, 2008). The arguments developed by the new right in support of its critique of state welfare tended to be highly politicised and ideologically driven. Little evidence was ever offered in support of the arguments. For example, Beresford (2006) reports in a case study the concept of 'the underclass', an idea originated by Charles Murray in the USA. According to Murray's own timetable there should now be a disaffiliated and deviant class of people created by welfare dependence who are causing a risk to the very survival of democracy. Interestingly, it is an idea New

Labour retained interest in, especially during its second term of office, despite the fact there is no empirical evidence to support such a claim as the critics of the ‘underclass’ idea have repeatedly shown (Lister, 1996; Beresford, 2006).

At this point it is important to offer a reminder of the stated welfare principles of the political new right as many of them continue to be influential in social policy in the UK. These principles include supporting individual freedom, encouraging individual and collective initiative and the production of wealth, emphasising efficiency and highlighting consumer choice. These principles would be achieved by:

- Extending the operation of the market in public services; recasting the state as organiser, regulator and purchaser, rather than the direct provider of services;
- Emphasising residualism and ‘safety net’ welfare;
- Encouraging individual responsibility for welfare and for people to make their own arrangements for their health and welfare;
- Relying primarily on people (women) looking after their loved ones ‘informally’;
- Reducing benefit levels in real terms, retracing access to benefits, attacking ‘scrounging’ and ‘benefit fraud’ and stigmatising people receiving state benefits and state services;
- Creating internal markets in public welfare services to mirror the operation of market discipline;
- Importing market based models of management into public services;
- Limiting state intervention where areas and industries were undergoing economic decline to let the market have free play.

(Hayek, 1982; King, 1987; Beresford, 2006)

The Thatcher governments had not only wanted to reduce the role of the welfare state but to embark on a policy of the privatisation of welfare. But this perhaps conceals something of more fundamental significance. The market, which had traditionally been seen by advocates of public welfare as one of the creators of individual and social hardship, insecurity and inequality was now being presented as the *means* to solve these problems. What is especially challenging is gaining an understanding of how the Thatcher government managed to achieve such a dramatic shift in political thought and argument. Hall's (1998b) excellent analysis is well known but it is worth a brief discussion as it has implications for subsequent developments in social work provision and ultimately how future social workers might be educated in the universities. Hall's analysis of Thatcherism was an intellectual response to the apparent political acquiescence of the British working class to neo-liberal tenets. He rejected the 'classic variant' of the Marxist theory of ideology, namely, the idea that the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. He argued instead that the power of Thatcherism was its ability to create a position from which its discourses about the world made sense to people in a range of different social circumstances. In doing so Thatcherism 'changed the currency of political thought and argument' (p.40) and marked the consolidation of a new ideological hegemony based on the tenets of neo-liberalism.

In arguing that Thatcherism was an ideological transformation, Hall makes explicit three points: first, that neo-liberalism is not simply a system of ideas, nor a simple lurch to the Right in how policy agendas are formulated; second, that power is not constituted and exercised exclusively on the terrain of the state; third, that hegemony is only achieved

through an ongoing process of contestation and struggle. Strongly influenced by Gramsci, his claim is that Thatcherism is best understood as:

a struggle to gain ascendancy over the entire social formation, to achieve positions of leadership in a number of different sites of social life at once, to achieve the commanding position on a broad strategic front (p.52).

The strength of this work is that it does not under-estimate the contradictions and complexities of Thatcherism as a real political phenomenon. In particular, he was concerned with the fact that Thatcherism had managed to articulate the interests of a wide range of groups in Britain, thereby clearing the way for the reassertion of market forces. Moreover, rather than understanding the ideology of the 'New Right' as a coherent corpus, he emphasised the different threads of this ideological formation; in this case the tensions between a 'pure' neo-liberal ideology premised on the individual and free market, and a more traditional conservative ideology based on family and nation.

It would be a crude over simplification to see 'New Labour' and its 'third way' as simply a continuation of the new right political ideas and policies. But in terms of a preoccupation with market values, ideas and structures the same commitments still seem to be strongly evident. The emphasis on individual responsibility remains as does the obsession with efficiency gains; 'downsizing' and 'outsourcing' state jobs to the private sector. Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and Public Private Partnerships (PPP) (which were introduced by New Labour) are now operating on a significant and expanding scale imposing huge financial liabilities on future governments (Pollock, 2004). As Clarke (2004) has observed:

New Labour emerged as a distinctly contradictory formation: committed to the modern, yet proudly traditionalist; unevenly liberal and authoritarian; and both expansive and repressive (p.132).

It is as if the modern state itself has become a facilitator of competitiveness which generates a different understanding of the state in relation to both the delivery of welfare and its education system. For the latter, the state now sets the terrain on which education operates. For the university sector, it regulates its performance through the use of targets and performance indicators to ensure standards, however they might be defined. It also ensures a neat fit between the perceived needs of the new economy and educational 'outputs' in a pursuit to ensure the conditions exist in order to remain competitive in a global economy. These ideas share a common understanding of the transformation in economic and social relationships but, perhaps also, they are in part an attempt to make sense of the new conditions in which we find ourselves whilst at the same time attempting an ideological reconciliation of the apparently new social conditions in which we are located.

Interestingly, it is not clear what the public attitude might now be towards the state and the market. There can be little doubt, however, that taken for granted attitudes about the benefits of state welfare and access to higher education which were perhaps the public expression of the political welfare consensus that lasted from the inception of the welfare state to the 1970's has been significantly undermined in recent years (Beresford, 2006). Attitudes towards state and market are more ambiguous and perhaps more polarised. For example as Beresford argues:

A growing proportion of people no longer expect automatically to turn to the public sector for goods and services once closely associated with it (from housing and dentistry, to health and social care) (p.471).

Instead, there is now a sense that the state has to sell itself to the public which underpins government prioritisation of both the 'choice agenda' and 'consumer involvement' in public services.

3.4 Reconstructing Social Work

The provision of social work has traditionally been an activity that is often time consuming and intense, based as it is, on working with people who are beset with the often intractable problems of poverty, relationship difficulties, violence and mental health issues. Recent legislation, policy and practice have, however, tended to narrow its function to the management of individual care plans, purchased as cheaply as possible from private providers and often delivered by unqualified and untrained workers. This is the starting point of a McDonaldised system - the end product - driven by the need to produce a cheap, standardised product as efficiently as possible that is of a uniform size, quality and acceptability rather than by an attempt to produce the best product that caters for a wide range of discerning needs. There is little doubt that the last twenty years has seen an increasing rush towards a McDonaldised service (Ferguson, 2008). There are, of course, many advantages to this rationality especially from the point of view of the producer of the service or product. It also has disadvantages not least the extent to which, 'rational systems serve to deny human reason [and they] are often unreasonable' (Ritzer, 2000, p.16). As Ritzer himself acknowledged, however, there are degrees of McDonaldisation and it is not the purpose of this discussion to suggest that every organisation delivering a social work service has been influenced in exactly the same way but it is important to acknowledge its influence and define its main characteristics. These include such changes as: an increasing emphasis on the exercise of managerial control over professional discretion by, for

example, subjugating professional autonomy to organisational goals and missions (Evet, 2003); the concern with efficiency and effectiveness; the emphasis on standardisation which is evidenced in an increasing number of national standards; codes of practice; and frameworks for assessment alongside the development of national occupational standards and the new hegemony of evidenced based practice. It could be argued that each of these developments represents the process identified and described by Ritzer. Some writers have regarded this development as an attempt to de-professionalise social work (Dominelli, 2002). Healey and Meagher (2004) capture this theme when they argue:

...despite the rhetoric of quality service now pervading public policy, social services work is being deprofessionalised around the English speaking world and unless halted, deprofessionalisation will continue to affect adversely the capacity of human service organisations to deliver effective services (p.244).

At the same time as individual social work has become more technical and less creative in its approach, the problems of deprived communities have been increasingly seen in terms of the organisational management of risk, dangerousness and correction – as issues of assessment, control and punishment. The effect of these changes has been to privatise and familialise issues of care but criminalise issues of poverty and insecurity. As Jordan (1998) argues:

as British society has become more conflictual, social work practitioners have been drawn back into the administrative sphere, as assessors, managers and monitors of care and enforcers of the law and standards of behaviour...all these developments have pulled social workers away from the perception of themselves as brokers of the informal sphere.....towards the authoritative enforcement of legal rules and societal norms (p.187).

Social work in the new millennium is less involved in the more enabling and preventative work in the community associated with the traditional work of interacting with the most vulnerable and the excluded. Habermas (1998) is, as usual, forthright when he says:

Equality is sacrificed on the altar of performativity. A consequence of economic globalisation and the competitiveness it has imposed is the transformation and reduction of the welfare

state mirrored in the fact that benefits drop, access to social security is toughened and pressure on the unemployed is increased (p.315).

‘Tough love’, as a prescription for a new style of practice, is a term which has emerged in recent years and reflects a slogan which is consistent with this more demanding form of social policy (Jordan and Jordan, 2001). However, the ‘tough’ in tough love requires social workers to be challenging, assertive, and more demanding of those who seek help. This is not new. In fact, social work practitioners have always balanced their caring, supportive function with the need to monitor and, where necessary, control. What has changed under the influence of ‘third way’ policies is the style of intervention and the extent to which the policing function dominates practice objectives at the expense of others. For Habermas (1998) the explanation is clear. Our times, he says, are distinguished by:

the structural menace to the welfarist domestication of capitalism and by the revival of a neo-liberalism unhampered by considerations of social justice (p.314).

The ‘love’ dimension in tough love, although more closely associated with social work’s long established befriending tradition may be equally problematic as the number of examples where this type of work takes place is almost entirely confined to the private and voluntary sector. Interestingly, a new book entitled ‘*The Barefoot Social Worker*’ (2004) challenges the very core of modern practice and demands a return to the fundamental values of social work. In the book, the author uses the term ‘love’ unashamedly as a value modern practice has lost. It reads strangely anachronistically in a modern age of short term, measurable delivery but it appears to have caught the imagination of many practitioners and students.

My own experience of coming in to social work over twenty five years ago was that work traditionally done by social workers like counselling, non directive therapy, group work and

family therapy have all but disappeared and been taken up by other professions such as nursing, psychology and a burgeoning private sector. It will be important to test this experience against other's perceptions during the empirical study but, in the meantime, the changes in the role and function of statutory services can be illustrated by examining the developments in the probation service. Up until the early 1990's social work and probation students trained on the same course and the latter were very much seen as doing social work with offenders. The progressive distancing and eventual separation of probation from social work was a key development not least because it split work with offenders from the rest of the profession's contribution but also because it is a clear illustration of the increasing political influence over the definition and construction of 'social work' and the inability of the social work profession or the academy to resist it. Moreover, as Oldfield (1994) argued it represented a clear political *putsch* intending to remove social work values from work with a particular client group to reflect values rooted in an individualized view of the needs of offenders. Oldfield went on to suggest that the progressive separation made possible the extension of managerial approaches that created the earliest example of the McDonaldisation of a branch of social work. Predictability, National Standards were introduced in the late 1980's and quickly covered every aspect of probation officers working lives. This reflected:

an increasing concern to reduce the complex activities of probation officers to a set of formalized moves within a series of prescriptive guidelines...aimed at developing a standard product that has nothing to do with engendering creativity or innovation.
(Oldfield, 1994, p.187)

Oldfield went on to argue that there then followed a significant increase in managerial control over the practice of probation officers by a variety of means, which resulted in 'deskilling and devaluing...the workers at the bottom of the hierarchy and reducing their

control over their work' (ibid). These developments were matched by a redefinition of the quality of practice with a move away from concerns about the quality of relationships with offenders or their welfare or rehabilitation prospects towards 'results that can be measured and evaluated by the use of technology, standardized working practices and adherence to the rules' (ibid, p.189). These developments were supported by the emergence of two developments. Firstly, the message from government that traditional social work interventions were not working and secondly development of 'the new penology' which was less concerned with individual offenders but more with the grouping of offenders who were then classified and managed in terms of their dangerousness (Feeley and Simon, 1992). The focus of the new penology was stated to be on:

the criminal justice system and ... pursu[ing] systematic rationality and efficiency. It seeks to sort and classify, to separate the less from the more dangerous, and to deploy control strategies rationally (ibid, p.452).

Its goal was not to eliminate crime but to make it tolerable through systematic co-ordination heralding a dramatic shift from the values and practices of welfare and rehabilitation to that of crime control. As a result of these changes, the probation service has increasingly adopted 'the bureaucratising and rationalising approaches that have been typical of the modern organisations search for efficiency, predictability, calculability and control' (Oldfield, 1994, p.189). In such a system the probation officer's relationship with his or her client becomes one of achieving organisational objectives to the exclusion of the skills and talents that made creative work with offenders a feature of probation practice. This was an approach that lay at the very heart of Florence Hollis's work.

Although the idea that 'nothing works' permeated political debate throughout the 1980's, it focused initially on the practice area of working with offenders (Oldfield, 1994). The

discourse, however, soon permeated into social work to the extent that increasing weight was given, both in terms of research and practice, to short term and particularly behavioural methods which provided clearer, more structured approaches to intervention with people which in turn became more amenable to empirical evaluation. This development which became known as evidenced based practice will be discussed later in this study.

As part of this realignment of practice a new managerial discourse began to permeate social work. Tropman (2002) made the argument that managerialism, which he equates with good management, is much needed in the field of social work due to rising expectations, shrinking budgets and increased competition. His argument differs from others like Payne (2002) and Tsui and Cheung, (2004) who take a different or, at least, a mixed view of managerialism. Tsui and Cheung pose an interesting question. Is managerialism the solution or the cause of the problems besetting many social work departments? For them, managerialism is a set of beliefs and practices that assume better management will resolve a wide range of economic and social problems and which includes a number of key components:

- *The client is a customer.* In the commercial sector it is a straightforward paradigm that the person who pays the bill is always right and has protection under various pieces of legislation. A managerialist approach to human services (which includes students in higher education) also views those clients as customers which means they are then encouraged to define the quality of the service.
- *The manager (not the front line staff) as the key.* Under a managerialist approach front line staff are not viewed as the key personnel in an organisation. The proponents of this position argue that improvements in efficiency can only be

achieved by effective management which might include cutting costs by, for example, contracting out. Critics might argue that one result of this is the marginalisation of front line staff.

- *The staff are employees not professionals.* Professional autonomy, as alluded to earlier in this chapter, was a feature of social work practice until the 1980's. The proponents of managerialism believe that expertise in a particular practice area is not indispensable and staff are employees not independent professionals with specific expertise. Indeed, modern human service practitioners are required to do a great deal of managerial work like planning, budgeting, and management audits. However, as Clarke et al (2007) argue, organisations have not entirely reduced autonomy as some is required to deliver an effective service. They suggest, however, that autonomy has become functional in that some is allowed to meet the organisations goals rather than have reference to 'extra organisational sources' like a code of ethics or professional standards.
- *Management knowledge (not professional knowledge) as the dominant model of knowledge.* Management knowledge appears to have become the dominant mode of knowledge in the operation of human services work where management jargon seems to have replaced professional discourses.
- *The market (not society or community) as the environment.* Managerialism views society as a market with competing interests, not a community with a common goal. In a market, the important elements are supply, demand and price, meaning managers are now inevitably more concerned with budget constraints not the well being of the clients they serve.

(Tsui and Cheung, 2004)

The above themes are central to this study and will be explored in more detail during the empirical discussion in Chapter 7.

3.5 Summary

It is important to recognize that the process of change under discussion has increasingly eroded the epistemological, organisational and therefore the ontological security of social workers (Jordan, 2001). This issue is not only confined to social workers. As Bottery (2004) argues, for teachers the erosion of government trust has resulted in increased surveillance and audit which includes an emphasis on behavioural outcomes for teacher training. As he points out; “....happy, tolerant and healthy individuals require a large degree of existential trust” (p.121). For front line social work staff there are a number of similar elements that can be identified which link policy to practice and capture the experiences of staff on the front lines:

- Social workers in the public sector (where resources are thin and case loads high) now use a predominance of short term case work approaches consistent with care management (Stepney, 2005). Cognitive behavioural approaches along with counselling have migrated to the voluntary/independent sector;
- Training has become increasingly focused on the acquisition of core skills and competencies without clear evidence of a direct pay-off in terms of greater effectiveness and improved outcomes. Critics may now question whether the theoretical knowledge base is too shallow and superficial for the complexities of the job (see next chapter for a fuller exegesis).

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- Social work under 'New Labour' has become an instrument of risk assessment and risk management, specifically of those deemed to be high risk, troublesome or in need of protection (Jordan & Jordan, 2000).
 - Social workers experience considerable strain by maintaining loyalty to traditional values when those values may be undermined and compromised by managerial and marketised priorities that lead to the rationing of services for the most vulnerable (Butler and Drakeford, 2001).
 - Service users have gained a greater 'voice' and consumer power; generating expectations about rights to influence service planning (and social work courses) at a time when social workers and those in the academy often feel disempowered and disconnected (Beresford, 2006; Oliver, 1996; Morley, 2004).

(Stepney, 2005)

Faced with this challenge and in their continuing search for acceptance as a profession, social workers (both academic and practice-based) have increasingly embraced successive governments' agendas in terms of both research, practice and by definition, the education of social workers. It is that theme that will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Social Work Education and the Academy

By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest. (Confucius).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the history of social work education against a background illustrated in the previous chapters. After discussing the history of post war social work education up to and including the introduction of the new social work degree the debate on what and how it might be taught on social work programmes will be explored. The changes over the last twenty five years will be discussed culminating in the introduction of the new degree in social work following the Care Standards Act in 2001. Crucial to the debate is the position of the universities and how they involved themselves in the discourse of social work educational reform which this chapter will trace before ending with a brief account of their role in establishing the degree with specific reference to the situation in Wales.

4.2 History of Social Work Education

Following the implementation of the Seebohm Report (see Chapter 3) social work education was placed within a validation framework. Prior to that social work education and training had been piece meal and disparate. Although localized within the university system, courses tended to be client specific i.e. a Certificate in Child Care or Mental Welfare. To manage this new post-Seebohm framework the Central Council for Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW) was established in 1971. For much of the

1970's and early 1980's the framework put in place was, by today's standards, quite permissive with the education process essentially being 'professionally self-regulated' (Jones, 1999).

During the late 1970's however, having established the Certificate in Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), CCETSW embarked on a wide ranging process of consultation with employers and the universities about the future direction of higher education social work programmes. Three consultative documents were produced. The third written by Reg Wright, who was then an assistant director of CCETSW, was to prove a contentious but ultimately prophetic piece of work (CCETSW, 1977). It was a contentious and controversial report which CCETSW initially distanced itself from but it did receive much coverage in the social work press and in the universities. By modern standards its contents were remarkably modest. *Consultative Document 3* main proposals were that CCETSW staff should seek to arrive at a statement about what the aims of CQSW programmes should be and, most controversially, a statement that described the type of social workers the programmes should aim to produce. One of the key phrases in Wright's document was the proposal that social work programmes should instil in students 'a system of shared professional values, to enable them to practice competently' (CCETSW 1977, p.10). This would appear to be one of the first references to 'competency' in a social work context that would ultimately become a guiding principle in later years – a point that will be developed later in this chapter. It is also important to note that another major criticism of *Consultative Document 3* was the suggestion of 'shared values' which was interpreted by many in the academy as being an assault on the teaching of radical practice particularly as the document went on to say that students should avoid action 'to change the system' but instead limit

themselves to actions involving functioning as ‘agents of controlled social change’ (CCETSW 1977, p.11). In the face of consistent criticism CCETSW distanced itself from the report by arguing that it was a contribution to a broader debate about the future direction of social work education. What was most interesting is that so much of the criticism of *Consultative Document 3* coming out of the universities was targeted at the content of what might be taught. As Timms (1991) said of the content of the report, it possesses... ‘a certain anti-intellectual attitude towards the contribution of the social sciences to social work education...and a failure to appreciate research findings’ (p.207). Interestingly, at the end of the consultative period CCETSW stated: ‘On the basis of the comments received, we do not believe that the council has evidence that it should institute immediate and radical changes in any particular direction.’ (CCETSW 1983, p.29)

Despite the above comments the 1980’s saw CCETSW moving on to propose and implement major changes in social work education. One change, although seemingly very technical, is worth a brief discussion. At the time the CQSW was introduced a similar but separate programme was also introduced known as the Certificate in Social Service (CSS). This qualification was aimed at employees of social service departments and was delivered often in FE colleges on an in-service basis. The distinctive feature of CSS, however, was the involvement of the employer. I began my teaching on social work courses on a CSS programme and can remember the endless meetings with employers and local authority training officers and how I noted (enviously) colleagues on CQSW programmes were mercifully spared. The crucial point here is, however, that when CCETSW began to review the two qualifications with a view to establishing one unified programme the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) insisted that ‘the best of CSS’ should be adopted and

adapted to the new rules and requirements of the new qualification (ADSS, 1985). Jones (1989) suggested that; 'the best of CSS' was seen as 'the joint management of courses and the centrality accorded to practice competence in course design and student experience' (p18). This undoubtedly prepared the ground for the joint management of programmes which was to become a central feature of social work programmes to the present day.

By 1987 the lengthy negotiations had produced a report entitled *Care for Tomorrow* which recommended to government a new qualification that would be a three year degree to replace the CSS and CQSW. In 1988 the government rejected the proposals in *Care for Tomorrow* and instead offered extensive National Vocational Qualifications in social care and a two year diploma in social work with a post qualifying framework. The new qualification, the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) was accompanied by a publication from CCETSW - *Paper 30: Rules and Requirements for the Diploma in Social Work* (CCETSW, 1989). *Paper 30* for the first time included assessable outcomes of performance which effectively governed the incoming Diploma in Social Work. They were introduced and refined with little debate at the time and presented as a requirement of all programmes and eventually presented as a 'fait accompli'. The result was that all DipSW programmes had to develop strategies to test and measure these new competencies during student's practical experiences (Osborne and Pierce, 1993).

Interestingly, the original *Paper 30* produced in 1989 to support the new Diploma in Social Work was amended by the Home Office almost immediately to include more specific requirements for probation officers. The Privy Council examined it again in June 1991 to ensure that the requirements covering anti-discriminatory practice were not driving other

considerations. The Department of Health then demanded a major overhaul in 1993-4 which Harris (2003) for one described as a quite extraordinary series of events for a new programme that didn't become established until 1994. He goes on to argue that one of the reasons for these changes was media pressure. Claims were made in the national press that social work education had been taken over by 'political correctness' (Appleyard. 1993; Phillips. 1993; Pinker, 1993; Dominelli, 2000). The criticisms continued. In the run up to the appearance of the revised rules and requirements, Virginia Bottomley, then the Secretary of State for Health, and previously a social worker, announced in a speech to the local government conservative conference that, 'a National Core Curriculum for social work training...will be no place for trendy theories or the theory that isms or ologies come before common sense and practical skills' (quoted in Preston-Shoot, 1996, p.13). Harris (2003) contends that Paper 30 was:

intended to lead in the direction of a no-nonsense vocational training which prepared people for employment in the social work business, with anti-discriminatory practice reduced in scope and seen as an individualised and personalised guiding ethic for social workers' practice (p.107).

The last point regarding the underpinning values and ethics of social work is an important one in the context of this study and is an issue that receives empirical exploration later in this account. Harris goes on to argue that the new requirements for the Diploma in Social Work effectively 'watered down' social work's traditional stance on anti-discriminatory practice by moving from a model where teaching focussed on structural inequalities to one which saw disability or 'race' more from the perspective of an individualistic approach. That trend has continued with the new degree in social work which Ferguson (2008) argues is one of the outcomes of the neo-liberal assault on social work. He argues that over the past two decades:

there has been the attempt to excise or downgrade ‘values talk’ from social work education and practise and to reconstruct social workers as social technicians, or social engineers, carrying out ethically neutral tasks (p.129).

Ferguson’s concerns can be traced as far back as Paper 30. At the time, the Department of Health’s Social Services Inspectorate stressed the importance to CCETSW of ensuring that there was evidence of value for money in social work education and that there were clear quality control mechanisms in place. In addition, it also argued that “it was important that CCETSW programmes and priorities are congruent with those of government” (Department of Health, 1992). With the growth of NVQ’s in the care sector, a new organisation, the Care Sector Consortium, began to assume greater prominence and forged a close working relationship with CCETSW. In 1994 the two organisations employed consultants – the National Institute for Social Work and *Mainframe* (a private company) – to develop national occupational standards for social workers. *Mainframe* used occupational mapping techniques derived from functional analysis to develop the standards. These developments matched the government’s drive to place competence at the centre of training and assessment for employment across a wide range of occupational groups. *Mainframe’s* methodology drew heavily on that set out by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ, 1988) and involved a descending level of detail about the social work job. There were overarching units of competence (‘core competencies’) after which each unit was broken down into elements of competence (‘practice requirements’). Performance indicators (‘evidence indicators’) were then identified in the form of behaviours which suggested that each ‘element of competence’ was being met.

The core competencies were:

- Communicate and engage
- Promote and enable

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- Assess and plan
 - Intervene and provide services
 - Work in organisations
 - Develop professional competence

(CCETSW, 1995, p.16)

At the time CCETSW maintained that in undertaking this process there was extensive consultation within the tight timetable required by government. Harris (2003) maintains that was not the case and that the exercise was swift and cursory with the debate confined to the detail of the proposal rather than any meaningful debate on pedagogy or the direction the DipSW was heading. My personal recollection of the time was that, as a new member of the academic team, I assumed an enormous amount of teaching while the head of programme with his counterpart from University of Wales, Bangor wrote feverishly to meet a very tight deadline in Wales. The consultation process of the new degree in social work is a point which will be developed later in this study. The final document *Assuring Quality* was approved by CCETSW in February 1995 and was heralded by Tony Hall the then Director as a great success. 'No other profession defines so precisely and comprehensively the competencies required for its newly qualified practitioners' (CCETSW, 1995).

In parallel, the organisational structures for delivering social work programmes were standardised through partnership arrangements, in a way which gave Social Services Departments the potential to secure a dominant voice in shaping and developing the curricula of the programme and in the selection of students. In fact, it was a requirement of validation that each programme had to have at least one social services agency as a partner in order to secure validation. At the time Brewster (1992) wrote, 'When CCETSW talks

about partnership led training it should really be saying managerial-led training' (p.88). At the time the new social work education advisors which CCETW appointed were drawn almost exclusively from middle managers of social service departments and, in my experience, the DipSW partnership committees were always dominated by senior managers from local agencies which led to a strange relationship with the universities in which the latter were often treated as junior members of the partnership. I can remember one particular incident in the mid 1990's when agency partners 'let slip' in a casual conversation at a degree management meeting that they were sending some of their staff to do their DipSW with the Open University who were not partners in the North Wales scheme. There had been no consultation with the established university partners and the result was an instant reduction in available placements for students which remained a serious issue to the end of the life of the DipSW in North Wales as did the resulting mistrust between the universities and the agencies. Such experiences supports Webb's contention (1996) who argued at the time that a direct and subordinate relationship was established with academic staff by representatives of social services agencies. This theme is another that the empirical study will seek to examine in relation to the new qualification.

4.3 The Introduction of the New Degree in Social Work

From 1997 onwards social work education underwent a series of quite dramatic changes.

The new Labour Government established four institutions to reform social work:

- The General Social Care Council (GSCC) – regulating the workforce through a statutory code of conduct for staff and a code of practice for employers;
- The Commission for Care Standards – regulating service quality;

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- The Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services (TOPPS) – an employer led body producing occupational standards;
 - The Social Care Institute for Excellence – identifying and promoting best practice with regard to ‘what works’ (Department of Health, 1998).

These developments followed a review of CCETSW which was then effectively abolished and its powers transferred initially to the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and later to its various counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom, including the Care Council for Wales (CCfW). The GSCC effectively kept the regulation and awarding functions of the old CCETSW but its other functions like workforce planning and occupational standards went to the industry led body, TOPPS. By 2003, however, only England retained the industry led body (now called *Skills for Care*) whilst in the other countries of the UK those powers were handed to the various Care Councils. This structure ensured that, in the early days of the degree, TOPPS defined the occupational standards, the GSCC designated the training required to deliver them and the universities would provide the training using the knowledge base developed by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (Orme, 2001).

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) is charged with developing and appraising the knowledge base for social work and issuing guidance on ‘what works’ in practice. It produces ‘knowledge reviews’ on topics such as long term foster care of children and adoption practice; position papers on topics such as service user involvement in service planning; resource and practice guides. A further simultaneous policy initiative was the establishment at Exeter University of the *Centre for Evidenced-Based Social Services* with its emphasis upon seeking the practical goal – much admired by the current administration

in relation to human services work – of discovering and applying ‘what works’. The core assumption, at once ‘scientific’ and political, as Webb (2001) notes in a powerful critique; ‘is the idea that a formal rationality of practice based on scientific methods can produce a more effective and economically accountable means of [delivering] social services’ (p.60).

The epistemological criticisms levelled at evidence based practice broadly restate long standing and familiar philosophical critiques of positivism and empiricism which I will develop in detail in the next chapter (Schwandt, 2000; Thyer, 2001). However, it is important to note that in the Care Council for Wales blue-print for the new degree, the theme of ‘what works’ appears as a requirement to be embedded into the curriculum (*Raising Standards*, 2004). Although a focus on evidenced based practice is relatively new to social work it is well established, for example, in medicine. This has led to the development of an increasing number of clinical guidelines as a way of ‘ensuring the avoidance of mistakes and/or sub-optimal treatments’ (Dent, 1999, p.161). In social work, however, it has been criticised for focussing on measurable outcomes of interventions within a managerial and social control framework while at the same time neglecting reflexivity, flexibility and creativity (Banks, 2006). Malin (2000), however, argues that adopting evidence based practice in social work could help to raise its claim for professional status based as it is on a scientific rationality that appears to give credibility to professional interventions. Dent (2000) argues powerfully in support of evidence based practice in medicine suggesting that these practices “cannot be seen as the start of any process of de-professionalisation, McDonaldisation, de-skilling or proletarianisation’ (p.161). Other writers however, are less enthusiastic. Ferguson (2008), for example, regards the process as part of the assault on social work but couched in terms which make

it difficult to challenge. Who would be opposed to implementing anything but practice based on sound principles? But the term has received sustained criticism in the social work academic journals usually on the basis of a lack of clarity as to what constitutes evidence; a lack of understanding as to what constitutes the very nature of social work and finally a disregard for the political, situated context in which social work operates (Gray and McDonald, 2006; Hope, 2004; Glasby and Beresford, 2006).

Another key responsibility given to the Care Councils by the Department of Health was the development of the new degree in social work to replace the outgoing two year Diploma in Social Work. This responsibility included the structure of the degree which included both its content and the methods by which student social workers were to be trained and assessed in practice. The announcement came in March 2001 that a new three year degree was to be established throughout the UK and would be in place by 2003 (although it was two years later in Wales). The announcement also said that greater emphasis would be placed on practice learning and the programme would be based on a national curriculum (Department of Health, 2000). For the Department of Health the task was to ensure that, 'The new courses will strengthen the practice learning undertaken by students and ensure that they are able to do the job required by employers at the end of their training' (Department of Health 2001, p.2). The generic professional outcomes are contained in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) benchmark statements for social work whilst the precise national occupational standards were engineered by (TOPSS). These latter standards were a direct result of a review conducted by JM Consulting (1999), commissioned by the Department of Health. The report by JM Consulting set the parameters for the new degree. Its recommendations included the key provision that

employers should be central to the process and that the replacements for CCETSW should have more control over the curriculum, validation and approval process. In addition, although the report recommended the continuation of social work education and training in the higher education sector it went on to say:

However the main funding via the HEFCE means that the Department (and CCETSW and future regulators) has limited ability to influence the pattern of provision – as opposed to its quality (p.15).

Another key message from the JM Consulting report was the importance of the employer becoming central to the design and management of the new degree and the establishment of fewer, more responsive training consortia. This issue, the centrality of the employer, was adopted more rigorously in Wales than any other country of the UK and the implications of that may well be profound. This is another issue that will require empirical exploration.

Following the JM Consulting report, the Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales commissioned a task and finish group to look at workforce issues in Wales which included the brief to: “Develop proposals for taking forward the reform of social work training within the context of the responses to the consultation on the Quality Strategy to include a review of current funding arrangements” (The National Assembly for Wales Report of the Task and Finish Group on Workforce Issues in Social Care, 2001, p.1). This group, which consisted of twelve people, was heavily dominated by employers having only one representative from an HEI yet its recommendations would have profound effects not only on the higher education sector but the future of social work education and training in Wales. The key recommendations to emerge in relation to the degree included the statement that National Occupational Standards (NOS) must (*my emphasis*) inform the development

of learning outcomes for students and the competency requirements of the new course. In Wales there were additional requirements to equip students to work in the context of the Welsh language and culture, and the NOS had to be mapped across the three levels of the degree.

Earlier, the point was made that when the DipSW was introduced consultation was minimal (Harris (2003) That appeared to be the case with in relation to the presentation of the new standards which was done very quickly with the minimum of consultation. Although there were a number of ‘road shows’ organised by the Care Council for Wales to which academic staff and agency personnel were invited, the debates appeared largely cosmetic and the final version of the national occupational standards were little changed. The maxim of whoever controls the agenda controls the debate was an inevitable feature of the consultation process as the fundamental decision to engage with a competency based framework linked to national occupational standards had already been made. These perceptions will be tested later in the empirical study during discussions with the other Heads of programme within the University of Wales. The final version of the NOS was designed by a private company, LMG Associates Ltd, who had had previous experience of designing national standards for the British Psychological Society. The development of the national occupational standards and the issue of competency based learning is a theme developed later in this chapter.

As pointed out earlier, one of the key recommendations in Wales was that employers must be at the centre of training and that training supply must be based on forecasting future employment needs. The traditional arrangement of partnership between HEI’s and social services agencies may well become very different as the relationship changes to that of a

commissioning function with local HEI's, making future planning of student numbers a challenging task. In the introduction to '*Raising Standards*' (2004) the Care Council for Wales said:

placing employers at the centre of the training process will ensure that qualifying training social workers are competent, committed and supported in undertaking the challenging and complex tasks of their job.

It does not say how that is to happen and why it hasn't happened already, however. The

Social Services Inspectorate policy document *Ensuring Consistency in Learning to*

Practice (2004) reinforces that position:

...such centrality will involve employers in having a central role in the implementation of the new degree; including partnership in recruitment and selection processes, in planning and contributing to curriculum design and delivery; in the teaching and assessment of social work skills, knowledge and values as well as ensuring good quality practice learning opportunities (p.15).

The developments described above represent another shift this discussion has tried to

chronicle over the previous two chapters. In other words, social work is to move from:

being a (quasi-) profession with central governance and a fairly cohesive, if not coherent, infrastructure for education and training, to a regulated and accredited profession, but accountable to, if not directly governed by, many different bodies...the regulatory systems as currently envisaged represents a fragmentation of responsibilities and a proliferation of lines of accountability...while the structures may appear to be fragmented the desired outcomes are centrally driven (Orme, 2001, p. 612).

4.4 On Being Competent

The last two decades has seen a major advance in the development of competency based learning biting further into areas where there is a technical and vocational element. Bates (2002) has conducted an extensive review of the history of the competence movement and finds how little academic scrutiny there has been over the years and how its development and penetration has outstripped our understanding of both its effectiveness and its social significance to the extent, she argues, "It has become a colossus, skating on thin ice" (p.1).

She develops the argument further and suggests that somehow its implications for education have been immune from critical academic scrutiny. In 1993 Jones and Moore speculated that the silence in the academic literature may be socially constructed in the sense that by creating strong classifications and boundaries around the knowledge production of vocational programmes it has produced almost 'no go' areas for academics.

Bates (2002) develops this point further when she says:

If we define the competence movement more broadly to include the increasing use of performance criteria to manage and measure organisational and individual performance, it is even more starkly evident that we are dealing with a highly pervasive and seemingly relentless social trend (p.8).

As was suggested in the previous chapter, there was little debate in the universities in relation to the introduction of competence based training on social work programmes yet they became assumed as part of the reconstruction of social work education. Certainly, the term competence was never clearly defined in any of the three main publications about the Diploma in Social Work or the two main reports that introduced the three year degree in social work. Perhaps this is not surprising because as Bates argues in her comprehensive study, the movement appeared almost by stealth and invaded virtually every vocational area with the minimum of critical analysis despite, she says, the development running counter to 'the spirit of education'. Nonetheless, competencies were seen to be the key to establishing national criteria for standardising social work education. Harris (2003) suggests that this is because the government wanted to bring social work education closer to the quasi-business discourse in which practice is now more and more embedded. Certainly, I could find no evidence in the literature that other models of curriculum design or modes of learning were ever considered. As early as 1992 Brewster pointed to the

minimal representation of social work educators on the reconstructed CCETSW council as it moved the DipSW to a model of competency based learning.

Dominelli (2002) agrees with Harris when she argues that a competency based approach to social work is particularly suited for preparing practitioners for a market driven environment. She goes on to suggest that by breaking the social work task down into its technical components it renders social workers into technicians by narrowing the ideas consistent with an outcomes based activity rather than allowing them to concentrate on critical reflective practice. In addition, as Dawson (2007) argues in relation to nurse education, the increasing emphasis on a competency-based version of practice reflects the increasing association of managerialism and professionalism, wherein professional managers can claim expertise in the deployment of resources, human and otherwise in two ways. First, the close association of terms (manager, professional, effectiveness, efficiency) constructs a discourse of expertise, which omits or plays down less measurable (*ergo* less accountable) elements of practice. Second, the simplification of complex practices by professional managers seeks to make the invisible visible (*cf.* Foucault, 1973), allowing greater control and predictability of individual action, an example of what Strathern (2000) calls the “tyranny of transparency” (p.309).

I want to develop this theme further by arguing that such an approach, as well as being potentially professionally damaging and overly controlling, is also educationally unsound as an over reliance on narrow outcome based approaches runs the serious risk of a narrowness of learning. By themselves occupational outcomes stress only the instrumental value of learning which may ultimately foster an impoverished conception of educational

activity. Jeffs and Smith (1990) argued that the obsession with minimalist training programmes that focus on narrow outcomes has seduced us into believing that this emphasis on ‘training’ at the expense of education can deliver what modern organisations and society actually needs. They go on to argue:

The problem with skills led training is that it is incrementally bolted on to a partial analysis of practice and purpose. Faulty and restricted perceptions of essential role, purpose and practice ensure that the skills taught must be inadequate to the task (p.130).

There is a risk, however, that the narrowness of the learning outcomes prescribed by CCfW could potentially have the opposite effect of that which was espoused and lead to disempowering students. As (Bates, 2005) argues, competency based training is not primarily concerned with learning but with the collection of evidence to satisfy outcome criteria and since students have had little say in the construction of the competency requirements the idea that they are autonomous learners, as the CCfW demands, is very suspect. In addition, and perhaps most worrying, however, were the changes to the management of practice learning. For many, the full implications of this took time to understand. With the outgoing Diploma in Social Work, students were allocated a practice teacher, usually an experienced social worker, who taught them practice as well as assessing their suitability to practice which would include practice knowledge, proficiency in agency procedures and so on.. The new arrangements refer to this person as being a ‘Practice Learning Assessor’. Nowhere in *Ensuring Consistency* is the term ‘practice teaching’ mentioned and it is already clear that agencies had not appreciated this change in language. Students are now required to present a portfolio of evidence for verification by a practice assessor who is not required even to work in the same office. Although the new degree talks of encouraging students to reflect, the prescription of the curriculum allows little opportunity for that to happen although students are asked to complete several

reflective commentaries within their practice portfolios but without the benefit of a practice teacher to guide them through what is a complex and sophisticated task.

Another seduction of this approach is its apparent ease of assessment for what is assessed is that which is most easily accessible. This runs the risk of a protection of low standards as higher order learning is not considered, leading to an overly atomistic model which may encourage a tick list approach to learning. Nor is this confined just to social work. Although from a nursing perspective, Watson *et al* (2002) undertook a systematic literature review of work concerned with its definition, clarification, and application of competency based education and training. They examined an extensive body of literature, both within and without nursing, concerning issues such as validity and reliability, content specificity, its distinction from alternative terms such as performance or capability, and its utility in practical application; they found the concept wanting, and their conclusion is unequivocal. While they found some examples of rigor in competency-based assessments, they nonetheless questioned the validity of the approach with respect to everyday nursing practice. Nursing, like social work, has adopted a competence-based training system but Watson *et al* challenge its wisdom by suggesting that:

this approach to producing nurses, has apparently learned little from the other areas in which competence has been tried, tested and to a large extent failed. All of the problems of definition, lack of rigour in assessment and tension between competence-based training and other educational approaches are apparent in the nursing literature (p.429.)

Mezirow as long ago as 1978 accused this approach to the training of adults as ‘indoctrination to engineer consent’ and of addressing ‘the wrong reality to begin with’. In addition, simply presenting a list of outcomes or competencies is no guarantee of anything – especially learning. The work of Donald Schön (1983) is useful in this respect. While he

is concerned with professional practice generally he argues that the technical-rational model has been embedded in the institutional context of many professional lives for some time. He sees it as implicit in the institutionalised relations of research and practice and in the everyday curriculum of professional education so that even when educators and practitioners might question the model it becomes difficult as educators are complicit by perpetuating it in their institutions.

According to Schon the dominant epistemology of professional practice is predicated on an exercise of technical rationality. In social work, Parton (2000) argues that this is where professional practice is conceived as deriving its rigour from the use of:

describable, testable, replicable techniques derived from scientific research and which is based on knowledge that is objective, consensual, cumulative and convergent (p.453).

On this basis, social work practice becomes the application of rigorous social science in the same way as engineering becomes the application of engineering science. Schon, however, suggests that this approach fails to capture what professional workers actually do and how they 'know' in practice for, so often, problems arrive in such a way as a technical-rational approach will not easily fit. Real world problems, especially in social work, do not come in well-formed packages but usually present themselves as messy and confusing enmeshed as they often are within the intractable problems of poverty, violence and mental health issues. 'Knowing' in such situations is often tacit and implicit following the development of dialogue with the person about their situation through which the social worker comes to see the uniqueness and uncertainties which need addressing. Practice knowledge seems to come from 'reflection-in-action' but one which emphasises interaction. Parton (1998) argues that Schon's ideas suggest that social workers are not so much theoretical as they are practical,

concrete and intuitive which makes practice an art form as well as disciplined reasoning. Parton's interesting idea that social work is as much an art form has been lost in recent years yet art does have the virtue of being able to accommodate notions of ambiguity and uncertainty in ways which a technical-rational approach could never hope to emulate. However, one must be cautious in accepting too optimistically Schon's analysis based, as it is, on working with professionals after the event. His use of the term 'reflective practitioners' seems to imply that the process of reflection is based on a generic, rational process which can be easily understood and explained. A major problem with Schon's work is that it is not derived directly from observing people in practice but from tutorials with practitioners who try to explain their knowledge and then pass it on to new learners. However, what people do and what people say they do, and how people think in action and how people reflect on the way they think in action are not necessarily the same thing. In addition, the reflective process requires time which is an issue Schön does not sufficiently address, according to Eraut (1994, p.145) and Smith (1994, p.150); (cited in Smith (2004, p.11). The time element is a real one in social work especially in a busy office where challenges cannot always be resolved in the time available. Nor is it always possible to reflect-on-action after the event. In such cases, delay compromises the reflective process and can impact on learning potential for both practice teacher and student.

Even so, Schon's work provides a number of useful insights into the nature of theory/practice in social work which then pose serious questions about the applicability of the technical-rational model based as it is on positivist science. My anxiety is that this reductionist approach to training and education might lead to a generation of social workers and probation officers who are inflexible and narrow in their perceptions and who are poor

at problem solving. My own anecdotal experience of trainee social workers is that they put their energies into completing their competency portfolios rather than thinking and reflecting on the complexity of the task. This anxiety is also reflected in the writings of other disciplines. For example, Milligan (1998) argues, that in nurse education, trying to assess competencies is nothing less than a distraction for students and is, in fact, an irrelevance because it detracts from the main business of learning to practice. Similarly, in the study alluded to earlier, Watson, et al, suggests that competencies in nurse education have no practical relevance to the business of educating nurses. Claxton (1999) has suggested that “learning to learn, or the development of learning power, is getting better at knowing when, how and what to do when you don’t know what to do” (p.45).

In reality, even in the marketised personal social services, for many social workers there is actually very little that is routine. Much of what they do is unpredictable and demands a capacity to ‘think on ones feet’ and an ability to improvise and combine ideas and themes in new and creative combinations. This involves tailoring theoretical and research-based knowledge to fit the circumstances encountered in specific practice situations. However, this is not a new or original idea and can be traced back to Socrates who encouraged a form of learning driven by questioning and feedback. The process forces one to question what it is that we know and how we come to know it. Becoming reflective involves moving away from traditional approaches to learning with the emphasis on technical-rationality and forces the individual to examine the basis on which he or she believes something to be true. Reflection, done well, draws us into revealing and critically examining the values, assumptions, ideas, theories and strategies supporting our professional decisions and skills.

It is essentially a process of clarification (Bates, 2005). Gould and Taylor (1996) develop this idea further when they argue that:

There is considerable empirical evidence, based on research into a variety of occupations, suggesting that expertise does not derive from the application of rules or procedures applied deductively from positivist research. Instead, it is argued that practice wisdom depends upon highly developed intuition which may be difficult to articulate but can be demonstrated through practice. On the basis of this reconstructed epistemology of practice, reflective learning offers an approach to education which operates through an understanding of professional knowledge as primarily developed through practice and the systematic analysis of experience (p.1).

However, to be effective reflective practice needs to be critical. In its traditional form it has the potential to simply reinforce the status quo, existing power relations and the discrimination and oppression associated with them. Fook and Askeland (2006) concur with this and argue powerfully that reflection needs to be critical if it is to have any value. As they say: 'in critical reflection, the material that is being reflected upon is filtered through an analysis based on critical theory' (p.41). This involves linking personal experience with wider social and political contexts and thus being more aware of the potential for inequality and disadvantage to be reinforced. Mezirow (ibid) in elaborating the concept of perspective transformation captures this idea succinctly when he says:

the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings (p.6).

The concept of competence-based learning for professional workers then is a contested one. Its value as evidence of safe practice is spurious, since it fails to capture complexity in an integrated form: isolated procedural performance cannot equate to judgement or generalized capability. It has become strongly associated with notions of measurement, through a shift in the discourse of professional practice; at worst it misrepresents a

complex, situated practice. As Foucault (2002a) suggests, such a discourse is an irruption of its time and circumstances and seeks to reduce difference and operate in the interests of others. Measurability masquerading as professionalism is a function of its time which allows control to go to others. The question as to whether the new degree requirements might engender conformity, or, alternatively, whether a fresh creativity in learning and teaching for social work might result are intriguing questions and will form the basis of much of the dialogue during the empirical study.

4.5 Social Work Education and the Academy

Thus far, this account has tried to chronicle how the system created by the Department of Health and implemented and managed by the respective Care Councils was a response to the changing nature of welfare provision and the requirements of social workers in a post-Fordist economy. The economic and social dislocation arising from changes in the organisation of production and consumption increases the need for welfare, while at the same time creating pressure to reduce the resources available to meet those needs. The result is a targeting of welfare spending which has had the effect of reducing the level of resources available to social services. That in turn has demanded changes both to the organisation and delivery of such services and the role and function of social work itself which, in turn, has changed the way social workers are educated.

As Esland (1996) argues:

The paradox of a government simultaneously wishing to experience the economic opportunities of a deregulated global economy while retaining control over its powers of decision making in fundamental areas of social policy is seen in a particularly acute form in the UK of the 1980's and 1990's (p.23).

Despite the rhetoric of quality services now pervading UK social work, there is a fragmentation of social work with the concomitant loss of the opportunities for the exercise of creativity, reflexivity and discretion in direct practice. It may well be that the loss of discretion in statutory services is one of the main causes of young social workers leaving public welfare organisations. Certainly, a number of writers draw this conclusion. For example, Healey and Meagher (2004) argue that this de-professionalization process is now affecting the majority of social workers which is leading not only to alienation and dissatisfaction, but a loss of workplace conditions which include professional development and supervision. Harris and McDonald (2000) develop that point and argue that as a result of the public sector 'reforms':

social work as an occupation will remain a more heavily constrained part of the state's welfare apparatus than it was in the 1970's and early 1980's (p.859).

Jones (2001) paints a grimmer picture when he says:

It comes over to me at least as a traumatised, even defeated occupation which has lost any sense of itself. I am coming to the conclusion that the silence of the commentators, especially in the academy, says much about the ways in which state social work has changed in the past 30 years (p.550).

The lack of response by social work academics and the place of the academy is a point which will now be developed further.

The development of the degree and its impact on academics, however, has to be seen within a concomitant changing context for higher education not unlike that which has affected the delivery of social services. There are more students, less resources, a reductive and technicist notion of the individual, and polarising debates around 'standards' and 'effectiveness' (Taylor, Barr and Steele 2002; Scott, 1998; Barnett, 1994; Maskell and Robinson, 2002). It has been suggested by Jary and Parker (1998) that these developments

have created the 'McUniversity', with standardized, bite-sized modules served up by 'have a nice day' automatons to increasingly instrumental 'customers'. The concept and practices of managerialism driven by the thrust of neo-liberalism have penetrated the university as much as social services departments as a means to encourage efficiency, productivity, value for money and so on. In higher education this is a time of benchmarks, league tables, measurable and comparable outcomes, a hard-edged accountability and the 'bottom' line'. The neo-liberal emphasis on the workings of a 'free market' has increasingly divested universities of their 'public-good' functions, reduced their institutional autonomy and threatened their forms of democratic governance (Apple, 2001; Taylor et al, 2002). Cole (2008) argues that with increasing globalisation, in order to compete with other capitalists there is a need for more human power than ones competitors. In order for this to happen, education needs to be privatised not only to extract what profit there is from the activity but also to ensure that the system is more geared to produce compliant labour power. What is apparent, is that like other public service sectors, higher education is having to confront the 'economizing' of education, the hollowed-out language of the 'market', and the 'emptying out' of relationships (Lash and Urry, 1994). We now have a discourse of 'clients' and 'consumers', individual rights rather than social responsibilities, 'stakeholders', and economic relevance, whilst much less space is given to issues of equity and social justice. There may be a general sense in higher education of a sense of marginalisation but it was felt quite acutely by many immediate colleagues as the new degree in social work was developed. Perhaps it is part of a wider agenda not to trust educationalists who must, instead, be made more accountable and controlled (Bottery, 2004).

Barnett (1994) sees a shift in emphasis in higher education from what he terms 'academic competence' to operational competence' which he suggests reflects the changing labour market needs of graduates. He also views the changes as part of a process of modernisation related to a broader cultural change project focussed on the cultivation of rational instrumentality in place of more traditional academic values such as understanding and wisdom. Certainly, a purely technicist discourse works very effectively to drive out or silence other ways of understanding outcomes, prediction and control of what it is to learn, act and speak in society, including the moral or ethical basis of who we are as academics. Nor is this confined to the UK. McWilliam et al (1999) speaking of the Australian experience talk of the change in the dominant discourse away from client-centred service (in the sense of emancipation in education, social justice in social work) in favour of an emphasis on economic and functional values. This shift by governments from a position of patron to that of buyer of education's products, with the emphasis on economic efficiency, may reconfigure the nature of the activity of both teachers in higher education and social workers in practice.

The implications for individual academics within this changing atmosphere may well be profound. Ball (2000) uses the term 'performativity' to describe the current conditions whereby we are required to add on particular kinds of value to our professional selves. Ball (2000) explains it as follows:

Performativity is a technology, a culture, a mode of regulation, or a system of 'terror' in Lyotard's words, that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change (p.1).

New modes of regulation (accountability) produce or fabricate new professional subjectivities whereby excellence in teaching is being replaced by an emphasis on

enterprise and enterprising organizations, such that the excellent academic is the enterprising one, in the sense traditionally associated with corporate business. Williams et al (1999) comment, for instance, that

The new curriculum for identity formation is...a radical departure from orthodoxy in terms of what knowledge is to be valued, where this knowledge comes from and how this knowledge is to be disseminated (*ibid.*, p.55).

When activities are driven by business values, it is no accident that competencies come to represent practice, in stark contrast with other characterisations of professional or higher education (Barnett, 1995). Yet, for teachers in higher education, professional work is integral to their identities and self worth – "[our] freedom to exercise informed judgement in work is a vital part of being human", argues Ozga (1999, p.69).

For social work academics in Wales, these challenges came to the fore in 2003 when the Care Council for Wales issued the criteria for the structure of the degree including very specific conditions institutions had to comply with in order to be approved to deliver the programme. Regulations relating to Quality Assurance and financial audit combined with output related funding and techniques of human resource management allowed the Welsh Assembly Government and the Care Council to be in possession of far reaching powers to regulate the operations and personnel functions of both the university and social services agencies. One key element in that process was a requirement of the accreditation and approval process that there was a clear articulation of behavioural learning outcomes that married with the National Occupational Standards which could then be assessed in practice. As Avis (2000) argues, however, if the tightness of learning outcomes is linked too rigidly to assessment in the workplace it has the potential to lose meaning in an attempt to ensure consistency. In the worst case scenario, he goes on to argue, academics will then

teach to the outcomes ensuring that teaching and learning is orientated to achieving these with each session being tied to a particular cluster of outcomes. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the key messages delivered to students of social work over many years is that uncertainty and ambiguity are part of the job but the curriculum built around the new degree presented uncertainty almost as a troublesome process to be expunged through technical rationality. In these uncertain times it seems ironic that the drive in higher education teaching and learning and in social work education and training is towards prediction, control and certainties supported by specialist curriculum bases which appear to have been designed by government nominated 'experts' as, in the case of the degree under discussion, the private company that designed the National Occupational Standards.

This conjunction between policy makers, social services agencies and universities creates a potential for social work education (and research) to be transformed into a much reduced, colourless and almost de-politicised curriculum. Social work remains a political activity and as such is un-amenable to consensus. The production of social work knowledge through debate, research and practice is inevitably contested, sectional and partisan and, hopefully, always will be. It is the role of social work academics to be 'problematisers' and critics of any developing new epistemological, methodological or practice orthodoxy. Social work has always been a political activity - 'a disputed and even a dangerous activity' (Butler and Drakeford, 2000). At one level it has always been acknowledged that social work has a role to play in managing 'the social' i.e. that complex area between the state and the individual (Donzelot, 1980). Social work's tradition of radical practice has led commentators like Ilfe (1997) to note that, 'There is still a tendency...to treat social work as ideologically neutral, rather than to define it as an essentially ideological

activity...essentially as political practice' (p.199). While in the UK anyway, the practice of social work and thereby social work education continues to be of political interest, not least through its close links with the public sector, nevertheless Ilfe's point holds. It is easy to see how and why one might confuse neutered social work with neutral social work.

4.6 Summary

The establishment of the new degree in social work and 'modernisation' of social work education has to be seen alongside the parallel reforms to social work delivery made possible by the radical changes to the universities themselves. The Conservative governments reforms of social work education might have been seen as simply increasing the involvement of employers over what was to be taught on the old Diploma in Social Work programme but the steady developments of the New Labour agenda has been able to build on that by establishing tight regulatory mechanisms for how people now learn the business. Jones (1999) paints a pessimistic picture of the whole process:

In the contemporary welfare system, state social work agencies do not require highly informed or educated, research aware social workers. These are now regarded as positively unhelpful qualities that make for questioning and criticism. Rather what is now demanded is agency loyalty, an ability to follow instructions, to complete procedures and assessments on time, to modify and placate client demand, to manage inadequate budgets and to work in such ways that will not expose the agency to public ridicule or exposure...Simply, the tasks expected of state social workers in the contemporary welfare system are such that professional self regulation is hopelessly inadequate, what is required is a managed workforce with no illusions about professional autonomy or ideals that that service to the client is paramount ... Professional social work education – for so long held to be the key to the regulation and reproduction of the occupation – is constantly becoming increasingly marginalised...As state social work has become more concerned with rationing and gate keeping scarce resources and the surveillance of clients...so the need for professional education will increasingly diminish (p.47).

So much of what Jones describes is accurate but perhaps sounding the death knell of social work education is as premature as sounding the end of the welfare state. Perhaps it is also

possible to re-ignite the fire of critical practice. The young people coming into social work today are as committed to the values of social justice and radical change as a generation ago thus the universities have a role in harnessing that commitment to challenge the current narrative and re-claim the soul of social work. At stake are practices of 'criticality' (Barnett, 1997) which encourage students and practitioners not only to learn about their world and themselves, but to contribute to their world and develop themselves. For social work academics, perhaps it is a question of regaining some control of their identity and seeking a fresh clarification about what it means to be a teacher in higher education.

This chapter has traced an account of the development of social work education since the Second World War by linking the account to concomitant socio-political events. The journey has highlighted a number of key issues including; the changing emphasis of values teaching to social work students; the emergence of competency based education; the changing role of the universities and the academics who work in them. These themes will form the basis of much of the discussion in the empirical part of this dissertation to which this study now turns.

Chapter 5

Methodology

I want to suggest a different metaphor for theoretical work: the metaphor of struggle, of wrestling with the angels. The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency. (Hall, S. in Grossberg, 1996, p.256)

The previous three chapters have attempted to offer a background to the debate as to what social workers should do, how they should do it and how they might be educated. As illustrated, it has been a source of contention influenced as it always will be by political ideology, shifting epistemological influences, social changes, intrigue and expediency. There is little doubt that the journey to establishing a three year degree in social work with its particular emphasis on a competency framework with prescribed national occupational standards raises a number of challenging questions and issues that this dissertation is seeking to explore. So far the study has begun the task of untangling the themes identified in Chapter 1. Firstly, there is the changing political climate, especially the advent of neo-liberal thinking and the globalisation of capital, in which the delivery of welfare and the role and function of social work itself has changed beyond recognition from that of even thirty years ago. A second theme is an analysis of the impact of these fundamental shifts on the structure of social work education and training especially the introduction of a more technicist approach to learning and a third issue is, how these changes in social work education have impacted on higher education institutions, their staff and students.

The study now proposes to contextualise these earlier discussions by examining in detail the development and introduction of the new three year degree in social work in Wales by conducting an empirical study to explore the story which lay behind its introduction.

Finally, the research will consider the effect, if any, of the introduction of the degree on the academics working in the higher education institutions in Wales.

As illustrated in Chapter 4, the debate as to what is to be taught on social work programmes and how it is to be taught is a long and fraught one and is interwoven with broader debates about the nature and delivery of social work itself (Burgess, 1994; Aymer and Okitikpi, 2000). The literature and research on social work curricula have mostly been undertaken from the perspective of a specific discipline, user group or question, such as the CCETSW sponsored reports on law (Ball et al 1988, 1995) and child protection teaching (CCETSW, 1991a) and on developing an anti-racist approach (CCETSW, 1991b; Penkreth, 2000). Analysis of the curriculum as a whole and how it might be taught is sparse apart from Lyons comprehensive account referred to in Chapter 3 (Lyons, 1999). The debate on content was opened by the development of the benchmarking statements for social work (QAA 2000, 2007) and, at an international level, by the Global Minimum Qualifying Standards (IASSW, 2002). However, the process of curriculum design and its implementation is pivotal to this proposed research project. In the wider pedagogical literature the nature of curriculum design has received much attention but in relation to social work it has remained thin (Jones, 1996). The empirical element of this dissertation proposes to explore this in more detail by raising issues such as whether the new requirements of the degree in social work might engender conformity, or, alternatively, whether creativity in learning and teaching for social work has been stimulated. That discussion, however, will need to be located within a framework of competing forces that bear down on curriculum design. These include epistemological pressures, ideological pressures, political and economic influences, vocational influences, social or humanistic

influences (such as equal opportunities), notions of student equity and specified agency drivers (such as QAA, Higher Education Mission statements and policies, regulatory and professional bodies, benchmarking statements and employers). The forces impacting on social work education are substantial.

To add to the complication, devolution has brought diversity in requirements in the four UK countries which are also increasingly divergent in terms of policy for both education and social work practice. Funding the degree has changed with the introduction of student bursaries and new arrangements to support practice learning which were referred to in Chapter 4. The workforce crisis in social work has meant courses competing for students (both with each other and with professions such as teaching and nursing); similarly, many agencies have problems in releasing staff as practice teachers. More positively, the crisis has helped social work and social work education get increased government support. Concerns about the quality of practice (and thus education), raised through public enquiries (e.g. Laming, 2003) have influenced regulations for selection of students and notions of competence to practice. They have also led to the introduction of performance management frameworks for agencies which in turn must be reflected in the curriculum. The establishment of the various Care Councils, the registration of social work staff, the Codes of Practice for employers and employees alike have all impacted on how social workers are educated.

Another contextual influence is the changing practice within and between agencies, with inter-professional working, the emergence of new agencies (such as Sure Start, Connexions, Children's Trusts) and the separation of adult and children's services.

Epistemological changes in social work include changing family structures; understanding and working to achieve the best outcomes for children and evidenced based practice have also influenced the structure and delivery of programmes. Finally, there are ideological drivers such as the place of anti-discriminatory social work and the requirement to incorporate user and carer involvement in both practice and education (Webb, 2001; Aymer and Okitikpi, 2000; Beresford, 2006).

The key component of this study is to examine the policy drivers which lay behind the introduction of the degree in social work in Wales and its impact on the design of the degree and the people who deliver and receive it. As pointed out in Chapter 1, Wales pursued a path quite distinct from England in the following specific ways:

- CCfW developed a set of standards for practice monitored through a unique funding scheme;
- They developed a more prescriptive approach to annual monitoring;
- Decisions on approval of the degree rested with the CCfW advisor on the day of validation;
- The centrality of employers in the design and partnership process;
- The requirement to map the National Occupational standards across the three years of the degree;
- The requirement to link the NOS to 84 specific learning outcomes.

5.1 Research Methodology

Social work's research tradition is rooted firmly in the positivist school of the social sciences (Brandell and Varkas, 2001). It is interesting to note that this positivist approach to

social work research with its emphasis on quantitative, objective paradigms that attempts to categorise people is at odds with practitioners experience of uncertainty, complexity and his/her concern with individual difference - a point raised in the previous chapter. This history, however, is understandable as much social work research grew out of social administration and medical epidemiology inheriting their scientific approaches to research. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the relationship between social administration and social work was strong. Positivism is characterised by the belief that social science can be carried out in a parallel fashion to the natural sciences. The assumption is that the social sciences should proceed in the same way as that of the natural sciences, and the more it resembles them the better – more rigorous, more valid, more useful – it will be. Positivist researchers would argue that general laws of causality can be deduced by studying social phenomena in a rigorous, objective and value free way. As Heather (1978) comments:

...the term positivism is used to refer to a broadly defined movement in the history of 'mans' intellectual development, the distinguishing feature of which is the attempt to apply to the affairs of 'man' the methods and principles of the natural science. (p.13).

A positivistic methodology provides a scientific conclusion capable of replication.

Quantitative enquiry, for example, is driven by the need to examine key observable realities in a valid scientific way, ensuring that the phenomena are actually present and not merely a figment of one's imagination. This paradigm has considerable appeal, as it purports to provide scientifically based research that would be capable of informing strategic policy. Bryman (2005) observes:

As social scientists have been looked to increasingly by governments and other agencies to provide policy-relevant research (or alternatively have sought to present themselves in this light), they have either been compelled to adopt a supposedly scientific approach or have sought to display an aura of scientific method in order to secure funding (p.13).

This has certainly been the case in social work and the trend to more positivist approaches to research methodology is evident in the literature. A fundamental assumption of quantitative research, pertinent to the empirical study under discussion, is that there is a shared reality among relevant individuals that can be discerned and described. It is true that quantitative researchers today are more sophisticated than the early logical positivists who believed that they could “study society rationally and objectively” (Babbie, 1998). Or, as the concept of logical positivism implies, research is dependent on logic and rational reasoning as well as objective empirical observation. Modern social scientists generally agree that there is no ‘true’ way of recognising an objective reality as everyone observes the world through his/her own subjectivity. Nonetheless, positivists would contend that it is possible through dialogue to get a ‘shared agreement’ of what constitutes the meaning of a concept, for example. However, there is a political component at work for what appears to be happening in social work research is an adoption of a most uncritical form of positivism. In attempting to understand this return to positivism MacIntyre (1981) offers an interesting insight:

What managerial expertise requires for its vindication is a justified conception of social science as providing a stock of law-like generalisations with strong predictive power (p.90).

There is little doubt that we are beginning to see commissioning agencies who control research funding prescribing that all evaluations of practice should be outcome focussed (Ferguson, 2008). As suggested in the previous chapter, social work practice and the teaching of social work students is, of course, unpredictable and takes place in a context which changes with time and space creating a challenge for social work educators in how both research methods and practice methods will be taught and, indeed, how research in the future will be conducted. Traditionally, method or programme evaluation has been taught within the philosophical tradition of realism which has stressed that context and not

outcomes alone is crucial in the evaluation of any approach. Pawson and Tilley (1997) in their work on evaluating methods and approaches stress the importance of understanding the context if one is to learn from a study and reshape practice approaches. They talk of 'context-mechanism-outcomes' configurations which are propositions stating what it is about offender programmes, for example, which work for some people in some circumstances.

What appeared to be proposed regarding the new degree in social work was the replication of the programme across Wales in the hope that it would work everywhere and always. The problem with de-contextualising any subsequent evaluation research (as is planned) if a preoccupation with outcomes is the driving imperative is that, inevitably, most of the results of these findings will be inconclusive because the theory it is supposed to be testing depends crucially on the specific context in which they are implemented. This means that, as many have suspected, the theory or theories that necessarily lie behind any social work intervention is nothing like as straightforward as the managerial culture which demands single, right answers requires it to be. Braithwaite (1993) has argued that what is necessary is the development of a wide range of theories that are sometimes useful. He goes on to say:

In the world of problem solving that matters, it is contextualised usefulness that counts, not decontextualised statistical power (p.36).

Perhaps this new culture has inevitably affected not only what is being taught on the new social work programmes but what research social work academics may conduct. The traditional tolerance for theoretical pluralism is becoming strained by policy makers and social work managers who demand a quick and simple 'fix' to what are essentially highly complex and context bound phenomena. Maybe what is needed is a variety of approaches

rather than exclusive reliance on one and a challenge to the growing accounts in the literature which extol 'programme integrity' which will only mislead if it is taken to mean determination to change nothing even when the context changes as it always does.

There is little doubt, however, that quantitative research has its value in that it can reliably determine if one idea or concept, for example, is better than another and the results may be projected on to a larger population allowing generalised conclusions to be drawn. For the study in question, however, the stories of the participants are crucial hence the rejection of a positivist approach which always runs the risk of denying human freedom by assuming that all behaviour is determined by biological, psychological or social factors.

It is for that reason a qualitative approach was chosen for the empirical element of this research dissertation. Thompson (1992) is right when he suggests that one cannot understand human behaviour without understanding the framework within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. In fact, the "objective" scientist, by coding and standardising, may destroy valuable data while imposing their world on the subjects.

Barker (1999) provides a succinct definition of qualitative research as:

Systematic investigations that include in depth, non-quantitative studies of individuals, groups, organisations or communities. Examples include field study, ethnography and historiography (p.393).

From an epistemological perspective then, qualitative research is essentially phenomenological. The primary focus of the research is to understand the human experience from the individual's own frame of reference, unlike the quantitative approaches discussed earlier which attempts to seek the facts or causes of social phenomena based on experimentally derived evidence or observations. Phenomenology addresses itself to issues of perceptual frameworks and how meanings are constructed by individuals. In other words

‘facts’ are not purely objective entities but are defined by the conceptual frameworks in which they are located and cannot, therefore, be taken at face value but must be placed within the conceptual framework which generates them and the conceptual framework which is used to interpret them (Kazi, 2003; Everitt et al, 1992).

5.2 Philosophy

For this study I wanted to enter the world of the subject and communicate and observe with the intention of gathering a rich source of contextual and complete descriptive data. Human behaviour is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs; thus, it is argued, one must study that behaviour in situations (Everitt et al, 1992; Etherington, 2004). The setting e.g., the university, the Care Council for Wales offices, The National Assembly for Wales buildings are crucial venues harbouring their own norms, traditions, roles, and values which are all crucial contextual variables having their own meaning. The crucial question is to move from “What do I know about a problem that will allow me to formulate and test a hypothesis” to “What do my informants know about their culture that I can discover.”

It was also a question of conducting a research enquiry that fits with who I am: my underlying values, my philosophies on life, my views of reality and my beliefs about how knowledge is known and created. My ontological and epistemological views are intertwined. For example, I believe that the world becomes a world of meaning only when beings make sense of it all. Also, because I believe that reality is socially constructed and subjectively determined any research approach has to be suited to the purpose of discovering something of how those constructions come about and the meanings people

give them. Choosing how to do research is therefore a personal decision about what one would like to discover.

5.3 Narrative Knowing

As a social worker I came, almost by accident, on what were then new approaches to working with people known collectively as narrative therapies. Strongly influenced by feminist theory, narrative therapies and approaches allowed people (especially children) to construct stories as a way of sharing their lived experiences. These approaches are based on epistemologies that view reality and knowledge as socially constructed, and on the idea that knowledge is situated within contexts and embedded within historical, cultural stories, beliefs and practices (Burr, 1995; Crossley, 2000). More recently, research involvement with a local child care agency which uses these approaches with traumatised children re-kindled the interest and influenced this research project. Because there is a complex interaction between the world in which a person lives and their understanding of that world, narratives are particularly suitable for portraying how people experience their position in relation to a culture whether it be the university, the Care Council for Wales or the Social Services Inspectorate. It seemed important to hear people's feelings, thoughts and attitudes and hopefully that richness of narrative allows one to understand how people understand themselves and how their individual story provides another piece in a jigsaw that might highlight a brief era in time. Listening to peoples accounts would also enable the gaining of an 'insiders view' of the cultures in which the stories were embedded) and which might also invite questions that could lead to further enquiry (Etherington, 2004).

5.4 The Research Questions

The four themes to be investigated are:

1. *The political imperatives:* - What were the key drivers behind the degree? What was the rationale for ensuring the centrality of employers in the process; the changed format of practice learning?
2. *The philosophical imperatives:* - Why the model that incorporated the National Occupational Standards linked to prescribed competencies was adopted. To what extent were other curriculum models considered?
3. *Implementation:* - Did the degree proposal change in process? What was the role of the main 'players' in the project?
4. *Impact:* - What effect has the new degree had? For example, what kind of workforce is the new degree aiming to 'produce'? Will the reforms help? If so, in what ways?

As outlined in Chapter 1 these questions were chosen with the intention of gaining insight into what the various policy, political and educational imperatives actually were and whether or not the changes brought about by the degree would ultimately succeed in 'producing' more effective social workers who might still retain a critical perspective towards their practice.

In advance of each meeting I sent a letter explaining my research interest and listed the above themes as indicators of where our conversations might focus.

5.5 The Interviews

In order to conduct the research a series of interviews were carried with a number of key policy makers within Wales which included staff from the Care Council for Wales and the Social services Inspectorate for Wales plus the heads of social work:-

- A member of the Senior Executive team of the Care Council for Wales;
- Jane Hutt AM: Former Minister who guided the degree through the Welsh Assembly Government;
- A senior member of the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales with direct responsibility for implementing the degree;
- A Senior Workforce Advisor, Care Council for Wales, seconded to work on the implantation of the degree;
- Six heads of social work programmes from within the constituent colleges of the University of Wales.

It is important to note that Wales is a small country and that the main architects and builders of the degree during the planning and implementation stage of the degree were few. Those chosen above were central to the project. The Heads of Programmes were all of those who were in post at the time of the implementation phase and who had managed social work programmes previously.

As can be seen above, it was planned to speak to the Minister at the time of implementation of the degree but she declined an interview. She did agree, however, to complete 'questionnaire' of the intended interview questions but after several attempts including emails and telephone calls no response was forthcoming. She was the only person who declined to take part in the study. The staff interviewed from the Care Council and the

Social Services Inspectorate were those directly charged by the Minister to implement the degree.

The research participants were chosen, then, because of their specific characteristics and location with the intention of providing useful and specific information to the enquiry. The Care Council staff were not only responsible for managing the design and implementation of the degree but for re-approving or approving the HEI's to deliver the degree and then to attend every validation event in order to give the final decision.

Social workers (and academics) spend a good deal of their working lives interviewing so there is a sense that interviewing is a logical approach for any human service worker to pursue. Caution is advised, however. Interviewing in clinical or academic situations is very different from interviewing for research purposes. The former is usually in relation to helping or supporting people whereas the latter is an observational method to develop empirical knowledge (Padgett, 1998).

Ribbins (2006) argues that clarity at the outset is an essential component of any successful interview. That clarity includes key components with regard to the essentials of what the researcher wants to find out; a considered plan; location of the interviews and how long they might take and type of interview structure. Equally important, he argues, is that clarity is essential in terms of interviewees being reassured regarding confidentiality and anonymity and the right of interviewees to have access to any transcript and an option to amend any inaccuracies before publication or indeed have an option to withdraw their contribution.

Interviewing provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of diverse viewpoints but crucially the degree of structure of the interviews needed to be established. Typically, in any in depth interview approach there is a choice of three structural types: structured, unstructured and semi-structured. With structured interviews the researcher decides what questions will be asked and the order of delivery. This approach inevitably imposes the researcher's "template" about a problem on the interview. A high level of structure might be appropriate if a number of interviews are being carried out by a large number of interviewers, for example. At the other end of the interview spectrum is the unstructured approach where there is no pre-established schedule. This approach does have its advantages in that the interviewee tends to be more in control of events but for this study there was a need to have some control of the direction of the interview to ensure collection of appropriate material and to avoid having to filter hours of superfluous material. As mentioned earlier a particular challenge for this research project was the fact that all of the interviewees were known in various degrees. Some people I knew well whilst others I had met at various meetings over the years. This presents unique but ultimately potentially rich opportunities which are discussed below.

5.6 Insider Research

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) reflect on the fact that there are distinct advantages in having subject knowledge to take to the interview situation. Whilst that epistemic privilege has its advantages in that, in this case, the situation in Wales was well known as were many of the personnel involved, it was hoped that these factors would facilitate both insight and frankness whilst also acknowledging that such 'insider knowledge' has its disadvantages in that colleagues in Wales largely know me quite well which could have the effect of them

telling me what they think I would like to hear. However, I was confident that the people participating were not vulnerable subjects who might be ‘led’ or persuaded to adopt a certain view point. The respondents were either seasoned academics or well established, experienced government civil servants who would also not be prone to being manipulated.

In their chapter on interviewing, Fontana and Frey (2000) describe a view of collecting data that resonated with my own ideas: ‘Interviewing and interviewers must necessarily be creative, forget how-to rules, and adapt themselves to the ever changing situations they face’(p.657). However, Wengraf (2001) describes interviews as ‘a special kind of conversational interaction’ maintaining that:

...what is planned is a deliberate half scripted or quarter scripted interview: its questions are only partially prepared in advance (semi structured) and will therefore be largely improvised by you as interviewer. But only largely: the interview as a whole is a joint process, a co-production by you and your interviewee (p.3).

As such, this enquiry adopted a semi-structured approach but given the issue of familiarity with the interviewees adopted the ideas of reflexivity which allows the researcher to ask questions in the usual way but, crucially, the interviewer shares personal experiences of the topic and comments on the unfolding communication between both parties. Ellis and Berger (2003) see the researcher’s disclosure as:

More than tactics to encourage the respondent to open up: rather, the researcher often feels a reciprocal desire to disclose, given the intimacy of the details being shared by the interviewee (p.162).

Reflexivity in research is the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. Because of the subject under examination and my closeness to the project, I wanted to be open with participants and share how my own thoughts and feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history informed us as I dialogued with them, transcribed their conversations and wrote the

representation of their words. I also felt that by adopting reflexivity in this research project there would be an attempt to close the illusory gap between researchers and researched and between the knower and what is known. Reflexive feminist researchers encourage us to display in our writings the full interaction between ourselves and our participants so that our work can be understood not only in terms of what we have discovered but how we have discovered it. (Josselson, 1996; McLeod, 2001; Etherington, 2004).

One of the key methodological issues is that the interpretations can, hopefully, now be better understood and validated by readers who have been informed about the position adopted in relation to the study and my own explicit questioning of my involvement. This means “interpreting one’s own interpretations, looking at one’s own perspectives and turning a self critical eye onto one’s own authority as interpreter and author” (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p.11). It is hoped that this frankness enhances the trustworthiness of the findings and outcomes of the research. It is important to stress that had the participants been unknown to me, or potentially vulnerable, a very different approach to the interview process would have been adopted.

The meeting with each participant was like a snap shot in time where I felt able to meet them wherever they were at that juncture in their lives and to recognise that stories are constantly being reconstructed. Each story was told for a purpose and how it was told and how it was heard will depend as much on the listener as the narrator. What was especially interesting and surprising was how many of the interviewees gained something for themselves. A number said that they hadn’t ‘thought about it that way before’ or ‘now you ask it like that I hadn’t realised the implications’. Even the humble research under

discussion has not only allowed the researcher an occasion for growth and learning but the researched too found opportunities to do the same.

Each interview began with the broad invitation to tell their story of the development and introduction of the degree. The research topics outlined earlier invariably came up in conversation but if they didn't they were introduced at appropriate points in the dialogue. In addition there was an attempt in each case to ask the sort of 'curious' questions that shape peoples narratives and help them unfold (Thyer et al, 2001). Each conversation was very different and the analysis in the next chapter reveals how some of the dialogue was co-constructed. As mentioned in the opening Chapter, this exploration was a journey which was started in an attempt to try and unravel many complex and often contradictory forces that were at work changing both the delivery of welfare services and the education of social workers. At the outset, I was clear about my position regarding the role and function of social work and the responsibilities of social work academics to act as 'problematisers' for their students. Inevitably, that commitment and passion for both the practice and the teaching of social work bubbles up in some of the conversations but as Eley (1977) says:

Qualitative writing by its nature involves the Self too intimately to ignore wounds, scars, and hard won understandings that are to some degree part of our baggage.

Each interview, except for one, took place in the person's own environment i.e. the university, the Welsh Assembly Government's offices or the offices of the Care Council for Wales. The exception was one interview of an academic who happened to be in Cardiff when I was there and invited me to conduct the interview as a 'breakfast meeting' in a hotel before he spoke at a conference. Although it offered an opportunity to avoid an additional journey to his institution it turned out to be a mistake as the hotel lobby was

noisy with very poor acoustics which meant transcribing was particularly difficult as so much of the conversation was hard to hear. Although it was a relatively short interview the transcribing time was almost three times as long suggesting that the additional journey might have been a better use of time.

5.7 Transcribing

All of the interviews were taped and then transcribed. The question of whether or not to transcribe personally is an important decision. My preference was to pay someone to do it; however, supervision advice suggested that the process of transcribing is in itself a valuable and useful exercise. I was not convinced but did it anyway. The experience, however, was extraordinary valuable. Despite being time consuming and tedious on occasions the exercise allowed me to pick up nuances, hesitations, pauses, emphases and the myriads of other ways we all add meaning to our words. Transcribing also allowed me to hear more of what I missed the first time (a surprising amount) and to check that I had behaved ethically throughout each interview.

After re-checking the transcripts they were returned to the participants with the suggestion that they were free to censor anything they were not happy to have included and to check that their meanings were still intact. Having done that for the first three participants it occurred that, although for ethical reasons it was the correct thing to do, as the transcripts represented a window on reality at a specific point in time and did not represent reality itself so perhaps the opportunity to re-draft or remove elements defeats the point of the exercise.

I was also anxious that returning the transcripts might encourage some to withdraw from the study if they felt that they had said too much or had come over in a way that didn't truly represent them. Until transcripts are written up one never sees just how bad we are at interviewing and how spoken language is made up of incomplete sentences and incorrect use of grammar or language generally. However, it was decided not to remove the countless 'erms' and 'aaahs' and 'you knows' for fear of losing subtle meaning (although the temptation to remove some of my dreadful long winded questioning was overwhelming). Nonetheless, as I had stated at the outset transcripts would be returned for comment there was no question of failing to do that but it did raise an interesting dilemma. The fact that two participants did want minor changes is a good enough reason to return them for scrutiny. None of the participants asked for their contributions to be removed from the research project.

5.8 Ethical Issues

As pointed out earlier, each participant received a letter inviting them to participate (usually after an explanatory telephone call or email) which also contained details of the purpose of the research and the purpose of the interview including an explanation of any risks involved in participating. Respondents also signed a form at the end of each interview outlining once again their rights and offering the contact number of my supervisor should they be dissatisfied with any element of the research (See Appendix 1). The correspondence also involved assurances about anonymity, how the findings would be used, details of the limits of confidentiality and how their confidentiality would be protected. The invitation letter and consent form were processed through the University of Hull's formal ethics procedures in the Autumn of 2007.

In addition, prior to every interview the above information was repeated. Interestingly, every participant was very relaxed about taking part but by the end of the interview many re-visited the question of anonymity and asked for re-assurance that nothing of what they had said could be traced back. That is a point which will be developed more fully in the next chapter.

Finally, in order to ensure anonymity those people representing government agencies will be referred to as 'Officials' whilst academic staff will be referred to as 'Heads'.

5.9 Analysis

One of the risks of trying to make sense of data from qualitative research is the challenge of the 'anything goes' critique (Antaki et al, 2002). I intend to draw on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) and adopt a thematic analysis approach to make sense of the data produced from the interviews. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data with an opportunity to then organise and describe it in rich detail. Braun and Clarke warn against the presentation of research findings which talks of themes 'emerging' from the data as if it was somehow a passive activity devoid of human agency. Researchers always play an active role identifying patterns and themes by selecting those which interest and then reporting them to the reader. The language of themes emerging:

can be misinterpreted to mean that themes 'reside' in the data and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them (Ely et al., 1997, p205 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80).

Braun and Clarke (2006) offer a comprehensive approach to understanding thematic analysis and argue convincingly that it should be regarded as a method in its own right. Thematic analysis is a way of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Braun and Clarke are right when they say that great caution should be attached to the notion that researchers can simply ‘give voice’ to their informants perceptions and views. Thematic analysis allows examination of the ways “.... in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81). They go on to argue that a rigorous thematic analysis helps to mirror reality as well as being able to examine and unravel superficial realities. This is crucial to the study under discussion as I wish to explore the ways in which meaning and the experiences of the new degree are socially constructed and reproduced allowing exploration of the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that give meaning to people’s accounts.

Initially, there were already a number of themes identified which drove the interviewing schedule (see above) but as the analysis of the material developed a number of other themes and patterns were identified. A crucial question to address is what actually constitutes a theme. Braun and Clarke suggest that it is a question of prevalence across the data set but that there is no hard and fast rule. The next chapter identifies clearly what additional themes were identified, why they were regarded as sufficiently important and why they were judged them so. Braun and Clarke suggest that identifying the ‘keyness’ of a theme is not always measurable by quantifiable means but rather on whether it captures something important and relevant to the research question. They go on to argue that the attractiveness of thematic analysis in qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to

determine themes and prevalence in a variety of ways. What is crucial, they suggest, is that the researcher is consistent in how this is done within a particular analysis.

A key decision to be made is around the way themes might be identified – a semantic or explicit level or at a latent or interpretive level (Boyatzis, 1998). At a semantic level one is trying to identify the themes explicitly without looking beyond what the participant has said and then presenting the information as patterns in semantic content. In contrast, a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content and instead looks for underlying and subtle ideas, conceptualisations that might have shaped the content of the data. It is the latter approach I have taken as it is important in this study to try and analyse the form and meaning of participant's stories. The latent thematic analysis resonates with an earlier discussion regarding how meanings are constructed. From this perspective the epistemological position is clear – meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced rather than being inherent in any individual. I am not trying to investigate the motivation or individual psychologies of the participants but rather understand and extrapolate ideas and theories from the accounts people gave influenced by the cultures and structural conditions in which they were located.

Earlier in this chapter the topic of anonymity was raised and it was pointed out that although all of the respondents were very relaxed at the start of the interview many revisited the issue again at the end seeking reassurance that nothing they said could be traced back to them. Given that the sample is small and social work practice and education in Wales is a close community, the problem of anonymising responses was a challenge. Accordingly, the respondents were divided into two. Those representing the Care Council

for Wales or the Welsh Assembly Government or the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales appear in the analysis as ‘Officials’ whilst the Heads of Programmes will appear as ‘Heads.’

It was outlined earlier how the study would attempt to make sense of disparate accounts through thematic analysis. Using the guidelines offered by Braun and Clarke (2006) they stress there are no hard and fast rules but simply guidelines to be used flexibly and creatively. They stress that analysis is not a linear process but is one which is ‘recursive’ and which, in fact, ended up being surprisingly time consuming. Braun and Clarke suggest that the process should journey through six distinct phases:

1. *Familiarise oneself with the data* – transcribing, reading and re-reading;
2. *Generate initial codes* – Code interesting features in a systematic fashion across the data set;
3. *Search for themes* – Collate codes into different potential themes gathering data relevant to each theme;
4. *Reviewing themes* – Check if the themes work in relation to coded extracts then Generate a thematic map of the analysis;
5. *Define and name themes* – Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, naming each theme;
6. *Producing the report* – The final opportunity for analysis. Select vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts relating back to research questions and literature.

Phase one involved the careful re-reading of all of the interviews and a re-listening of the live interviews. This latter activity was especially useful as it encouraged interpretation at a different level in the sense that it became easier to locate where meanings were being created and where pauses, for example, which weren't noticed during transcription took on a new meaning. Phase two consisted of generating an initial list of ideas and what appeared to be the most interesting elements in order to produce initial codes. "Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.88). Although Braun and Clarke state that this coding will differ from the units of analysis it was nonetheless a somewhat worrying experience as coded data began to appear which was not expected. For example, the competition between the HEI's and the relationship between the HEI's and the Care Council drew a great deal of material – far more than I had remembered whilst conducting the interviews.

Coding was done manually although I did have access to suitable software but I felt that the time taken to familiarise myself with a new software package was simply not justified. Instead, I noted interesting areas of data and coded them by using colour within the Word program itself. Bryman (2001), warns against losing the context of the data by ensuring that some of the relevant surrounding data is left intact. Braun and Clarke (2006) also offer a warning against not being afraid to see contradictions within a thematic 'map' and that was certainly the case. For example, one official who is normally very careful in what is said, spoke movingly about his unhappiness about the state of UK social work which placed his comments rather intriguingly alongside one of the most oppositional Heads!

5.10 Summary

This chapter has proffered a discussion regarding the historical background to social work research before offering a rationale for a methodology to conduct the empirical component of this dissertation. The intention is to try and give voice to people in the hope of trying to improve dialogue, understanding and interpretation whilst at the same time acknowledging the extent and dangers of possible ‘insider research;’ bias. The following chapter is the results and analysis of that dialogue but with acknowledgment that ‘truth’ is invariably contested, complex and ambiguous.

Chapter 6

Results and Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the results of a series of interviews conducted during the end of 2007 and the early months of 2008. The focus of the interviews was the introduction of the new degree in social work in Wales and specifically the four interlocking themes referred to in the previous chapter:

- 1. The political imperatives: - What were the key drivers behind the degree? What was the rationale for ensuring the centrality of employers in the process; the changed format of practice learning?*
- 2. The philosophical imperatives: - Why the model that incorporated the National Occupational Standards linked to prescribed competencies was adopted. To what extent were other models considered?*
- 3. Implementation: - Did the degree proposal change in process? What was the role of the main 'players' in the project?*
- 4. Impact: - What effect has the new degree had? For example, what kind of workforce is the new degree aiming to 'produce'? Will the reforms help? If so, in what ways?*

The themes identified above inevitably appear as discrete, identified subjects as the questioning during the interviews inevitably focussed directly on them at some point during the interview. However, some of the identified issues like 'influences on the curriculum' didn't generate enough material to be a theme in its own right but collapsed into broader

themes around the National Occupational Standards and competencies. Other themes were broken down; for example, the ‘centrality of the employers’ was broken down in to a further theme of ‘partnership’ as it generated so much coherent, meaningful data in its own right. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise a final re-reading to ensure data fit into themes comfortably and, if not, to question whether or not the theme is problematic or whether the data belongs elsewhere. This wasn’t a problem with this analysis and all of the data extracts seemed to find a ‘home’ but there is a risk, as they acknowledge, that this process could continue *ad infinitum*. However, there was still a need to define and refine a little further to ensure that the data provided sufficient essence to support the theme. At this point some data were discarded as they duplicated other material without losing the integrity of the ‘story’.

Interestingly, what became apparent was how certain themes caught the interviewees’ imagination. For example, the fourth rather broad question of whether the degree would ultimately ‘produce’ the workforce of the future generated a major theme of ‘fitness for purpose’ which created more discussion than any other issue allowing people to engage in critical dialogue about the very nature and future of social work itself. The discourses that ensued revealed another large gap between the views of the Heads and the Officials as to what constituted the nature of social work. Also, the second question which probed the contentious area of the centrality of the employer created an extensive discussion regarding the nature of partnership which became another discrete theme. During the analysis and coding of that theme another emerged, namely that of the perceived competitiveness which had been created between the various constituent colleges of the University of Wales.

Eventually, a final thematic ‘map’ emerged:-

The key political drivers behind the degree

Did the degree change during the process?

The centrality of the employers

The nature of partnership

Was the driver collaboration or competition amongst the HEI's?

The changed focus of practice learning

The curriculum model integrating the National Occupational Standards linked to assessable competencies

What kind of workforce is the degree aiming to produce – is it fit for purpose?

6.2 Background

The introduction of the degree in Wales began in 2001 following the introduction of the Care Standards Act 2000 which not only established the degree in social work but replaced the old Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) with care councils for each country of the United Kingdom. It is important to stress that both the academic community and practitioners were warmly in favour of the three year degree and embraced its possibilities with enthusiasm. The Department of Health gave each of the Care Councils responsibility to implement and regulate their own programmes with the result that each country does have differing emphases. In Wales, for example, the National Occupational Standards had to be mapped across the three years of the degree and the Care Council for Wales (CCfW) was represented at each validation event with the power to decline final approval.

6.3 Analysis

6.3.1 The key political drivers behind the degree in Wales

The introduction of the Care Standards Act 2000 was an attempt to re-shape and restructure social work education and practice. As one Head said:

We were being driven by this. Following on from things like the scandals, you know, the bad press that social workers had and I suppose everybody agreed that there was a need to go back to the drawing board of having a look at that and there was a strong pressure about more time; we need more time to do things with students and I don't know if that's how the 200 days emerged but the idea that there would be more supervised practice time.

One Official concurred with this analysis

When did all this change begin? The concerns about the Diploma in Social Work went back as far as 1997 and then there was the decision - Ok so there were concerns and the changes for Wales needed to be located in the 1999 White Paper for the modernisation of social services and then the decision that there would be different national arrangements for social work training and registration, the assumption to the Care Council. So all of it was part of the overall reform of how you would set standards for practice and set standards.

These views were fairly standard and reflected a general agreement amongst all of the respondents that the changes were driven by central government who saw the new degree as an opportunity to re-shape UK social work practice and education.

6.3.2 Did the degree change during the process?

With this issue the intention was to explore whether or not the original plans for the degree changed in the light of discussions during the preliminary stages or during the implementation phase. One dialogue with an Official suggested that there was no overall plan:

JB - From the early inception of the degree, when you were planning it, did it actually change in any way from your original blueprint to what we finally ended up with?

Official - We didn't have a blueprint. What we had was a set of principles which the Minister announced back in sort of late 2001 I think, and they were about improving better linking of research and practice and lots of things were happening at this time - being set up. We were engaged with SCIE [Social Care Institute for Excellence]; they were producing lots of guidance around the new degree and some of that they were doing directly on commission from the DoH but nevertheless it was all generic. Having people who were fit for purpose at the end of it, putting employers at the centre, making sure that social work was part of the

bigger workforce planning agenda, you know those kinds of things so I don't think we had a blueprint.

This was an odd comment as all of the Heads interviewed felt that the implementation process was so prescriptive that there was no opportunity for creative action. One Head, however, rather impishly confided:

We put it together like a jig saw but what else could you do? We did change it though after they'd gone because we've got a module now here at XXXXXX which was in its validation process called 'Social work theory 2' and we now we call it 'The politics of social work' so we could have never got away with it at the time [laughs]

Although, as pointed out earlier in this study, most people both in practice and the academy welcomed the three year degree as an overdue reform, concerns began to be raised quite early on in the process as suspicion regarding the amount of control and regulatory powers awarded to the Care Councils. Harris (2003) suggests that this is an essentially New Labour strategy who want a much more interventionist and highly centralist approach to policy making but with responsibility for implementation given to quasi-independent bodies which are in fact themselves highly regulated and controlled from the centre. In this case the CCfW regulates both the workforce and social work's knowledge base. Ferguson (2008) concurs with this view suggesting that New Labour's approach to controlling the professions has tended to favour a 'franchise model' in which targets and standards are set centrally and then delegated to a semi independent body like Care Councils to achieve subject to a regime of tight regulation.

6.3.3 The centrality of the employers

One of the key features of the degree in Wales was that employers were made central to the degree which included assuming total responsibility for practice learning, the assessment of practice and having a significant presence on each programme's management structure.

the establishment of the partnership has been agreed as part of the project to reform social work training in order to ensure that the new degree is located within a workforce planning process with employers taking a lead role (Social Services Inspectorate for Wales 2005).

This issue raised possibly the clearest differences between the Officials and the Heads and generated a great deal of data. For all of the officials their responses were fairly uniform and tended to locate the response within a workforce planning discourse;

JB- I mean, for example, in Wales you placed the employer deliberately at the centre of things. What was the imperative that lay behind that? It didn't happen in England, why did you go down that route here?

One Official suggested:-

...if you look at the skill based learning agenda, the centrality of the employers is actually being clear that the kind of people they wanted was very much the policy driver for that side of the business and we were actually looking across some of the things that the employers were saying regularly to WAG and to ourselves which is: "These people are coming off the Diploma not able to do the job, they've been on the wrong kind of placements, they've been on placement in the voluntary sector, never touched any statutory work and the jobs are in statutory work and we are having to start from scratch." So it seemed very logical then to say, "Ok then. The best way of achieving that is for the employers to play a much greater role in that partnership and taking more responsibility actually."

Another Official said:-

I suppose it's most acute in terms of the emphasis on the employers taking the lead of practice isn't it? I mean we enshrine it in our requirements for degree approval by saying we expect this to be a partnership and we have to see evidence of that and to the extent, if you remember working with you a couple of years ago in NEWI, you know we were saying your student numbers have got to reflect the ability of your partners to deliver on this so while you might have liked a programme of 60 or 70, is there any way in which your geographical area can absorb that sort of number and clearly their interests, bottom line is well how many workers do we actually need coming into our workforce and the two things might not exactly match but if they want a local programme they're going to have to come to some sort of compromise position aren't you?

For the Heads of programme however, there were anxieties about that approach:-

You know how universities are funded, they can't be funded on the possibility that the employers will say next year well we need 25 across the whole of the region and you know, that's all that the Care Council then want to fund; we haven't seen that yet but the implications of that were always with us in our minds as we were developing the degree programme but we've become so reliant and so linked to this idea – I mean it's a very blunt

instrument. I mean who's to say they're going to go to work in the local market? And what does it say for migration and change?

Other Heads regarded the centrality of employers with greater suspicion. One said:-

I think that this whole kind of, New Labour modernising starts in terms of workforce management and mapping and they were the real reasons why we had to – I don't want to say kowtow but it was a real reason why we were so tied in with the employers and the employers were such key players to the degree and how it would come about.

Another Head identified an especially interesting point:-

The centrality of employers particularly in Wales where it's not just, it's not actually centrality of employers, it's centrality of the statutory sector because it's the local authority employers who were driving this. In all the documentation where it refers to employers, given the guidance, you might as well bracket it and say 'statutory sector employer.' It's really about generating a workforce for the statutory sector most particularly.

The issue of the centrality of the statutory sector is an interesting one given that a large amount of social work delivery is done by the private and voluntary sectors as I pointed out in Chapter 4. This process was begun during the Conservative administration during the 1980's and 1990's during which time a 'market' for care was established in which statutory agencies were forced to participate ((Henwood et al, 1996). This market is now hugely significant in the delivery of welfare with a network of independent trading agencies and quasi-independent service agencies, including government quangos, freelance enterprises, Trusts, joint ventures plus a host of other bodies created through management buy-outs and facilities management arrangements (Bartlett et al, 1994; Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996; Burchardt et al, 2000; Thompson and Thompson, 2005; Sharkey, 2007). Successive governments over the last two decades have regulated the public sector to turn it over to a deregulated private sector which has resulted in a shrunken public service and a flourishing private sector. Voluntary agencies are under increased pressure to become more business orientated and to compete against the private sector. Helen Tridgell, the Director of

External Affairs at the Disabilities Trust says,

Businesses and charities are remarkably similar these days. The days of charities being soft and fluffy have long gone. They are just as focussed and tough as companies (Plummer, 2006).

6.3.4 The nature of partnership

As discussed in Chapter 4, the theme of partnership within social work education goes back many years. Reflecting the responses from interviewees, for this discussion I want to analyse partnership at three levels. Firstly, the partnership between the HEI's and the regulatory body. It would be true to say that the relationship between the former CCETSW, its Social Work Education Advisors (SWEA's) and the HEI's was fairly benign by modern standards but according to the Heads of programme I spoke with, the introduction of the degree in Wales revealed fault lines of considerable depth between them and the reconstituted Care Council for Wales. Secondly, the partnership between HEI's in Wales. For many years the various HEI's had worked together on the former qualification, the Diploma in Social Work. My previous institution worked with Bangor University for over twenty years in a north Wales consortium. Tensions were occasionally evident but, in general, it worked quite successfully. The legislation which introduced the degree abandoned the concept of jointly managed consortia across regions in favour of individual HEI's in collaboration with a prescribed number of local authorities. Thirdly, I want to highlight some issues regarding the partnership between universities and social work agencies. As argued in Chapter 4, these arrangements were in existence from the late 1970's onwards and guided the gradual development of CCETSW policy although they identified tensions quite early on especially around the planning and evaluation of practice learning but critically about the lack of unanimity as to what constituted social work

knowledge, skills and values (CCETSW, 1983). However, the reality of partnership working was embodied in the former CSS programme and it served to provide the basis for all future arrangements. CCETSW's arguments in support of partnership based social work education were:

- Both field and academic learning are equally important and need to be closely integrated
- By having agency input, programmes could make the curriculum more relevant in preparing students for work in the personal social services
- Partnerships are essential to achieving a high quality of education and training and in order to increase the quality of DipSW holders
- Programmes would be more relevant.

(Harris, 2003, p.114)

This background is crucial to understanding the rationale of the Care Council for Wales in implementing the structure they chose. As one Official said:

We're moving on, modernising, this will be different, it may well be the HEIs who have the responsibility in England but then the reflection here was well, you can only actually deliver this through partnership so wouldn't you want to require that?

JB- But that's what we had with the DIPSW.

Official: Oh yes. And a lot of it was worth hanging on to and say, 'well this is working at the moment' but we're much more prescriptive, for example, about practice assessment panels and the make up of practice assessment panels, the requirement for employers to be involved at that level.

Another Official felt that:

We had already had a really good framework for partnership around the Diploma in Social Work ... so it was, I think it's a truly vocational degree and therefore the centrality of employers is critical for that. Employers helping HEIs to define what modern standards needed to be, what was critical, you know, and then enabling people to put their academic learning into practice and then to be able to assess them in doing that. And I think then WAG [Welsh Assembly Government] went through our kind of education policy to validate that model for degrees in Wales generally which are much more employer driven models for Higher Education anyway. So in a way I think, you know, we kind of did that because we drew on the kind of culture of social care if you like, but then our education policy sort of caught up with that and I thought it kind of fitted the whole environment because I think probably half way through the reform of social work training they produced a higher

education document *Aiming Higher* didn't they? Which was very much about the kind of things that we were trying to do anyway.

The reference to *Aiming Higher* is an interesting one. This policy document which emerged in 2001 was the blue print for higher education in Wales for a decade. Essentially, one of the key recommendations was that higher education was to become more aligned to the needs of business and commerce. As a result, any new degrees validated in Wales were required to show how the programme designers had consulted with industry or the relevant training organisation.

However, returning to the theme of partnership between the HEI's and agencies, the Heads of programme didn't see the relationship as always being positive. In fact, all of them felt there had been deterioration in the partnership arrangements from the former DipSW days.

One Head said:

I certainly felt a very kind of weak partner in what was going on and I was involved in validating a number of other degrees across Wales. I was in the validation process of XXXXX and I was the External for XXXXXX and my sense was that we were really being driven; you know we were going to be made to come into line kind of thing.

Another Head expressed anger that they had almost been marginalised in the whole process:

Head: Why were we so weak in the face of that - did it catch us off our guard? And you know, it's all that kind of thing looking back now. Yeah it was, it was an interesting time and like I say, I mean if I could go back again I think I would be much more forceful.

JB: But then you would have risked not being validated.

Head: I know. They had it all their own way, you know, and I remember saying, "Just do what you're told." We've just got to do it otherwise we won't get it and we knew it meant mega bucks for the university.

This same Head went on to describe how their partners in their degree had assumed what the university staff regarded as excessive intrusion into the business of the university:

Head: In fact at one point, we even had our partners intervene in our recruitment of staff to the programme and I think that is overstepping the employer role. You know, passing comment on who should get the post.

JB: Wow, that's very interesting.

Head: Yes, and I really felt that, you know, they'd been given so much power now they could come to meetings and say "We want to be involved in the short listing." And, "Can you have this person rather than that person?" You know that sort of thing to the extent that they sent letters to our Vice Chancellor. They clearly felt they could interfere and, you know, that's not what we saw as employer-led. So I mean that's partly the local politics of the area as well but it all counts if you're looking in terms of what was happening across Wales.

Another Head summed it up as:

the employers had been completely empowered by the Care Council that they were in charge. 'Employer led' it says, not partnership!

Another Head identified an interesting issue in relation to the narrowness of the partnerships with local agencies:

....the way the Care Council guided the partnership with authorities and I made this big fuss about it as I didn't think it was useful to have a lock-in with the three authorities whereas in previous partnership arrangements we'd seen much more of a regional approach. I think you'll remember these conversations. So that students could benefit from lots of different types of placement opportunities, that we wouldn't want to be seen as a university serving a local patch. Of course, I didn't particularly win on that and my sense is that a) we have much more parochial delivery. Instead of the university being a spring board for opening up people's minds/education, experiences and so on. I think the way we designed the partnership and the way it locked us into the local area and the local workforce demands have produced a 'high school'. You know, an extension of the local high school so we were being encouraged to recruit from the local schools, put them through a very competence based programme and put them back into the local authority and the whole way the placement pattern works encourages that.... I thought that was one big step backwards.

6.3.5 Partnership between the HEI's and the Care Council for Wales

For the universities in Wales the relationship with the former CCETSW was generally a benign, one, as suggested earlier. Social Work Education Advisors were allocated a number of universities to work alongside and attended programme management meetings, offered advice and generally supported the regional consortiums. They carried out five yearly reviews of programmes and monitored each consortium through an annual report compiled by all of the consortium members. With the advent of the Care Council for Wales, the

Social Work Education Advisors became Workforce Development Advisors. The change in terminology was highlighted by one Head who said:

Head:- I think around that shift into being a Workforce Development Advisor from a Social Work Education Advisor which makes it sound like you're advising, you're working on behalf of the employer, about staffing the workforce and it is a very different role whereas with CCETSW it was about supporting the programmes.

JB- That's an interesting point about their change of title. Do you think that leads the universities to feel this is about employer's needs and not education?

Head:- Sure, and it relates back to what you said earlier about being involved in the development of the degree. My sense was that there were one or two people identified in the Cardiff area who were quite involved and beyond that I don't think people were - HEI people I mean. They'll even probably go back to their records and show that they had a number of meetings where people were invited and everything. I don't know how much effort they [CCfW] made to make that a fully inclusive, collaborate, deliberative kind of process.

I raised the issue of the relationship between the HEI's and the CCfW with all of the officials:

JB: Did you feel, for example, that the HEIs were sufficiently involved as partners with you? Did you feel that the consultation process was long enough and detailed enough? Would you revisit that now if you went back?

Official: At the time it seemed to go on for a long, long time so I don't think we would reflect that we rushed it too much. We set up structures for involvement and we weren't too exclusive about that, if people said they wanted to contribute then we were usually saying, "Yes great! Here's a group for you." We set up a structure of working groups which tried to have a mix. I think people we really failed to engage with were middle managers and senior managers inemployers.

Another official felt that they had worked with the 'wrong' people in the HEI's:

We had Higher Education Wales on that group so, you know, higher education was represented via a Vice Chancellor. Well, you know, that's ok, I think. And then we had the task groups and higher education was in most of the task groups and then we had the kind of all Wales meetings where higher education attended. Now I think what I would ask higher education is, 'were they represented at the right level?' Because I always feel that to some extent in some places higher education was represented by, if you like, team managers and it should have been represented by Directors and I think the thing that we struggled with was engaging people at the right level in the HEIs. And I think it took some time for the HEIs to realise as I said at the beginning, that 'No, we we're not driven by England, we didn't have to do what they did, that we were in control of this ourselves.' But I think once we got over that, I think people, you know, my experience, the way I experienced it was that there were difficult things which we were able to work through together and that generally there was a really high level of engagement from the HEIs. And you know quite a lot struggled with the model but support for the - if you like, "strategic vision" which was that we would together create a workforce fit for Wales.

And another concluded:

The HEIs were represented in the steering group and in the project groups so there was no systematic exclusion of HEIs so they were involved and were very vocal in their contributions, particularly in the steering group level, as were HEFCW actually. Whether we involved them enough in sharing with them strategically the vision and the expectations, I'm not so sure. Some of the difficulties at the point of approval, you know had we worked with them strategically earlier on we might have helped them to understand the vision and the model earlier really.

Certainly, none of the Heads I spoke with felt engaged with the process. Indeed, half said that they had to 'muscle in' to the various groups to get a voice. I discussed it with one

Head of programme:

JB: My feeling was that they [CCfW] didn't want dialogue. This is what we're going to do and this is how it's going to be and so on." So that was my perception but I wondered whether you'd, you know, whether you felt more involved than I did?

Head: No. I couldn't say that. I felt that it was very much; it was a WAG [Welsh Assembly Government] imperative, a driver which was happening in nursing, teaching and was happening in medicine and so on.

I raised these issues with one official. The response was telling:

JB: Some of the Heads of programme I've spoken to didn't feel that they were involved sufficiently, that their feeling was "This is what you're going to do so do it", rather than actually being engaged as equal partners.

Official: They're not equal partners though and that's the point really. This is about HEIs, in the same way as the learning strategy for Wales says that the colleges and the learning providers need to be responsive to the needs of the sector. This is the step change for social work training and for some educational institutions, that was an uncomfortable place to be and for some people they did not accept the rules of the regulator. At the end of the day, we're the regulator, we set the standards and we decide whether you meet those standards or not and that's the difference. And for some they didn't accept that.

Continuing that theme one Head said:

Yeah I think a big thing at the time was the heavy handedness of the Care Council that they were driving a very particular Government agenda for very particular reasons and in which the HEIs were going to be brought into line. "They'd had too much autonomy and it was all going to be different" and we better get used to it, that kind of thing.

Another who sat as the external on a validation panel said:

If you took a programme like XXXXX that had been long established, my sense was of outrage. You know, absolute outrage. "We're being treated like this when we're such a long established programme" Yeah, there was that feeling about.

I asked another experienced head of a programme to talk about working with the CCfW through the validation and approval process. Their response mirrored that of all of the heads I spoke with;

JB: How did you find the experience then? Tell me about the validation and the accreditation and the approval process.

Head: From what I understand from colleagues in England the Care Council here seemed to be much more prescriptive with the rules and requirements so they have gone down a different route in a sense of actually making it, in a sense they have a more managerial approach to the way in which they regulate. That wouldn't be what my understanding of what the function of the Care Council should be. What they always said is, "We want the sector to decide" And I always said, I've got no problem with that, I'm quite happy for the sector to decide but the sector is not an homogenous group of people so they need somebody to bring them together and facilitate that process – like you lot! [laughs] No, the experience I've had of the Care Council attempting to do that has been appalling really.

Another Head said:

I'm not sure I want to have my comments recorded or made public really but actually I thought CCfW handled it pretty badly. We'd prepared on their advice the validation papers for the university, we had a validation meeting. The CCfW came along and started a public grilling, "You haven't done 'this', you haven't done 'that', you haven't done 'the other'" and we'd had discussions with you about this.....it soured my view of the CCfW. They did themselves no favours.

Another Head said:

My underlying issue would be neither the Care Council nor SSIW [Social Services Inspectorate for Wales] promoted the collaborative approach so whilst at the same time as spouting they want an all Wales unified approach to qualifying and post qualifying delivery; they haven't actually created an environment that enables us to do that. If anything they've created lots of obstacles to inhibit that.

This last comment is especially pertinent as it introduces a theme that generated a lot of feeling amongst the Heads of programmes. The theme that competitiveness between the HEI's was subtly created where there had been none before. The Officials stressed on many occasions how their driving ambition was to create an all Wales, harmonised system based on workforce needs although the reality appears rather different. As one Head said:

If you didn't dot the 'i' and cross the 't' you weren't going to get the degree and we were walking a very fine line with them right through that process to get it and my view - and I communicated it to the staff team - was 'we'll just do as we're told on this one' and that's how we ended up. And you know, even the way they changed the relationship between us, our programmes in the North, they very cleverly hived us off into our areas and made sure that there was, almost a competition between us – horrible.

JB: That's interesting. Did you get the sense that we were almost set against each other to some extent?

Head:- Exactly. Well when we started this, you know, all of the old partners but really the partners in the west denied access to you so the whole thing about supporting your development in terms of Welsh language and so on was buggered up completely. And equally, we were denied access to more varied kinds of placements in the statutory setting down in Wrexham. And yeah I think that was by, kind of by design. I remember saying to XXXXXX [names an Official] "Look I'm not, I just think you're forcing us." I think I used the word 'forcing' to which, you know, the Care Council hated it.... "You're forcing us into a very parochial set of circumstances and I think as a region we can meet the same objectives" He wasn't happy! [laughs]

Another head from a different part of Wales put it as follows:

I think the CCfW hadn't actually made up its mind whether they wanted collaboration or competition. You know that somehow all HEIs competed against each other so there's a lot of encouragement of new HEIs to get involved in delivering the programme and, hopefully this isn't traceable..... but there are, I think it's probably fairly apparent, there was no kind of - in the validation process they were validating programmes for numbers without looking at the bigger picture. Which to me seems absolutely pointless having set numbers in there. If you don't think they're viable numbers why on earth are you validating these new programmes where there weren't any before? And the employers would say, "We presume that the Care Council is looking after that." And the Care Council would say, "Well that's the employer's responsibility." If they signed a partnership agreement then that is down to them to provide placements.

This last point is an interesting one. One of the acknowledged drivers for developing the degree in Wales was its embeddedness within a workforce planning model and yet the CCfW approved an additional three new programmes in university colleges who had no experience of delivering social work. As the head above suggested it seems odd that no one in Wales was viewing this increase in numbers within a broader strategic framework.

Another Head said:

You can't respond to a changing environment if you're so rule-bound in terms of being prescribed and if people are competing against each other, the willingness to function collaboratively when you're being set up to compete with each other for employer partners and for practice learning opportunities. Personally I don't think that's good for the sector and I don't think it promotes a healthy learning culture really.

Another dialogue reveals a sense of frustration with the process:

JB: I'm interested in your comment about the competitiveness between the HEIs because we worked with Bangor for donkeys' years with the DipSW partnership and I got a sense that 'you're in competition here; you've got to convince us that you're any good.'

Head: Exactly. If it had been about quality I'd have been far more comfortable with that. I'm quite happy to compete with other programmes on the basis of quality. What you're competing for is how well you can crawl to the local authority and who you know. And this is such a small geographical area to have the number of programmes that we've got running, makes absolutely no sense whatsoever and if I felt that, originally I looked at it optimistically in terms of, 'well maybe it will give them more diversity in the range of flexibility in types of modes of programmes or, because we're all working from the same curriculum so you can't be hugely different in terms of what you're delivering' but I think the newer programmes are trying to present themselves as something different and new because it's new. But also because they've got such small cohorts I'm not convinced that that's necessarily - if it was about having easier local access we could have done that through a partnership approach and we could have gone much more heavily down the collaborative route which would have been my preferred option. And in a sense we would have had the most to lose by doing that but that's still the option that we were kind of pushing for and wanted.

My own personal feeling is that the competition thing was driven by XXXXX [names an official] on behalf of WAG, that they really wanted a competition, because that was going to – not drive down cost because we're all going to charge the same thing, but it would be more about meeting the needs of employers and if the practice learning is in the hands of the employers as well then they have the control.

Another Head who is geographically close to the new providers provides an interesting insight into the realities of the new competitiveness;

Whilst some of us worked hard to establish a collaborative model in the region that kept all the programmes viable that doesn't seem to have been enough for the two new providers (and XX [names a provider]) who while in formal meetings agreed with allocation then outside of regional agreements made other 'deals' that have undermined the delicate balance of the eco system.

I asked the official who was named earlier whether they had created a market where one had not previously existed. This was refuted although they did suggest that having too many programmes and too many graduates was no bad thing. The Official argued that having a 'market' has encouraged developments in the field:

You know we're talking to some authorities who are telling us that they've got too many people coming back off the degree now for the number of vacancies they've got which is good news, you know, they're not fazed by that, they're saying, "We'll just create some new posts"! And you know 6 years ago people couldn't get social workers for neither love nor money and they know that those people will stay. You know because whether they stay in 'x'

authority or they move to 'y' but they'll stay in Wales won't they generally? No, I think the more the merrier. Students will be able to pick and choose where to go and agencies can too.

Another Official argued a similar point:

You know you get a lot of different messages at different levels in organisations. You know you can get a very senior level which is saying we need more people coming into the workforce and wouldn't it be great if there was hot competition for social work jobs so that you advertised and you got 6 newly qualified people who are all trying to get there and sort of you might get one person applying and perhaps you don't think they're right for the job and you can't appoint. But that would mean a bit of over supply which you do get in other professions, they do the training, get the qualification but whether they get a job in the profession or not, you know they're trained. You sort of assume there's another filtering process at that point where it's the really excellent people who will have either done very well on their training or are prepared to put in that extra bit of commitment who are going to get the jobs.

The previous dialogues have highlighted the changed nature of partnerships within Wales apparently driven by the Care Council which has become a far more managerialist organisation which both the Officials and Heads acknowledged in their various ways. Clarke (2004) calls it the 'universalisation of management' which he suggests involves very hands on management as if it might be a panacea for all of the perceived ills of the public sector. This is a point made earlier in this dissertation regarding how public services have sought to promote identification with the organisation (CCfW) rather than the profession.

Clarke (ibid) sees it as forcing a:

shift from what were occupational/professional identities to ones that are organisation-centred. The organisation – the Trust, the school, the department – seeks to become the point of identification, loyalty and commitment, with externally orientated provision being treated as suspect and as a 'special interest' that distracts from the 'organisation as common purpose (p.121).

6.3.6 The changed focus of practice learning

Perhaps one of the most significant changes heralded by the new degree in Wales was the new arrangements for practice learning. Under the former qualification, practice learning was in the hands of the HEI's in the sense that they assumed responsibility for finding

placements with consortium partners. For example, in North Wales the consortium of NEWI, Bangor and all of the statutory authorities worked together in identifying practice learning opportunities and divided them between the two HEI's. The degree however introduced a new model which gave the entire responsibility to the statutory agencies who had to declare themselves 'partners' with essentially, their local university college. All of the funding for practice learning was then directed to the local authorities who had the responsibility to 'host' a named student who would then remain their responsibility for the entire period of the degree. As has already emerged in this discussion, the rationale behind this was workforce planning. In other words, if partner agencies predicted that they only needed x number of social workers over the next five years then the university would have to reduce its intake. Also, if the local authorities feel that they can not manage to allocate the number of students being recruited the universities are obliged to reduce their numbers accordingly. This has already happened in my former institution as the agency partners were simply unable to locate sufficient numbers of practice learning opportunities.

Perhaps more crucially, however, is the nature of how students were to be taught and assessed on practice. Previously, each student had a named practice teacher whose role was to teach practice and offer a final assessment as to a student's suitability to pass. This returns the discussion to the issue of competence based practice and assessment. The new degree presents competencies in the guise of revealing the elements of good practice but which operate through inclusion of the desired (the measurable, e.g. social work *delivery*) and exclusion of the undesired (the invisible, e.g. the *knowledge* of structural inequality), Such seemingly simplified language perhaps creates a sort of certainty for the person doing the assessment by giving an illusion of control and predictability.

With the advent of the new degree the role of practice teacher was re-defined and articulated in *Ensuring Consistency* (2002) as a 'practice assessor' with a brief to assess the student's practice usually through an evidential portfolio and observed practice. Nowhere in *Ensuring Consistency* is the term 'practice teaching' mentioned and initially it was clear that agencies had not appreciated this change in language. Although the new degree talks of encouraging students to reflect, as pointed out in Chapter 4 the prescription of the curriculum allows little opportunity for that to happen although students are asked to complete several reflective commentaries within their practice portfolios but without the benefit of a practice teacher to guide them through what is a complex and demanding task.

The rationale for this change was explained by one Official:

There's quite a lot of debate around who should assess students and we differ from England there again because on balance, the view in Wales was that we are going to try and clearly define that the only people that can make that assessment, but the only people that can make it will be qualified social workers themselves who have an assessors award or are working towards that. It gave us that bit of space in a way to look at it and say this is what we want and then to make some differences.

Another said:

I think it's a truly vocational degree and therefore the centrality of employers is critical for that. Employers helping HEIs to define what modern standards needed to be, what was critical, you know, and then enabling people to put their academic learning into practice and then to be able to assess them in doing that.

The changed format of local authorities assuming responsibility for practice learning was welcomed, in principle, by some of the Heads of programmes. One comment was typical:

On a more positive view of this, it's also about giving ownership to employers so that they drove the process more, had much more responsibility for placements, that actually they took some responsibility for staff development.

However, there were serious concerns about both the nature of practice learning partnerships and the way practice is now assessed. On the nature of the changed form of practice teaching one Head's view was fairly representative:

I remember doing a presentation at one of the Care Council workshops and saying the model of practice learning that seems to be evolving is we're increasingly having more and more off site supervisors and that the off site is the assessor and the on site person supervises what we've been teaching and that fragmentation of roles reflects the fragmentation in the guidance in *Ensuring Consistency to Practice*. They should have seen it coming.

One Head pointed out that although CCfW had given local authorities significant investment towards the development of new placements there was little evidence this had resulted in any major benefits:

The PLO [practice learning opportunity] funding doesn't come through the course, mileage doesn't come through the course, we manage none of the resourcing, that all goes through the local authorities and there's been some reasonably significant amounts of pump priming given to local authorities and it just feels like a lot of that has even been sidelined into something else. It hasn't come back into the programme in terms of how the partnership can reuse this money to develop more practice learning opportunities or whatever.

Another conversation reveals the tensions over the changing nature of practice learning:

JB: The fact that they've changed the title from practice teacher to practice assessor I think is also quite significant. Who's doing the practice teaching now?

Head: One of the key things is that experience in and of itself is not learning. Unless you reflect on it –

JB: I agree but you need a good guide to do that. The idea that you just sit there and it'll happen isn't the case in my experience. I mean you do need a good guide to say, "Well what informed that decision? Would you do the same thing again next time? And what knowledge base did you draw on?" etc. That doesn't happen by chance and as you're doing it pretty early on in the programme, you need a mentor or a guide to take you through that and what worries me is who's doing it with our students?

Head: Its worrying, isn't it? To actually only have one direct observation as evidence to go by and their day to day working practice to go by is not enough. I think you're absolutely right; it's almost like a reflection of the performance indicators mind set. What you look at is outcome based, outcome focused and not process or learning or development or seeing this as a continuum, it's seen as a snapshot and then you want a specific outcome at the end of it. And actually your idea about whether the practice environment is mirrored in the education context, I think probably has a lot of validity.

The final sentence in the above dialogue refers to an earlier part of the interview when I suggested that what we were doing in the universities was perhaps in itself mirroring practice in the sense that we were encouraging a box ticking mentality. This is a point highlighted in Chapter 4 and raises a fundamental dilemma for the academic community

which is, to what extent it can deliver a challenging curriculum within the confines of a rigid programme determined by National Occupational Standards and an outcome driven assessment. This challenge is explored in the next section.

6.3.7 The curriculum model integrating the National Occupational Standards linked to assessable competencies

In Chapter 4 there was a lengthy discussion on the development of competencies in social work education and the introduction of National Occupational Standards. I was interested to find out whether or not Wales was obliged to follow what were, in effect, Department of Health driven developments or whether or not other curriculum models had been considered. I was also interested to know people's views relating to the requirements to embed them across the three years of the degree and link them to prescribed outcomes in the form of competencies.

The Officials were divided on whether or not Wales could have gone down a route of their choosing. Two said yes whilst the other argued that they had no choice but to follow the directive from Westminster and, at the same time, offered an unusually personal critique of the developments.

JB: I wondered whether you'd had the opportunity to say, 'well we don't want to go down that route we want another model of learning, another approach to the way we teach our future social workers'?

Official: No I don't think so. And one of the responsibilities of the newly set up NTOs was to develop NOS across all parts of the workforce; they'd already been developed in social care. It would have been quite sort of difficult for the NTO to sort of turn around and say, "well we think social work is different or it's above NOS, we want to approach it in a different way" and I suppose there were the core competencies on the old DipSW and people were working to those so it was a sort of building on that model.

JB: It was an historical thing in a sense wasn't it? We've come down that competency route, and it just sort of happened and rolled on, snowballed down a hill in a sense and I wonder if-

Official: I think it's generally part of a sort of move for everything to be, you know, the attempt to define everything in measurable terms and disaggregate the whole into bits and pieces.

JB: It's a very behaviourist assumption that that's how we learn.

Official: Yes and I think employers seem to savour it to some extent although they wouldn't necessarily say that other than by implementing it they get what they want.

JB: Isn't there a risk of just producing technicians?

Official: I think it probably is for the less able students. I think it probably makes it harder for them to see the holistic aspect of the job and they disaggregate everything into small compartments and focusing on aspects of it in isolation and they never, maybe, even to the end put it altogether in a way that makes sense and it does produce then.... in local authorities quite a lot of the work is bureaucratic, functionary anyway. And they haven't been, they haven't seemed to be looking for people who are creative, problem solvers. But I think for the more able students they're able to see beyond all that and make the link and having disaggregated put it together again. And I think that's maybe quite helpful for them if they can then put it to one side but not find their practice sort of inhibited by it.

This last exchange was particularly poignant. No other official throughout the interviews proffered a moment's doubt as to whether or not the model chosen was anything other than 'fit for purpose'. The suggestion by the official that social work agencies are not averse to having workers taught in a rather functionalist way was echoed by two other Officials:

We believed that having a common set of competencies; if you see them as the closest you'll get to practice outcomes, competencies in practice that we would want to see in evidence. That was the closest model that we could think of that we would want to apply. And also they were developed across the four countries and that seemed really important.

And another:

Well you need a balance don't you? Because you do need people who are also technicians. People who understand because, you know, I think, what does all this mean in terms of personalised care and that sort of thing? What kind of social workers will we need to work in those environments? Well, actually understanding, being a bit of a technician, understanding how something works is going to be really important as well as being able to create isn't it? So I think, I know, I hear what you say and I think of course there's a danger in that. There can be a danger but it's about getting a balance right.

This official added later:

...well the two principles that came out of the consultation and which was then embedded were qualifications in the social care sector needed to be based on NOS, therefore competency driven and that they needed to be assessed in practice. So there was already that set of principles in place. So you know if there was a way of making the degree fit that and

there being a way of describing what social workers do rather than what social workers know, I think we were content to follow that model.

This final point is an interesting one and seems to neatly encapsulate the discourse of an outcome driven education process. One key problem here is an assumption that social workers all 'do' the same thing (and can 'do' without 'knowing') and that the complex business of practice can be somehow disaggregated into neat compartments. As Barnett (1994) says:

What counts as good practice in social work, the law, medicine and so on are contested goods....the identification of the occupational standards is not something that can be settled, and competencies read off in any absolute fashion (p.73).

The Official's comment also illustrates a risk that social workers do not need to know the causes of behaviours and situations, only the demand that they are described, identified and classified. It almost suggests that a social worker need not have independent thoughts but is only required to act competently. For the Heads of programme this theme provided some of the most thoughtful and interesting dialogues:

JB: I was asking about the Occupational Standards and whether you felt in a sense they restricted your creativity in terms of curriculum design.

Head: Yeah I think we felt that. When we sat down to put together the modules, to build the degree, we were very driven by ticking the box, in terms of 'this is the prescription.' It's a very prescribed curriculum and I certainly remember when I was going round as External. I think this is when I got more of the view than when I was looking at my own, that there were specialisms in areas, you know, that they wanted to bring into the curriculum, I remember in XXXXX they had quite, you know quite a lot of expertise on youth work and you might go to XXXXX and there were people with specialisms, that were completely disregarded. You couldn't - the way the curriculum was designed was very much about focusing on the prescribed components and somehow there wasn't room or scope for people to bring to bear some kind of flavour. It was a bit like this so basically everybody, every HEI looks much, much the same.

Another Head was quite pragmatic about the process:

I'm afraid I just said, "Look here's the NOS, here's what the CCfW wants, I'll write it, I'll take it through the university and you can send your students here."

The conversation with the next Head revealed tensions over designing the curriculum:

You couldn't put forward a module that might say something like the 'critical traditions in social work' because there weren't Occupational Standards which we would be tying it to so, yeah, in a way we ended up in a way with something, in my opinion, we ended up with something quite bland and something that meant that students wouldn't necessarily- and it was a real conflict for us in XXXXX because we like to think we attract students because of our expertise in Anti-Discriminatory practice.

Another Head concurred:

That's my feeling. In fact until you said that I never questioned it [laughs] - I must have really bought in! No my understanding was that it was non negotiable, it was the NOS that were at the core and obviously the Code of Practice. And they're so expansive compared to the DipSW competencies that they're going to dominate just by their sheer weight I think.

Another Head whose previous programme had offered highly specialist pathways said:

We were a programme that had choice and where people elected to go a certain pathway and we couldn't see any way of creating pathways on the new programme. Again, we thought, 'there must be some room for pathways here' but actually when you transmitted all the learning outcomes and all the rest of it, we could see that there was no way we could actually get any. That had implications for staffing because we had staff who taught certain programmes and certain pathways that weren't going to be replicated in the new programme so that was another issue we had to deal with. Basically we had XXXXX [names well known social work academic] here, and XXXXX plus on the probation side we had XXXXX. We had a strong set of people which fitted in with the post graduate and not with the undergraduate teaching. Some people left.

The suggestion that the introduction of the degree had produced a series of bland

programmes in which the expertise of the various universities had, in effect, been diluted or

even lost completely was one I posed to the Officials. One responded:

We were very concerned to be able to develop the academic capacity of the HEIs in relation to social work because actually yes, there is a lot of excellent research; but how relevant it's been to improve practice in Wales or to improving outcomes because this is all about the people who use services, it's not about how creative the academics want to be is it? It's about, 'well what does this mean to someone on the Child Protection register or whatever?

This was a very disarming comment and I remember at the time being quite perplexed.

There are several institutions within the University of Wales who have excellent research records which are predominantly practitioner based. In my own former institution we had received extensive funding from HEFCW to establish a Social Inclusion Research Unit that did some quite creative research on, for example, Family Group Conferencing in North

Wales. Perhaps there is a link here to a previous discussion in Chapter 4 on evidence based practice which figures highly on the Department of Health's commitment to social work research having to be linked to 'what works'. The above Official's reference to the child protection register is also interesting. The reduction of risk to children is, of course, a goal which all would support. However, as many commentators have noted (Parton, 1996; Watson and West, 2006; Webb, 2006) while an emphasis on evidenced based research might provide an illusion of being 'objective' and 'scientific' in reality the capacity to predict risk is limited because assessing the risk to a child, for example, is extraordinarily complex. The comments from the Official above also reflect how the centrality of the service user is expressed as a rationale for institutional and cultural change (Clarke et al, 2007). Social work has always been focussed on the individual client from its very early days but the new discourse of consumerism presents it as if it is a new theme. A dialogue with a head of a programme illustrates how they felt that the NOS were part of a process to manage and control what social workers do:

I also think they wanted greater surveillance and supervision of what social workers actually do, the backlash of the nineties has meant, "Look, we've let them do what they like and they've tried to change, you know, British race relations on their own." That kind of thing, you know, so I think there was a kind of coming closer, looking more closely at what we did and why we did it.

I was interested to find out how Heads had developed their programmes within the confines of the National Occupational Standards. This response was typical but also highlighted a recurring theme which centred on a tension between the maintenance of social work values and social work practice:

JB: How did you put the degree together given the centrality of the NOS??

Head: Building blocks [laughs]. So you're trying to bring all of that together more but it does feel like we have to work quite hard to keep values as central as they were in the DipSW because there are so many other things pressing on top of you in the degree and they've wrongly become a bit more marginalised.

Another Head developed the point further:

Head: I think a lot about competencies is a values issue. If you go in as a worker with a prescribed outcome, where does the empowering or informed decision making come in? - or in other words, you're saying, "Regardless of what the service user does, this is where we're going to get to." So then it becomes an issue of power and control rather than empowerment and enabling. It takes you down a different track and that for me I find a bit... which is again, going back to the direct observation model, the model is the same one we've always used implicitly which is that; you have a pre stage, you have the observation and you have a debrief but we didn't meticulously record all that because it's not things that would generate evidence but it's part of the learning process that you want,. But scribing it all, automatically ties you into, "Well, before I went in I said I was going to achieve 'this' and I was going to evidence 'these' competencies so that's what I've got to do." And that then is the culture we're transmitting to the students rather than saying, "Well of course you should plan and prepare but you should prepare for the unexpected not just the, this is what I want to get out of it." You can't be responsive in that situation if you go in with that kind of mentality.

There are two crucial points being made here. One is in relation to students becoming more instrumental in their practice in order to complete portfolios of evidence and links back to the Schonian idea of professionals being able to work things out on the ground which is more art than science. The second point being made refers to the centrality of values in practice – an issue I developed earlier. The matter of values was one raised in Chapter 4 in which it was suggested that there is a deal of evidence as to how social work values, based as they originally were around an understanding of structural inequality, have become far more individualised with the new degree.

It is interesting to see how the discourse of outcome driven practice seems to have permeated the whole culture of social work.

Head:about half of the [training] room were service users and carers and half were employers, practice teachers and training officers (mostly practitioners). And what a lot of them were saying; it's got to be outcome focused so that – actually some of the service user reps were actually saying it's got to be outcome focused rather than what it achieves for a service user! Christ, they've bought into the bloody language as well. Is this what social work is about? And even the social work practice, I mean what I tend to say to a student is, "The main outcome of the paper product is your evidence but the process of getting you there is much more important because it won't get you to that paper product unless you put the emphasis on that." And that is what my problem is with that model of direct observation which seems to be entirely focused on the scribing thing again. As long as I describe

everything I do in minutiae, I must cover the competencies. I would rather they had less of it described but it was more focused and they could then pick on an aspect to drill down in greater depth in their reflective analysis. But it feels like we're losing.

The phrase 'losing' in the last sentence of that Head's comments is an interesting one and points to the debate highlighted in Chapter 4 as to how best to understand and conceptualise the nature of day to day practice in terms of whether or not it is primarily a technical-rational activity or a practical-moral one? The comments in the above section would suggest that with the growth of managerialism, systems of audit, procedures, legalism and an emphasis on outcomes, it is the former, although this may be an inadequate explanation. As Parton (1998) suggests:

while the proliferation of procedures and so on aims to make practice more accountable and transparent, they render the social work process and the tacit assumptions upon which 'thinking as usual' takes place in practice immune from analysis (p.3).

As argued in Chapter 4, for social workers real-world problems do not come in a neat package that makes a technical-rational approach especially helpful. But perhaps the key issue is the fact that with a loss of faith in a welfare orientated practice there is now less interest in developing knowledge and skills designed to diagnose problems, carry out intervention plans, support people and change social systems. In the final section these issues are explored further

6.3.8 What kind of workforce is the degree aiming to produce – is it fit for purpose?

This part of the interviews generated the most thoughtful and challenging discussions amongst all of the respondents. All of the Heads had their concerns which were articulated in a variety of ways. For example:

JB: Are we going to be turning out a different sort of 'animal' than we used to turn out or will they still be the committed social workers that we've always tried to turn out or are they going to be something different now?

Head: I want to say something on this. The emphasis that came out of the new degree was ‘you learn how to do it, we do it like this, you do it and then we pick and say you can do it...’ The competency approach and of course the practice teachers were being supported to do just that, you know, talk about being ‘fit for purpose’. And we had, you know, interesting conversations at the time with the practice partners and they were saying, some of them were saying “Well we don’t want students who’ll come in and be critical of the bureaucratic set up, we don’t want critical thinkers, we don’t want radical social work students, we want student who can be....

JB: Technicians?

Head: Exactly. Do the job. And their definition of doing the job was the whole kind of prescribed managerial performance. I don’t know what you might call it; it’s basically like factory work in a way isn’t it? So there was that. Now a lot then depended on us, a lot more depended on us then to bring some ‘style’ to what we did and much more emphasis on “You don’t just have to read this book in order to know how to do it but you are, you know we are trying to engage with you as critical thinkers. We’re trying to engage with you as questioning people, we’re trying to encourage you to, you know, understand your role in terms of the role of the service user.” And you know, all of that was going on at the same time but that wasn’t written in, that was left to us to do kind of thing. I don’t know if you felt that at on your programme.

On the subject of producing practitioners that are fit to enter the workforce another discussion revealed subtle tensions:

JB: Is that the jobs of the universities though do you think?

Head: To create a workforce that does what the employers want? That’s a really interesting question! I think there’s some value and merit in saying that qualified social workers have to be fit for purpose but I think the discussion is around what is fit for purpose?

JB: Or whose purpose?

Head: Yes, and again it reflects the education versus training kind of, ‘we are not equipping people to understand agency policies and procedures for any specific authority.’ There’s a real tension there. What we’re equipping people with are transferable, lifelong learning skills that hopefully will ensure that they can keep developing their practice and work in a variety of settings in a variety of client groups but with the solid core skills and knowledge. And if you whittle that away too much by doing lots of specific training activities rather than education activities that might please your nearest and dearest in terms of your partner network in the short term but in the longer term you’re probably doing a disservice both to the service users/ carers/ students who are exiting from the programme.

When I asked the Officials whether they felt the new degree was fit for purpose two were cautious preferring to wait for an evaluation research project that had recently been launched;

Official: Well we don't know that yet do we? It's too soon to say whether we should have done it differently because we'll only know whether we should have done it differently when we know what the kind of results are if you like.

And another Official suggested:

We'll see won't we? It's too early to tell, I think. We've agreed to put a longitudinal study in place starting probably this year to follow through our cohort in Wales to see what happens to them over the next three years.

A third Official was less confident because of the complexity of additional variables like the nature of modern practice:

JB: The last question is, are you confident with this new degree structure, with the way it's been introduced in Wales? Will it make a difference to this next generation of social workers? Do you think it will produce the social workers that you want? Is it fit for purpose?

Official: [very long pause] – I don't feel confident in that, but I don't feel confident because I feel there are so many other variables which are brought to bear in saying how well somebody is functioning at that time. I think it's tricky. Part of our review process is to meet with students some time after they've finished training and one of the things we're testing with them at that point is, 'How effective was the training in preparing you for the workplace?' And very often students aren't slagging off their training at that point, they're saying, "I've just felt so unsupported since I got into this job, as soon as I arrived I was given 'x', the expectations were 'y', I had felt at the end of my practice that I was quite confident, now I've lost the skills really.

Another significant tension was discussed with one Head regarding whether or not the universities were actually doing a disservice to young social workers by preparing them for a world of social work that was disappearing. This response was echoed by a number of the Heads.

JB: And I just wonder, do you actually think that what we do in the university is contributing to social work in the sense that young social workers leave after we've established the intellectual base and done the hopefully more creative elements of social work, and they go out there and find it ain't like that. And I just wonder if the universities are adding to the problem rather than solving it?

Head: At times you kind of feel like you're a bastion trying to preserve, I mean not preserve in the sense of 'in aspic' or a museum piece but in the sense that you're trying to preserve the integrity of what the social work process is about and what its role and purpose is about when there are so many pressures on it. So I guess that's about the professional identity issue and I certainly see that as one of the thematic cores. I think if you can articulate your knowledge base, if you like, articulate your decision making process, you as a practitioner gain the confidence but other people gain the confidence in you because you've more autonomy which is a prerequisite to being professional. And at the moment it feels like, again from colleagues etc that people don't feel that they have very much autonomy, that what

we're doing is scribing every single thing they do and actually scribing it takes longer than doing it which is why the balance is shifting. And, as you say, a lot of the kind of therapeutic intervention kind of thing that a lot of people went into social work to do has gone. In a sense I'd be really reluctant to give up this idea that we shouldn't continue to fight for intellectual rigour. You have to get in there somewhere to break that cycle. I'd probably feel less motivated to do what I'm doing if it was just about trying to train people to be good bureaucrats and administrators. I suppose it's quite pervasive in seminars and discussions about that tension. As I said we've got a Working in Organisations module at each level which is a really good module for unpicking some of that and saying "to what extent do you feel part of your role as a professional is to challenge systems rather than passively adhere to them?". And actually if you look at the NOS, there are competencies there about the way ... of ticking the right boxes at the right time. So it feels like at times we're the conduits to support that activity.

One of the officials also discussed the changing nature of social work and the possible tension created by university education:

Official: I think having a degree is what we should have done a time ago. Inevitably we're at an early stage in developing that now but we had to have that level of status at least. I know that in itself didn't get us anywhere and doesn't get good services for service users but it's all part of the same picture. Is it a valued job? What sort of people would it attract in? I don't think it seems to be attracting the same kind of people. You're asking some very complex questions here about where society is at this point.

JB: And the nature of social work itself?

Official: Exactly. I was attracted into something very much around the one-to-one, the family worker, doing the therapeutic part of that work. You couldn't even sell the job to people on that basis now because their employer wouldn't want them to, expect them to do it.

Harris (2003) supports the last point.

The direction in which managerialism took social work after the establishment of the social work business was away from approaches that were therapeutic or which stressed the importance of casework, let alone anything more radical or progressive. Turning professionals into managers involved making them responsible for running the business. (p.66)

This discussion also resonates with Jones's (2002) research. He interviewed one social worker who said;

Social work is more and more about numbers, with managers wanting to hit so many targets which involves turning cases over quickly. They want a case in, sorted and pushed out. We have many unallocated cases so there is great pressure on everyone to take the maximum number of cases, to make it seem we are giving a service to the public. But we don't give anything. We have nothing to give (p.100).

Continuing that theme, another Head reported an interesting meeting with their university partners:

JB: Do you think there's a bit of tension maybe between the employer's imperative and their concerns and the luxury of being educators in terms of being able to have a vision and, I don't know to what extent as educators we have a shared vision of how we see social work practice, but....

Head: Its been good having the two of us just talking about this. You're making me think about this which is good. We had an away day with our programme partners and I wanted to take us back to basics and say, "Well what have we achieved here?" And, "What do we want to improve?" And I really did start back at basics and said, "What's the sort of social worker that we're trying to develop?" So I know the Care Council have done their thing but I wanted to know what we as a partnership, did we have a shared view of who this person was? And actually most of our debate was around the managerialist issue. To what extent are we tied by the managerialist agenda? And to what extent can we actually counter that? And actually exactly what you said some of the partners were saying - are we setting people up to fail because the reality in practice is that you don't have those opportunities to do those things but then if we buy into that- well my argument was, if we buy into that it's like 'tough shit' isn't it? We might as well give up. People will never challenge it so it will remain like that and we'll go down into that negative spiral. We mustn't allow that to happen must we?

6.4 Summary

This chapter has attempted to represent, with integrity, the accounts of the respondents and offer a commentary where it was felt appropriate. By using a thematic analysis the attempt was to present the results of a series of interviews in an accessible and honest way. Further, this chapter has tried to offer the dialogue within a theoretical framework examined in the previous chapters which has included an account of how the political outlook on welfare collectivism has not only directly affected social workers but also how they are taught. Those changes have impacted on individual practitioners, social work agencies, the regulatory bodies as well as the academic staff who teach the student social workers of tomorrow. The final chapter offers a more detailed discussion of the findings and attempts to contextualise them within a changing political landscape.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusions

To the extent that strategies don't work as intended and people fail to come when they're called, domination is always fragile, always needs to be reproduced, always needs to search for better, more efficient and effective ways of securing its rule (Clarke, 2004 p159).

7.1 Introduction

This study has tried to map a journey through a complex web of changes that has affected welfare provision, the changing nature of social work delivery and the corresponding impact on how social workers are educated and trained. The journey, however, has not been a linear one in the sense that it has been a straightforward account of history but more of an attempt to understand the present by examining multiple explanations of how we have arrived at this juncture. The introduction began by raising the spectre of whether it might still be possible to retain a critical form of teaching and learning that maintained, at its core, the fundamental values of social work summed up as a commitment to social justice. The background to the account and the empirical study conducted within the Welsh context has presented a brief glimpse into the issues. This final chapter will attempt to develop and summarise some of the key issues of this research project drawing on the previous literature review and the empirical study.

7.2 The changing nature of state provision

Over the past thirty years state social work has undergone a series of radical changes including the establishment of a number of quasi-markets, a system of social work based around care and case management and an audit culture of both the organisations and the

delivery of services (Lymbery, 2003). These changes appear to be driven by forces stemming from the global economy that require high rates of economic growth and low social costs and have impacted on British society at every level but probably had the most devastating effect on the poor and marginalised (Dominelli, 2002.) Social work is not unique, of course, and other sectors of the welfare state like health and education have been affected. Central to that is how public sector workers have had their autonomy reduced as professional identities have been eroded or as Clarke et al (2007) characterise it;

The struggle to corporatize occupational cultures: making them part of the organisation, rather than tied to external orientations (p.52).

As was discussed in Chapter 4, the universities have not been immune from these developments which have affected the very nature of higher education itself including the way students are taught. Lodziak and Tatman (1997) in their introduction argue powerfully how students' time to reflect and study has been eroded by the increasing costs of higher education which has forced so many students into part time work giving less time to study and think. They go on to argue that universities have re-packaged themselves to appear more 'attractive' to 'consumers' partly by fragmenting courses which has had the effect of doubling students work load. But their most interesting claim is how:

....the university context of today is increasingly unfriendly to the suggestion that students should engage directly with the writings of important theorists.... The commodification of higher education which threatens to obliterate thinking has its complement in publishing (p.4)

They go on to argue how publishers have introduced increasing numbers of texts which paraphrase the ideas of original thinkers and offer a time saving substitute for the real thing. In social work the series produced by *Learning Matters* have done exactly that. They have produced texts tailored to the BA Social Work which links the National Occupational

Standards at the beginning of each chapter and offers, for example, simplified versions of essential social work thinkers and theories. The authors are, of course, established social work academics who, according to Lodziak and Tatman (1997), are working in environments where the pressure to publish has grown beyond all recognition. As they conclude;

....on the one hand, changes in higher education have generated the need among students for introductory texts, and texts that might serve as a time saving substitute for the real thing, and, on the other hand, these changes have created insecure academics who are prepared to supply this need (p.5)

For the Care Council for Wales's staff and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales they too have been subjected to major changes including that of role and function accompanied by external audit, performance targets and closer government scrutiny. Charged with implementing the new degree they also had to behave in ways some were not comfortable with. Their changed role as regulator and purveyor of knowledge put a strain on the working relationships that had been established over more than twenty five years.

However, social work services have been disproportionately affected and have endured changes that have appeared, at times, almost revolutionary (Davies and Leonard, 2004; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2004; Bochel et al., 2005). It was pointed out in Chapter 3 that many of the changes impacting on state social work have occurred as a result of the role played by the marketisation of the organisation and delivery of social services. It is important to note, however, that the steady privatisation of social work is not just a matter of new privatised companies managing former state assets for there has also been a cultural revolution in which new ideas and practices have been colonised by the hearts and minds of social workers. Carey (2008) argues that the development of this market hegemony has

succeeded in establishing an acceptance of resource and contract led practices along with the application of scientific laws and technologies to standardise and regulate practices – a theme that a number of Heads raised as an important issue in the empirical study. For social workers this has led to a growth in administrative duties, the rationalisation of practice which Dominelli (2002) argues has led to a major deskilling including, and, perhaps for many of the respondents in the study the most demoralising, the virtual removal of therapeutic interventions as part of everyday service provision.

In Chapter 3 it was argued that, for nearly thirty years following the Second World War, the assumption was prevalent that the state was the only arena in which welfare could be delivered fairly although it was acknowledged that the welfare state was far from perfect and had failed a number of groups which reports by Black (1982) and Townsend (1991) demonstrated. Nonetheless, despite the shortcomings it was generally accepted that the state could offer an opportunity for equal access to the provision of services and support. In Chapter 3 the point was also made that even well into the 1980's private sector suppliers were marginal. By the early 1990's, however, state social work was ripe for reform and privatisation which then, it was argued, could reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, make better use of resources and increase choice (Knapp et al, 2001). The introduction of the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act began the process of privatisation by introducing a purchasing role for 'care managers' replacing prior state social work, and a service purchaser/provider split for social care (Means et al, 2003). The 1989 Children Act had a similar impact in child care with the advent of 'case managers' (replacing social workers), the growth of private foster care agencies and an extraordinary expansion of private children's homes (Carey, 2008). The extent of these developments can be illustrated as follows. Between

1979 and 2000 the number of private sector nursing homes and residential units grew from 20,000 to 193,000 in England (Kerrison and Pollock, 2001). In 1998 BUPA became the single biggest provider of residential and nursing homes for older people (Sharkey, 2000). For children's homes, a similar trend is visible. Over the last twenty years there has been a 20% reduction in local authority provision and a 70% increase in private units (Carey, 2008). The same story is also seen in the provision of domiciliary services. In 1992 only 2% of services were offered by the private sector but by 2000 that had risen to 70% (Scourfield, 2006).

Social work is shaped by the policy context in which it operates. As argued earlier, New Labour has continued a process of renegotiating the post-war consensus around the welfare state that began under Conservative Governments which has had and continues to have implications for the role of both social work and social workers. The periods of reform under both Conservative and Labour Governments have been marked by a move away from traditional welfarist models of the welfare state. Fox Harding (1998) characterised the Conservative periods of reform as a move toward a "laissez faire" model whereby the state attempted to retreat from the involvement in the day to day lives of even some of its more vulnerable citizens. Informal networks, most importantly the family, were seen as the key arena in which care was provided. Only the most acute need should, it was argued, be met directly by the state, reflecting the move toward a more entrenched individual casework model. The other key feature in this analysis is the move toward the mixed economy of care.

New Labour has paid considerable attention to the field of welfare in the context of the “modernisation agenda” of public services continuing the trend started by previous Conservative governments. The adoption of a quasi business rationality marked a fundamental shift in the way the state delivered social services. During the post war years the state articulated the broad aims and purposes of what welfare work should be leaving individual social workers to determine how those ends were to be met. The marketisation of social work delivery has also meant a different role for the state guided by cash limits and the intensification of market forces through the development of quasi markets. The present government appears committed to, and indeed has widened, the potential contribution of the private and voluntary sectors at the same time as seeking to question the desirability of the state acting as the major provider of social care services. These developments could be described as the McDonaldisation of social work involving the four guiding principles that Ritzer (2000) described as: efficiency, predictability, calculability and control through non human technology. Although the role of the voluntary and private sector has assumed greater importance the state has remained the source of funding and it has had a growing and significant role in terms of inspection and regulation as many of the respondents reported during the interviews. In this respect, the introduction of more audits, inspections, regulations and procedures and monitoring systems has not reduced the role of the state but reconfigured it in different ways so that, in some ways, the state has become more significant

Within the context of this study the changes illustrated above have had significant impacts on the nature of social work itself and ultimately on how social workers are educated and how they see their role. Firstly, the introduction of quasi-markets has not resulted in higher

quality care. Recent research has highlighted how many private providers fail to meet basic standards of care (*Community Care*, 2006). Secondly, the development of a social care market has resulted in large numbers of low paid, transitory workers (now approaching 1 million) who have little if any training. Potential problems of exploitation and abuse will always remain a common risk when employment rights are low and recruitment problems prevalent (Carey, 2008). Thirdly, the adoption of care/case management as part of the marketisation of social work has brought significant problems. As indicated in Chapter 3 and by respondents in the empirical study, there is now excess bureaucracy in social services departments with additional problems of limited client contact, excessive managerialism, regulation and insufficient resources available to construct decent care packages. Some of the respondents, including both Heads and Officials, talked powerfully of the removal of prior social work tasks such as counselling, group work and advocacy which resonate with a study by Postle in 2002 conducted amongst social workers in the south of England.

One of the results of these problems has been a disenfranchisement and cynicism developing within some social work staff leading to high vacancy levels for qualified staff (Jones, 2001). One of the driving forces behind the new degree in social work was an attempt by government to encourage recruitment. It was argued earlier in this study that recruitment of young enthusiastic students is not the issue. The problem is not recruitment but retention. There was a sense in listening to the respondents in the empirical study that few were confident that the new degree would make a significant difference to retention and, indeed, there was a risk that the universities by continuing to teach elements of radical practice might make the matter worse by creating disillusionment.

7.3 Revisiting the key issues

In this section the challenges raised in the opening chapter will be revisited utilising the headings of the four key themes of this research.

7.3.1 The political imperatives

It was suggested in Chapter 4, and several of the respondents concurred, that the reforms of social work education that began with the Care Standards Act (2000) were part of a process that was essentially political. Three key themes emerge from the literature and from the empirical study. Firstly, the gradual removal of critical social sciences theory and knowledge and its replacement with training methods which stress the importance of competences and skills. Secondly, state social work employers and managers have gradually come to dominate and control social work education and thirdly how the core values of social work are in danger of being marginalised. Jones (1996) has emphasised the long term and deeply political motives behind these reforms. He suggests that there has been a project by government and employers to make social workers 'safe' from radical and dangerous theories and ideas such as those espoused by Marxists, feminists and a range of critical theorists like Laing and Marcuse.

These are extraordinary developments for, as Stevenson (1998) has argued, social work was an optimistic profession during the post-war period believing that judicious interventions in the lives of children and families could make a difference. However, she goes on to argue that just as it was growing in confidence, the late 1970's saw the beginning of the challenge to welfarism including the role of social work itself. As discussed in Chapter 3, the consequence of this meant social work became vulnerable to criticism as it was seen to

exemplify all that was wrong with welfarism. In addition, as one of the Heads suggested in the previous chapter, the scandals and public enquiries came to be seen as emblematic of all that was wrong with social work and proved crucial in introducing a more legalised, proceduralised form of practice and a more controlled social work curriculum with all of the concomitant risks of losing many of the key critical, emancipatory elements of social work many of the respondents spoke powerfully about – essentially its moral-practical and humanist traditions. Another Head suggested that one of the key political imperatives that lay behind the degree was the need to bring social work ‘into line’ in the sense of reining in its political dimension. This was an interesting observation and was a view hinted at by three of the Officials who in various ways implied that the new degree was essentially about delivering prescribed, pre-determined outcomes to ensure a ‘balanced’ delivery that met the needs of employers rather than what academics might want to teach. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the history of social work is littered with its involvement in the great social movements of the day. As Powell (2001) notes, ‘politics was....in evidence in social work from its infancy and shaped its historic mission into a concern for the poor and oppressed’ (p.27). The radical movement of the 1970’s arose from social workers contacts with the women’s movement, the civil rights movement and the trade union struggles of the time (Thompson, 2002). Social work was also instrumental in working with welfare movements like the disability movement and the mental health users’ forums (Barnes, 1997). Jane Adams, one of the early founders of social work in the USA, was an anti-war activist who saw her social work as:

In its broadest conception, social work is teaching the sanctity of human life andthe doctrine of the brotherhood of man....The social workers of our time are dreaming a great dream and seeing a great vision of democracy....War is the doom of all that has taken years to build up (Cited in Reisch and Andrews, 2002, p.42).

Social work, then, became radicalised by contact with social movements which led to different models of practice including approaches such as advocacy and collectivist community work underpinned by values of equality, diversity and social justice.

The political drivers that lay behind the degree are multi layered and complex but seem to suggest an almost inevitable outcome given the history of changing welfare policy, social work practice and recent government policy wedded to neo-liberal ideas such as: extending markets, the creation of new consumers and the introduction of competitiveness where none previously existed. In addition, New Labour is also communitarian and emphasises family values, self help, voluntary associations and civic responsibility in an ‘age of giving’ (Parton, 2000). The drive to modernise, rationalise and create order has helped shape the new degree in social work. The essential question as to whether or not it is ‘fit for purpose’ will be addressed later in this discussion.

7.3.2 The philosophical imperatives

From the conversations reported in the previous chapter it can be concluded that the introduction of the National Occupational Standards, the assessment of competencies through a changed formula of practice learning was not something open to negotiation and appeared to be driven very much by the Department of Health. As suggested in the opening chapter, what is to be taught on social work courses and how it is to be taught have long been vexed questions. All of the Heads interviewed expressed some anxieties about such a prescribed curriculum given the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in social work practice. It is interesting to note that the response to the challenges of modern social work seems to be the construction of ever more sophisticated systems of accountability for practitioners

and increasing attempts to rationalise and ‘scientise’ the education of social workers. The introduction of competencies, however, is not new as pointed out earlier in this dissertation. Since the late 1980’s social work education has experienced a process of ‘NVQisation’ (Carey, 2008) in which the emphasis has been placed on skill development related to a student’s capacity to communicate, engage, assess and review. This trend, however, is not unique to social work as higher education programmes in the vocational area see more emphasis being placed on ‘employment-centred training at the expense of teaching knowledge as the priority (Times Higher Education Supplement, 2005). Davis and Leonard (2004) have also commented how social work education has shifted its emphasis to one of teaching students to ‘[master] scientific knowledge and new technical skills’. They go on to argue that social work can then,

best defend itselfby claiming to be a science-based profession with an important role in the monitoring and control of problematic populations at risk - the mad, the bad and the difficult’ (p. x).

As discussed in Chapter 4, social work, by its very nature, is indeterminate and complex. Rather than encourage the idea that people’s problems can be solved through a technicist approach, as one of the Heads said, perhaps the approach should be resurrected of teaching students that uncertainty is normal and that students should be encouraged to reflect that indeterminacy is not amenable or reducible to authoritative definition or measurement.

Parton (2000) argues convincingly when he says:

I would argue that notions of ambiguity, indeterminacy and uncertainty are at the core of social work and should be built upon and not defined out and thereby open up the potential for creativity and novel ways of thinking and acting. As David Howe has argued, ‘uncertainty is the domain of the educated professional’ (p.10).

However, perhaps the most serious objection raised by one of the Heads in the interviews to the more prescribed nature of modern social work education, was the perceived marginalisation of core values and the de-politicisation of the curriculum. This is a point

raised earlier in this discussion, and also in Chapter 4 but which was captured most powerfully by one Head who spoke of her struggle to guide students away from the routinised gathering of evidence to complete competency portfolios and to keep the person at the heart of the intervention. As she said, the process of getting to the outcome is often of more value and represents the 'art' of social work. Her anxiety encapsulated the views of many other Heads and some Officials who feared that the more technical-rational approach to learning social work may indeed produce a generation of 'efficient' social workers but who, in the process, may have lost those core values of a commitment to social justice and a willingness to occasionally forsake the formality of their role and to work with ordinary people in their own environments using the informality of their approaches as a means of negotiating solutions rather than imposing them. Jordan (1989) argued many years ago that what makes social work unique is its ability to pay close attention to individual's needs, people's social location and how their needs are articulated. Linked to this idea is the nature of reflexivity which the new degree has jeopardised by, for example, removing the requirement for students to have practice teachers as opposed to practice assessors. As discussed in Chapter 4 the attack on values teaching is not a new one but, as Ferguson (2008) argues, it is part of the downgrading of them in practice to be replaced by social workers as technicians carrying out ethically neutral tasks. He goes on to suggest that it is above all these neo-liberal assaults on values, the demonisation of certain groups in society (like young offenders and asylum seekers) and the increasing impoverishment of many people that eat away at the very soul of social work but which is fuelling the call from practitioners and academics to articulate other forms of practice rooted in social justice. This is a point which will be elaborated later in this final discussion.

7.3.3 Implementation

What emerged most clearly from the conversations in the previous chapter was that working on the degree throughout 2004 and 2005 appeared to be a similar experience for all of the Heads of programmes in that the process was more about implementing a set down policy which did not invite critical engagement. As discussed in Chapter 4, in Wales the employers were placed very much at the centre of the project. All of the academics interviewed were used to working in partnerships with agencies and had done so for many years. But this experience appeared to be something very different. Chapter 4 outlined the historical development of partnership working in social work education and it was suggested that it had always been a tentative but relatively successful arrangement. With the development of the degree, several Heads reported that their agency partners had attempted to assume control of the curriculum as well as the arrangements for practice learning. One Head, it may be recalled, reported how their partners had tried to influence a teaching appointment to the extent of writing to their Vice Chancellor. Many of the Heads felt that the agencies had been so empowered by the Care Council for Wales the universities were now very much 'junior' partners in the enterprise. This was raised with one Official who gave a forthright response. The universities were not partners. They were there to meet the needs of employers.

For many of the Heads, the process of accepting an educational model they perceived to be unsound was clearly troubling, made worse by an institutional culture which did not welcome engaging with the complexity of professional judgments in which, for example, outcomes may, but cannot always be determined in advance, and where reflection and debate is integral to work in higher education. Interestingly, writing this study and

interviewing colleagues from across Wales confirmed how many academic staff, despite anxieties, accepted a model many felt inadequate with only off stage mutterings.

As some of the Heads reported in the study, from the inception of the degree the feeling was one of assembling a programme from a kit. The normal ‘cut and thrust’ of debate amongst academic colleagues during the building of a new programme appeared to be missing as the task became a purely technical one. In addition, a side effect of the marketisation of higher education with its dominant discourse of ‘customers’, stakeholders’ ‘choice’ and ‘competition’ meant that Universities were operating more in isolation. Even within the University of Wales, much of the approval process was completed in isolation by the constituent colleges for fear of giving away ‘trade secrets’ to ‘competitors.’ The belief that higher education is now a market place in which everyone competes for a limited number of students (and partner agencies) ensured there was little or no sense of collegiality whereby academic staff could work together in the best interests of quality and the ultimate student experience. This reinforces Ball’s (2000) earlier point raised in Chapter 4 that ‘performativity’ does not simply get in the way; it fundamentally changes what academic life is. Although all of the social work academic staff in Wales had previously worked across large, regional consortia which included both agencies and other colleges, the new degree meant people were going their different ways. Several heads pointed out that there developed a sour atmosphere within the University that CCfW did little to rectify as the comments from the respondents in the last chapter suggested.

Implementing the degree in Wales perhaps shines a small light on the broader issue of what kind of academics and teachers we have become and what the purpose of teaching in

higher education might be, especially in relation to vocational and professional education.

The university has to be more than just a sophisticated skill centre or a site for professional credentialing but perhaps these developments raise fundamental questions of how academics might engage in critical forms of professionalism and whether or not they need to reconstruct a professional identity against such changing conditions. The question is, what might that reconstruction look like? (Walker, 2002).

7.3.4 The Impact

There is little doubt that social work is at a cross roads. With the demise of ‘welfarism’ social work seems to have been not only subjected to criticism, as alluded to earlier, but almost marginalised in contemporary welfare developments. Perhaps it represents too much of ‘Old Labour’ and ‘Old Welfare’ although it still retains a place in providing a proceduralised and legalised service but stripped of the face-to face skills required for mediating and negotiating (Parton, 2000). Moreover, the increased privatisation of services and the transformation of clients into consumers as witnessed by the current use of the terminology ‘personalisation of services’, the nature of social work over the next few decades remains uncertain. This is partly due to the fact that the nature and extent of the overall impact of consumerist policies is far from clear (Carr, 2004, p.2). The discussions with the respondents in the previous chapter reflected that uncertainty with most respondents being cautious about whether or not the degree would be ‘fit for purpose’ in what is a rapidly changing world. Many of the Heads and one of the Officials were troubled as to whether the new degree might simply be destined to produce ‘technicians’ unable to function in tense and complex situations. In addition, the attempt to ‘de-politicise’ the curriculum with the use of National Occupational Standards and outcome

based assessments runs a risk of social work graduates having little time to develop critical and more preventive practice that might challenge and change the dominant power structures (Fook, 2002; Thompson et al, 2008).

The new degree in social work represents more than simply a different approach to teaching and learning social work. As argued earlier in this final chapter, the degree is part of a longer history shaped by political and economic forces that have changed the very nature of social work itself through, for example, privatisation and consumerism. In addition, neo-liberal ideologies continue to impact on the most marginalised. As Stepney (2005) argues, despite the rhetoric the rights of service users will not be brought to the fore unless social work resists the more authoritarian elements of New Labour's modernisation policy informed by market principles and managerial regulation. It was pointed out in Chapters 2 and 3 that inequalities and poverty are central issues for social workers as the majority of their clients come from the marginalised and dispossessed. Lansley (2006) has noted that:

Britain has been slowly moving back in time – to levels of income inequality that prevailed more than half a century ago and to levels of wealth inequality of more than thirty years ago (p.29).

Even some prominent supporters of 'third way' policies like Giddens are belatedly showing early signs of disquiet about the impact of widening inequality and have called for a 'new egalitarianism' (Giddens and Diamond, 2005). Economic inequality has far reaching implications. In 2005 the Department of Health's own Scientific Reference Group on Health Inequalities found the gap in life expectancy between the bottom fifth and the general population had actually widened by 2% for men and 5% for women between 1997 and 1999 and 2001 and 2003 (Department of Health, 2005). Such inequalities matter as it

not only effects the health of the poorest but as Wilkinson (2005) has shown it links directly to emotional health, violence and the quality of social relations between people, including levels of trust and insecurity – a point argued by Bauman in Chapter 2. Compounding that sense of insecurity is the re-organisation of welfare provision around the concepts of ‘choice’ and ‘personalisation’ involving what Webb (2006) has described as the ‘privatisation of risk’. He goes on

The real issue of income inequality means that families and communities are afflicted with a huge burden of responsibility in having to sort out their own problems with a little push from the experts. Economic and structural disadvantage is ignored (p.62).

7.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

This study represents a unique and original insight into the perceptions and lived experience of those involved in designing, delivering, approving and implementing the new degree in social work in one part of the United Kingdom. The findings discussed above suggest that many academics and some officials have serious concerns about the structure, purpose and ultimately the reliability of the new degree in social work. In addition, the study has shown that the goal of partnership working embedded in the Welsh Assembly Government’s documentation was simply rhetorical. It would appear from this particular study that partnership working between the universities and the employers was not only rhetoric but essentially a policy driver. The statement from one senior official that universities were there to implement what the employer wanted was an unusually candid admission but reflected the experiences of the Heads of programmes who felt that employers had been so empowered that partnership working was impossible. This study has also revealed a serious difference in perceptions between the Officials and Heads as to the process of implementing the degree which has left scars of mistrust amongst the academic community in Wales. For the academics, it was about piecing together a prescribed

curriculum driven by the Department of Health. What also emerged from the respondents was the significance that this process of radical change was a part of a wider process of bringing social work 'into line'. In addition, profound questions were raised as to the effectiveness of an outcome driven curriculum and an assessment regime based on competencies and National Occupational Standards

The dissertation will conclude by drawing on the finding of this study to contribute to the debate as to how social work education in general and the universities in particular might move forward to offer solutions to what appears to be deep seated, divisive yet inter-related problems..

In this final section, another question will be revisited which was posed in the introduction; namely whether or not it is still possible to teach a form of emancipatory practice that takes due regard of people's social location, challenges accepted wisdom and seeks reform in favour of the most marginalised. In other words, is critical practice in social work 'mission impossible'? (Stepney, 2005). The first task is to explore the apparent naturalness of the social formations at play and the insistent views that the dominant forces of the age like the rise of globalisation, neo-liberalism, marketisation and individualism are somehow inevitable. Clarke (2004) argues powerfully when he says:

They [the dominant forces] want us to believe in the inevitability of their rule – so we should not describe their rule as inevitable. They want us to accede to their vision of how the world should be – so we should not close out the possibility of other imaginings of how the world should be. They want us to succumb to the 'natural' conditions of competitive capitalism – so we should not reinforce its authority by attributing to it more reach, potency and effect that it has (p.6).

Drawing on the insight from this study there are three clear possibilities. One is to accept that the wind of neo-liberalism is simply too strong to resist in any way and that the

quotation from Jones at the end of Chapter 4 becomes a truism. A second tactic is to adopt what one Head in the study described as a ‘bit of academic banditry’ which involves ‘sabotaging’ the curriculum. Rather like Clarke’s quote earlier in which he says that the bidders don’t always come to heel when called, two of the Heads interviewed had effectively re-titled modules after the scrutiny was over whilst others had simply continued teaching the critical knowledge base of social work and approaches to practice not deemed acceptable at the time of validation. As Avis (2000) points out, educationists have traditionally ‘bent’ the curriculum to suit the purposes which might be at odds with what was officially determined.

Perhaps inevitably, employers are interested more in short term results rather than long term considerations such as what might happen to their local university social work department whose legitimate and long standing core function is that of providing education, a respectable research base and perhaps even international recognition. They need people to fill certain posts to carry out specified functions in particular offices. Also of minimal interest is the notion of how service users’ interests might be safeguarded in a world of privatised services. In sum, academics, practitioners and, most importantly, the service user have become disempowered and residual. Dominelli (2002) argues strongly that one of the reasons the academy has been marginalised so effectively is because it was as a result of academic and practitioner research that the realities of so many service users lives were shown to be in the grip of poverty, powerlessness and hardship. She goes on:

The concern to secure social justice for all residents of this country became mislabelled as ‘political correctness’, a convenient appellation used by the powerful who controlled the media to dismiss the uncomfortable words which emanated from the pens of those who felt that social work was the appropriate profession for raising issues of such grave concern to peoples well being (p.167).

One impact of all of this has been that social work academics are now in the chase for research funding (often for evaluation studies) or publishing low key text books leaving social work practitioners to the realities and constraints of practice and service delivery and its effective management. This means that the partnership of academics and practitioners, which had existed over the years, started to crumble with neither side able to resist as both are dependent upon external, and largely political, forces meaning neither group has a grip on the 'soul' of social work anymore. The relationship between theory and practice has been deconstructed and redefined leaving an epistemological vacuum that evidence based practice is filling as academics and practitioners seize it to restore some credibility to their diminishing professional status. For practitioners, it gives an illusion that they can practice using techniques or models that have been 'proven' to work and endorsed as valid forms of social work practice and hence are seen as 'legitimate' by employers and government alike. For academics, it allows them to generate research income and publish in worthy (and not so worthy) journals whilst the government calls the tune in what research it will fund (Webb, 2006).

But drawing on the results of this study suggests that there is a third option in which universities might play a significant role but it will mean a re-appraisal of the last two decades and a harnessing of the early signs of discontent at both a global and local level. Firstly, challenges to neo-liberal dominance in world trade have begun with the growth of the global justice movement. The first major disruption in Seattle in 1999 was significant on two levels. Firstly, it signalled a growing discontent by many that the values and priorities of neo-liberalism need to be challenged on the streets. Secondly, the entire social work department from the University of Washington including students and staff were present at the event to protest. I spoke at the university the following year and what

surprised me was the ability of the students to articulate what they saw as a need for social work not only to renew its commitment to social justice but it was their duty and the duty of their tutors to take part and stand alongside those disadvantaged by current world trade practices. It seems that social work academics (with notable exceptions) have been slow to challenge the uncritical acceptance of the marketisation of social work and growing inequalities as social workers themselves have simultaneously become more powerless. The current Labour administration has tended to reinforce rather than challenge dominant discourses about market based reform, and its 'tough love' initiative seriously undermines the capacity of social work to promote emancipatory practice (Stepney, 2005). Furthermore, as argued earlier, the regulatory framework around protection and risk management leaves little room for a critical and more preventive practice that might challenge the dominant power structures leaving practitioners frustrated and a sense that nothing can change (Fook, 2002). For social work educators it may mean returning to a form of teaching that frees people up from the restrictions of dominant ideologies that assign various groups of people (women, disabled people, elders, black people etc) to subordinate roles. Moon (1999) captures this idea of emancipatory education well when she says:

Emancipatory interests rely on the development of knowledge via critical or evaluative modes of thought and enquiry so as to understand the self, the human condition and self in the human context. The acquisition of such knowledge is aimed at producing a transformation in the self, or in the personal, social or world situation or any combination of these (1999, p.14)

This emancipatory approach to teaching social work might begin by exploring how the everyday machinations of power takes place at an ideological level - as much through the power of ideas rather than through brute force. If power relations are maintained essentially by ideas then they can be changed through ideas. This study has demonstrated that the

relationship between policy-makers and education providers has required that practice teachers (and academics) somewhat uncritically implement the wishes of powerful others, despite their professional status. Acquiescence to the modernist preference both misrepresents a non-rationalistic practice, and places an extremely challenging burden on educationalists and social work practitioners alike. A more productive alliance *vis-à-vis* the nature of social work knowledge and its deployment in practice opens the way for a (re)awakening of the debate about the purpose of educational practices: to emancipate or reproduce. Using this approach has the potential to free people from adopting a subservient position of hopelessness and create a sense of hope that things can change. For practitioners, any sense of powerlessness can be overcome but it will mean moving beyond the market based solutions to people's needs and the personalisation agenda. It will require, instead, the strengthening of collective action between those who deliver the services and those who receive them supported by the university as it challenges for its rightful place in society by encouraging an important public debate over resources, meanings, identities and a struggle for better knowledge and a fairer society. In December 2004 a large group of social workers met in Glasgow to debate the theme of '*I didn't come into social work to do this*'. That group developed a Manifesto for Social Work and Social Justice which offered sources of hope for a reinterpretation of social work committed to a radical practice (Jones, 2004). Following this, two conferences were held, at Liverpool in 2006 and Glasgow, 2007 on the theme of 'Social Work – a Profession Worth Fighting For'. Simultaneously, in Nottingham, another event was held entitled 'Affirming Our Value Base in Social Work and Social Care' at which academics, practitioners, students and service users took part attended by several hundred delegates. The next conference in the series was hosted at

Liverpool Hope University in September 2008. These new alliances may well represent an opportunity to create a new future.

7.5 Conclusion

This study has argued that it is the neo-liberal attack on the welfare state and on social work itself that has undermined not only collectivist approaches but relationship-based approaches which have combined to create deep dissatisfaction and the emergence of new grass roots opposition linking academics, students, service users and practitioners in which the universities have played and must continue to play a central role. The evidence from studies over many years shows that the aspirations and commitment of social work students to ‘make a difference’ is as solid as it ever was. The results of this study would suggest that there are also many academics and officials who have serious misgivings about the direction social work practice and education is heading giving social work academics a responsibility “to engage critically in the political agenda of defining the terms on which knowledge and truth can be established” (Lorenz, 2005, p.10). As Brabazon (2004) reminds us, however, it is not always a comfortable place to be:

Socrates was sentenced to death for his crimes against society. The greatest teacher of all, whose questions were too radical for his time, drank the hemlock and died. Educators must mind this lesson. Those who dissent, those who offer resistance, may suffer a similar fate. The crushing of alternatives, the ignorance of history and the avoidance of political debate will cut the heart out of education. Without attention to social justice, critical literacy and social change, our students will know how to send an email, but have nothing to say in it (p.xiii).

Social work academics are in a position to offer a critique of these developments and to act as a catalyst for a new debate that galvanises social work’s role as a participant in the moral and political discourses of the day and which debates the development of new models for educating future generations of social workers.

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Appendix 1

Obtaining informed consent letter

Dear.....

As part of my doctoral studies, I am carrying out research which is looking at the introduction of the new social work degree in Wales. I am particularly interested in examining the policy drivers which lay behind the introduction of the degree in social work in Wales and its impact on the design of the degree and the people who deliver and receive it. I would very much like to come and interview you as part of my research.

The interview should last about 45 minutes and the themes are as follows:

- 1. The political imperatives: - What were the key drivers behind the degree? What was the rationale for ensuring the centrality of employers in the process; the changed format of practice learning?*
- 2. The philosophical imperatives: - Why the model that incorporated the National Occupational Standards linked to prescribed competencies was adopted. To what extent were other models considered?*
- 3. Implementation: - Did the degree proposal change during the implementation process?*
- 4. Impact: - What effect might the new degree have? For example, what kind of workforce is the new degree aiming to 'produce'? Will the reforms help? If so, in what ways?*

I propose to tape the interviews and transcribe the dialogue ensuring that you have a copy within a reasonable time limit. You will then be free to make any alterations to the transcript including deletion of any sections you do not wish to be included. You will not be identified by name without express approval and I will ensure complete confidentiality of information. You will of course be free to withdraw from the research project at any time and without any adverse consequences. If you did decide to withdraw all data will be destroyed.

My research supervisor is Professor Mike Bottery of The University of Hull who can be contacted by email on m.p.bottery@hull.ac.uk or you can telephone him on 01428 465378

Should you have a complaint about any element concerning the conduct of this research project you may contact the Secretary, Institute for Learning Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Tel number: 01482 465988

Yours sincerely,