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Social administration revisited: traditions of observational fieldwork and their value

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Abstract

This article revisits traditions of observational fieldwork inside welfare institutions which formed a core part of past Social Administration teaching and research in the UK. Drawing on archive materials, a historical exploration of journal contents and some supplementary interview data, it is argued that such approaches – though carried out in a less theoretically pluralist, more vocationally-oriented time for the subject of Social Policy and Administration – were at the same time valuable in facilitating critical perspectives on how welfare bureaucracies work. Their popularity is potentially rising once again in Social Policy teaching. Where cultivated alongside an appreciation of theory and where carefully integrated into university Social Policy departments' wider pedagogical and curricular strategies, they may be of benefit today to students and more senior scholars alike.

Introduction

Traditional academic Social Administration[i] during the 1950s and 1960s in the UK – an antecedent to the more expansive subject we know today as Social Policy – is regularly described in literature as having been untheoretical, excessively vocational, paternalistic and too close to the state welfare services it examined, contributing to a view that it was uncritical. While accounts of Social Policy's history comparing 'then' and 'now' may indicate that such charges are sometimes fair, in this paper I contribute to perspectives which have sought to qualify the idea that past Social Administration was entirely uncritical. In sum, I argue that, within traditional Social Administration, there existed some past approaches to teaching and research which, in principle at least, lent themselves well methodologically to facilitating critical perspectives on state welfare.

I focus specifically on strengths associated with formerly extensive Social Administration traditions of immersive fieldwork inside 'bedrock' welfare state institutions. Such traditions, flourishing as they did during the 1950s and 1960s, were in many senses heavily a product of their time in that they were part and parcel of the subject's early inseparability from the rise of the UK welfare state. As is shown below, scholars associated with early Social Administration were strongly linked to the social services they were examining, and such closeness did over time come to be problematic, feeding as it did into a 1970s period of major change for the subject (see Williams' 2016 article in the recent 50th Anniversary issue of this journal which shows that today's Social Policy incorporates a far greater diversity of critical theoretical perspectives than past Social Administration ever did). At the same time, however, past Social Administration methodological traditions of fieldwork inside institutions are still argued to have been valuable. Although carried out in the context of a less theoretically pluralist and more vocationally-oriented time for Social Policy and Administration, they lent themselves markedly well to aiding deep and at times highly critical understandings of important dynamics inside social services, and the practices, motivations and problems of real-life welfare service providers. In the present day, qualitative work 'designed to elicit the voices and

experiences of welfare subjects' (Williams, 2016: 637) has a strong presence in Social Policy, though scholars such as Sinfield (2004) have also cautioned against a risk of focusing primarily 'downstream' on vulnerable individuals without balancing this sufficiently against a focus further 'upstream', examining directly and in depth 'higher levels of causality' which may include welfare service delivery institutions. Previously key phenomena within past Social Administration such as student placements in, and observation visits to, welfare bureaucracies did become less prevalent in academic Social Policy during the 1980s and 1990s. However, evidence suggests they may be becoming popular once again.

The paper draws on three main sources of data, spanning from 1939 to the present:

1) Archived materials of the Joint University Council (JUC) for Social and Public Administration.[ii] The JUC, established in 1918, has from its outset been a learned society intended to 'promote and represent the work of higher education institutions in the field of the Applied Social Sciences'. Over several decades its outputs have constituted rich data for scholars exploring the history of Social Policy and Social Administration, documenting in detail historic facts and debates. Relevant materials used in this paper include: a) records of meetings and discussions where academics from across the UK have over time debated where Social Policy and Administration has 'been' and where it ought to be 'going'; b) reports mapping over time Social Policy and Administration teaching content, staffing and research across UK universities.

2) An exploration of historical perspectives emerging in the three oldest major Social Policy journals over time: a) Social Policy and Administration[iii] (whose first issue was published in 1967); b) The Journal of Social Policy (established 1972 as the 'house' journal of the Social Policy Association, itself founded in 1967); and c) Critical Social Policy (established 1981). Following a reading of all article titles and abstracts over time in these journals, I have drawn on selected works wherein academics have sought specifically to offer critical commentary on the past, present and future of Social Administration/ Social Policy. I have also drawn on articles in some additional journals which published Social Administration content prior to 1967 – the British Journal of Sociology, the Sociological Review, Public Administration and Social Service Quarterly.

3) Some supplementary perspectives emerging from eight interviews with academics carried out during 2012/13 on the history of Social Policy and Administration at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).[iv]

'Critical perspectives' are defined in this article as being any which prompt questioning of traditionally 'dominant', 'taken for granted' (Williams, 2016: 629) political ideologies informing Twentieth and Twenty-First Century social policy thinking in Western democracies. Lister (2010) has described such ideologies as including not only those comprising the post-WWII 'middle way' (social democracy, social conservatism and social liberalism – see e.g. Esping Andersen, 1990) and to varying degrees legitimising a somewhat 'benign view of state welfare' (Alcock, 1996: 13), but also those making up more recent New Right and Third Way perspectives that have legitimised the reform and restructuring of state welfare. In this paper, given a focus on UK Social Administration in the mid-Twentieth Century, I refer primarily to critical perspectives that were questioning past Fabian social democracy in the UK during this period.

The paper proceeds as follows: First, an outline is given of arguments made by Social Policy authors that traditional UK Social Administration lacked critical perspective on state welfare because its scholars were too closely bound to the actual development of key institutions to possess sufficient critical distance. Second, I argue that 'closeness' to social services was in some respects also a *strength* of past Social Administration, facilitating as it did deep, immersive understanding of state welfare and so some important critical insights. Discussion at the end of the paper reflects briefly on the place of immersive research in institutions today for students and more senior scholars in Social

Policy. I draw attention to recent efforts to boost student field experience (through student placements) in a number of UK Social Policy Departments.

Traditional Social Administration and the UK welfare state

Traditional academic Social Administration in the UK was a subject borne out of, and which rose in tandem with, the UK welfare state. Although it existed prior to the 1945-51 Attlee Governments which laid the foundations for post-WWII welfare state expansion, 'even its best friends would probably not wish to date its academic growth earlier than the second quarter of the [20th] century' (JUC, 1979: 3). Social Administration in universities originally formed part of vocational training for life as a social worker, and its academic staff were frequently heavily involved with local authority social work services, many having formerly been practising social workers. During the mid-20th Century the subject trained students bound not only for social work careers, but also the social services generally (Titmuss, 1968). Early key figures Richard Titmuss and Brian-Abel Smith are today famed for their post-war advising of government on the development of UK social services (Oakley, 2014). Overall, the subject may be thought of as being one that was both *created by* and *intended for* those who were – or would be – heavily involved with real-life, day-to-day state welfare.

In line with such origins, Social Administration is often described as suffering from problems 'one would expect from the alliance of a study of social services with the training of practitioners' (Baker, 1979: 191). 'Umbilical' links (Wilding, 1992: 107) between the subject academically and the phenomenon it was analysing are frequently argued[v] to have led to heavily partial work by scholars who too often failed to examine critically Whiggish, Fabian assumptions that the 'exceptional' UK welfare state always constituted a 'natural vehicle of progress' (Donnison, 1979: 147). Richard Titmuss during the 1950s and 1960s has been described as being 'apostolic' and 'like an old testament prophet'[vi] in this regard. Critics have relatedly argued that traditional Social Administration was almost 'avowedly non-theoretical' (Jones-Finer, 2006: 1), prioritising instead simple 'facts' in the form of highly descriptive detail on social services (see for example the work of Hall, 1952; Forder, 1966).[vii]

Retrospective accounts of early Social Administration by scholars writing critiques some years later should be treated cautiously insofar as they may risk depicting the past as being worse than it truly was. Nevertheless, even during the 1960s and early 1970s, academics did note that practical focus and 'closeness' to UK social services fed into lowly status for Social Administration. In 1961, Donnison (p.218) described the subject as having 'no theoretical structure, no distinctive body of knowledge, no rigorous logic and no reputable academic pedigree'. In 1970, one JUC report (p.9) stated that Social Administration's vocational elements had long been 'tolerated, but scarcely encouraged' by university authorities. Interviewees for this article recalled Social Administration being described during the 1960s as being a subject for 'midwives' and people 'going on to administer public lavatories'.[viii]

During the 1970s Social Administration saw calls for greater theoretical engagement and also greater comparativism. Academics such as Pinker (1971; 1974), Carrier and Kendall (1973; 1977), Warham (1973) and George and Wilding (1976) called for a shift in emphasis away from studying administration micro-details and towards greater incorporation of new and diverse ideas from sociology, economics and politics, though notably sociologists including T.H. Marshall and W.G. Runciman, economists such as C.A.R. Crosland and political scientists including W.A. Robson were already highly influential in the field.[ix] Detailed discussion of ways in which Social Policy and Administration as an academic subject subsequently grew and changed is beyond the scope of this article.[x] However, here it can be noted that, from the 1970s onwards, the subject focused decreasingly on 'professional training' and increasingly on 'intellectually respectable knowledge'

(JUC, 1979: 25). Vocational diplomas were replaced by degrees (Jones, 1963; Russell, 1981; Collis, 1989) and university Departments made important symbolic changes from being Departments of Social Administration to being Departments of Social Policy.[xi] Courses offering practical social work training also ceased to be offered in some Departments (for example LSE and Oxford).

Traditions of fieldwork in Social Administration during the mid-Twentieth Century

Perhaps there are areas of past Social Administration which merit revisiting, however. In 1988, the year after the UK Social Administration Association became the Social Policy Association, Howard Glennerster wrote a 'requiem' for the former. In this, he lamented what he perceived to be a move within new Social Policy away from observing directly the day-to-day inner workings of social welfare institutions. 'Administrative anthropology', Glennerster argued, had been a key element of past Social Administration that should still be considered valuable, highlighting as it did the importance of watching and seeking deep understanding of how welfare bureaucracies work practically at the local level. Building on earlier detailed 'implementation' studies in the fields of both Social Administration and Social Work by scholars such as Donnison and Chapman (1965), Mayer and Timms (1970) and Hill (1972),[xii] Glennerster (1983), and later with Jane Lewis (Lewis and Glennerster, 1996), sought in his own work to understand, through direct immersion in public service settings, the motives, perceptions and lives of welfare service providers 'on the ground':

> 'a lot ... can be gained by watching day to day, or at least weekly, what is happening in an organisation with frequent interviews, informal conversations and observations of life and meetings as they happen. This softer material can then be checked against council documents, policy statements, minutes of meetings and budgets and contracts. We have described this approach as 'administrative anthropology' ... many ethnographic studies adopt some of the same techniques.' (Lewis and Glennerster, 1996: 24).

Administrative anthropology has been so-called here because of its drawing on both participatory and non-participatory observation methods, interviewing and other detailed data collection techniques that are characteristic of ethnographic works originally pioneered in the discipline of anthropology. Wilding (1992; 2009) has rightly cautioned against the idea that such an approach within Social Administration was ever significantly extensive. Nevertheless, during the 1960s in this field, there were a number of now famous studies (in addition to already mentioned works on implementation referenced above) wherein Social Administration academics clearly sought specifically to highlight the importance of focusing directly and in depth on the lives and experiences of actors inside welfare institutions.

During the 1960s, Peter Townsend – a lifelong advocate of Social Anthropology having studied it at university – in carrying out participatory fieldwork for his book *The Last Refuge* (1962), personally resided in and worked as an attendant in an old age care home. Townsend and a small team of researchers additionally systematically visited 173 residential institutions for the aged across England. They gathered statistics, institutional reports, meeting minutes and documents such as staff and resident diary entries. They interviewed LA welfare officers, care home staff and 489 residents, undertaking tours of buildings and generating field notes in order to gain deep understanding of care homes' inner workings. In researching for his work on hospitals and the nursing profession in England and Wales, Brian Abel-Smith (1960; 1964) too drew extensively not only on statistics but on meetings and interviews with key actors and on knowledge gained from many hospital visits and observations. Abel-Smith's participatory position as governor on London hospital management boards gave him 'unparalleled access and insight into the contemporary conditions inside [NHS] institutions' (Sheard, 2014: 130). In researching English legal services, Abel-Smith interviewed hundreds of lawyers and again engaged in extensive contact with relevant social

service employees. Here he reported on highly detailed case studies of legal advisory services in London (Abel-Smith and Stevens, 1968).

Distinct but overlapping historical traditions of carrying out detailed case study fieldwork in government institutions[xiii] could also be found during the 1960s in the related field of Public Administration (a field which, like Social Administration, focused strongly on the vocational training of students who would go on to work in the public sector – Wright, 1974; Dean, 1962). Social Administration fieldwork at this time was additionally almost certainly influenced by and influencing post-war developments in the discipline of Sociology. Within the latter, ethnographic studies became strongly influential during the mid-Twentieth Century.[xiv] Here it is particularly notable that, in 1954, some years prior to writing *The Last Refuge*, Peter Townsend had co-founded the Institute of Community Studies where he worked alongside sociologists including Michael Young, Peter Wilmott, Peter Marris and Dennis Marsden. These scholars were at the time carrying out what would in future years become famous ethnographic explorations of working class lives[xv] (albeit outside of welfare state institutions) and Townsend wrote powerfully in the early part of his career on the importance for scholars of Social Administration of spending 'a good deal of time observing and interviewing' society's 'submerged fifth' (Townsend, 1958: 103). Carrying on similarly inspired immersive work albeit later during the 1970s, in 1976 Social Administration Professor Bob Holman even resigned from an academic post at Bath University in order to become a community activist living and working in a deprived neighbourhood in Bath (later Glasgow). Holman published on poverty having witnessed this first-hand in deprived communities (see e.g. Holman, 1978), critiquing works he saw as being 'about, on or for the poor, not by or with the poor' (Holman, 1987: 670). In 1997, Peter Marris looked back on several decades of research in the social sciences, reflecting on what he considered to be the great importance of researchers engaging in 'storytelling' and bearing 'moral witness' to problems faced by the poorest members of society (Marris, 1997).

For students within mid-Twentieth Century Social Administration, too, a great deal of observational fieldwork was formally expected (JUC, 1939; 1956; 1966; Leaper, 1989). During the 1960s, it is well-documented that undertaking a Social Administration Diploma in universities such as Birmingham, Exeter, Manchester, LSE, Edinburgh or Durham (JUC, 1979: 43) would typically involve much extra-mural learning. Lengthy Summer and Easter placements in welfare bureaucracies were expected (JUC, 1966; NCSS, 1970; JUC, 1979), in addition to once or twice-weekly visits to such bureaucracies. Donnison (1961) has stated that during the early 1960s students usually spent between one and six months, with a median of four months, gaining field experience in the course of undertaking a typical UK Social Administration diploma. Placements and visits were a mixture of both participatory and non-participatory – in some instances students simply observed but in others they undertook formal paid or unpaid work. Students were expected to gather observational data then write about local norms and knowledges inside institutions such as nurseries, psychiatric hospitals, special schools and local authority health and welfare departments, considering 'the fit between institutions and the people' (JUC, 1970: 29; see also JUC, 1966). Success in assessments depended on students' ability to convey 'the consequences of administrative structure' (JUC, 1970: 28). Such investigations have been recounted by former Social Administration students and teaching staff:

> 'We [as students] were thrown in to see what we thought … we visited old people's homes and we visited hospitals … You got to know people … because you talked to them all the time, you know. I did shifts in the children's homes. You were learning a lot of how people experienced their social situations and how policy was or wasn't responding to their needs.'[xvi]

> 'Part of what you were teaching [students] was an appreciation of how organisations worked and what it was like to be working in an institution which was hugely valuable

and so there was a fieldwork element in the diplomas ... A student would go off during vacations and spend four weeks working in a Housing Department or Children's Department and then they would come back and their first essay would be, 'what did you learn about the administration of housing allocations or rent rebates?''[xvii]

Practices outlined here have historic roots in older UK Charity Organisation Society (COS) traditions which aimed to promote observational fieldwork for learners in higher education. During the early Twentieth Century, COS sought to ensure in universities a better understanding of 'social problems' through opportunities for 'imaginative expansion of citizenship' in settings such as labour bureaux and Poor Law reception centres (Harris, 1989: 35).

Traditions of fieldwork in the 1950s and 1960s teaching of Social Administration were often criticised for involving 'nebulous' expositions of students to contexts of 'poverty and misery' without sufficiently defined pedagogical purpose (JUC, 1970: 1; Scott and Shardlaw, 2005). In a 1961 JUC review of Social Administration teaching, David Donnison called for greater attention to be paid to ensuring connections between students' fieldwork and their academic learning. Donnison expressed concerns that practical field experience in Social Administration was too often 'insulated' from such learning, organised by university staff with 'few teaching duties and scant opportunity for research' (Donnison, 1961: 222). By 1970, however, observational fieldwork in Social Administration was reported by the JUC to have become better integrated into programmes of academic study and more clearly linked, with careful pedagogic consideration, to focused assignments (JUC, 1970).

Fieldwork was believed to help students achieve 'a better understanding of social needs ... and the services available to meet them, than is possible through purely theoretical study' (JUC, 1970: 1). Formal 'work' in institutions, sometimes even abroad (see JUC, 1979, on the Cardiff experience; Leaper, 1989, on Exeter) ensured students would 'feel for themselves' the sorts of 'pressures' different jobs entailed for people inside public services, highlighting both 'the need for and the dangers of generalisation' and the complexities of human beliefs and behaviour. Students were taught to 'avoid superficial judgements' and 'naïve believes' based only on theory or on aggregated quantitative data (JUC, 1970: 2-4), guarding against a 'highly general, schematized view of social reality' (JUC, 1979: 50).

> 'Far from thinking less, field work means involving the student in thinking more and harder ... undoubtedly the thinking that has been done after we have left our books, been down into the arena and returned to the university to think about it all again is hard. It was all so obvious, so neat and tidy before ... one hopes to have helped [the student] come to terms with the inescapable fact that social services are not only run for people but by people.' (JUC, 1970: 4-5, emphasis in original).

> 'Those who have tried to teach Social Administration to students who have had no opportunity of participating in the social services or of observing their work are well aware of gaps in comprehension and a certain lack of zest which afflict all but the best ... there are many today who would argue that social administration cannot be taught satisfactorily, especially to the younger and inexperienced student, without carefully organised field work.' (JUC, 1966: 6-8).

At the University of Bradford during the 1960s, in order to ensure a maximally deep and immersive experience, Social Administration students were even placed for eight weeks (at the end of their second year of study) in institutional contexts where they would not only be undertaking unskilled work but would also be deliberately separated from all fellow student peers:

'Each student spends eight weeks of the summer vacation in an unskilled work situation and in a setting where he is not protected by being a member of a student group. He will go into an existing, stable work group as the only newcomer, and, whilst there, he will be given essay topics to focus his thinking. On his return to university there will be a formal presentation of his essay' (Nursten, 1966: 73).

Critical perspectives

Although carried out at a time in the history of Social Policy and Administration wherein critics have argued there was only a limited and somewhat narrow appreciation of theory, and so a failure to embrace fully diverse critical ideas challenging Fabian 'welfare state social policy' (Deacon, 1981: 45), early Social Administration fieldwork traditions may at the same time be considered valuable for their granting to students and scholars first-hand experience of welfare institutions' *people* – their practices, problems, reactions to and means for coping with problems. Moreover, Donnison has drawn attention to the central importance of 'evaluative' elements of early Social Administration fieldwork which directly encouraged students to appraise social service institutions critically with respect to their effects on service users:

'The deliberate introduction of value judgements and critical appraisals appears to be one of the distinctive features of Social Administration as taught in many universities' (Donnison, 1961: 209).

Cultivation of critical thinking was certainly expressed as being an explicit goal on many Social Administration courses. In one published account of Social Administration teaching at the University College of Swansea during the early 1960s, Lochhead argued that fieldwork during university holidays in particular was 'vital' for producing critical thinking:

'The attempt throughout is to promote independent and critical thinking with the hope that there will be a real integration between practical application and theory' (Lochhead, 1963: 156) .

One former Social Administration student interviewed for this paper did reflect on 'naivety' and a 'lack of critical ability' she felt she possessed while carrying out Social Administration fieldwork during the 1960s:

'There used to be what were called village children's homes … Cottages would be built on an area of land and a group of six or eight children with a house mother would live in each of these cottages and then there would be a school and there would be all facilities in this area. So that children didn't have to go anywhere else basically … and I remember we did a visit to this home and we weren't given any preparation beforehand about childcare and whether this was a good or a bad thing to have children like this outside the community. Obviously now I realise that it was a bad thing but, at the time, we actually thought it was run quite well and we wrote these really naive essays about how well it was organised and I'm actually quite ashamed now several years later about the lack of critical ability'[xviii]

However, critical perspectives derived from fieldwork, challenging in university classrooms a social democratic view of expanding state welfare as being entirely 'the promising and permanently valid answer to the problems of the socio-political order of advanced capitalist economies' (Offe, 2014: 68), can also be heard quite clearly in some other first-hand accounts from this period. The following

quote is from Sally Sainsbury, who prior to becoming an academic undertook a Diploma in Social Administration at LSE in 1962-3:

> 'Every week … people [were] deputed to talk about one of the visits that they'd been to and the one I did was on old people's homes … we had an old Poor Law institution and a beautiful new local authority home. I think I was supposed to say how much better the local authority home was. The Poor Law institution I thought was very interesting … You saw them in their common room and the old chaps were in their mufflers and their caps and they were playing billiards and they had their mugs of tea and they were smoking like chimneys and the old girls were sitting round the wall gassing together and knitting. And although it was terrible, it was also a discernible community … oh, and there was a wonderful woman who was sitting knitting in bed … and we'd been told by the matron that people knitted for the good of the community … to raise money. 'Is this for the sale?', 'Oh no, I'm doing this for my nephew! I do this to get away from matron' and this I thought was a wonderful thing; that you could get away from matron … whereas in [the local authority home] you were under matron's beady eye, there weren't many of you, you were sat around this very nice room with thick carpet and orange curtains and contemporary furniture and you were doing nothing, nothing at all.'[xix]

For those teaching Social Administration, too, reading and hearing students' accounts of time spent in welfare bureaucracies is said to have been helpful in allowing scholars to lift 'the blinkers of the status quo' (Taylor-Gooby, 1981: 7):

> 'They did fieldwork and came back and reported on it. The idea though that there was this sort of beautiful machine of the welfare state moving forward, achieving everything that was claimed for it, was not really quite what one heard, so it made one a bit more critical.'[xx]

> 'We were genuinely interested in their next essay. We were at the frontiers of knowledge together, learning from each other.'[xxi]

Sainsbury (see JUC, 1966: 63) has highlighted significant interdependency and mutual learning between Social Administration students and academic staff during the early days of the post-war welfare state. Notably, in a 1962 review of Social Administration at LSE, Brian Abel-Smith highlighted that students undertaking fieldwork during their diplomas at this time regularly carried on projects on a paid basis at LSE after receiving their diplomas (Abel-Smith, 1962: 330).[xxii]

A highlighting of critical insights here is in line with the perspectives of academics who have more broadly challenged assertions that past Social Administration was ever an entirely uncritical endeavour. Mann (1998: 77-8), though critical of early 'lamppost counting', has also emphasised 'longstanding critiques of welfare' and significant 'scepticism' throughout the history of both Social Policy and Social Administration. In 1986, Ramesh Mishra argued that, although a major supporter of 'the social services', Richard Titmuss had always rejected a fully 'handmaidenly' perspective on those services, his stance often being 'close[r] in many ways to critical theory than to the systematics of 'scientific' sociology' (Mishra, 1986: 30). As early as 1962, scholars such as Thomas Simey were critiquing 'complacency' in Social Administration, calling for the subject to accept due responsibility for emerging failures and 'thoughtlessness' in state welfare (Simey, 1962: 139). Critical elements in the work of Peter Townsend are known to have fuelled significant activism on his part throughout his whole career (CPAG, 2009; Walker, 2009). Brian Abel-Smith's work on hospitals is argued by Sheard to have highlighted the 'myopia of hospital service planning', revealing 'blinkered' elements of Ministry of Health policy in England and Wales (Sheard, 2014: 140-1). Anthony Hall's 1975 book

The Point of Entry critically exposed major challenges faced by both welfare service users and frontline staff in social service building reception areas. Williams (2016: 629) has highlighted that Social Policy and Administration historically has never been a subject 'entirely separate from critical thinking'. Instead, it has always been 'porous' (albeit to varying degrees, at different times and in different places) in this regard.

The place of observational fieldwork in Social Policy today

It has been well-documented that over the course of the 1980s and 1990s in UK Social Policy and Administration, student placements and other forms of student observational fieldwork that had previously been prevalent declined significantly (Collis, 1978; 1989; Shenton 1987; Leaper, 1983; 1989; Scott and Shardlaw, 2005).[xxiii] Scott and Shardlaw (2005: 114) have argued that, since the 1980s, remaining extra-mural learning for students in Social Policy has at times risked becoming 'dangerously utilitarian', 'decoupled from academic frameworks' and collapsing into wider employability and 'relevance' agendas. However, positive examples have also been noted wherein experiential learning in welfare institutions has been carefully integrated with university departments' wider curricular strategies (Scott and Shenton, 1995; Universities UK, 2002).

Fresh endeavours towards promoting experiential learning in institutions for students can be seen today in many UK Social Policy departments, even at a time when national developments such as QSTep are compelling universities to place top priority on boosting students' quantitative research skills.[xxiv] Optional placements in government, commercial and voluntary sector organisations for students undertaking undergraduate Social Policy degrees can currently be found in a number of UK universities including Bath, York, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London Metropolitan, Kent, Lincoln, Middlesex, Swansea, Salford, Anglia Ruskin and Central Lancashire. Birmingham and Brighton Universities have both introduced Social Policy degrees focusing specifically on 'Practice' and incorporating placement fieldwork. Field experience for Social Policy students is even compulsory in some universities. Liverpool Hope University offers Social Policy undergraduates both compulsory and optional field trips[xxv] and at Ulster University, full-time, six week placements are a requirement for all Social Policy BSc students.[xxvi] Such developments are potentially highly positive, generating as they will possibilities, as suggested throughout this article, for students to gain critical insights into the 'consequences of administrative structure' (JUC, 1970: 28) inside a myriad of contemporary welfare contexts. At the same time, taking heed of warnings from Scott and Shardlaw (2005) regarding employability agendas in higher education, here it is noteworthy that Patrick et al (2014: 20) have, too, reminded us that one key reason for Social Policy placements today becoming an 'obvious growth area' relates to opportunities that these pose not only for student fieldwork but also for student *work experience*. In the interests of avoiding 'dangerously utilitarian' placement initiatives, Curtis et al (2009) have stressed the importance of ensuring that such initiatives in universities are always well-resourced. Dedicated staff are needed to help students secure placements that will not only provide work experience but also be beneficial educationally. Careful teaching and learning development work is needed to ensure innovative assessments are always encouraging students to reflect extensively on their placements, bringing reflexive thinking together with relevant scholarly literature (ibid; see also Moon, 2004; Smith et al, 2007). Time on the part of academic staff must furthermore be devoted to managing the expectations of external organisations[xxvii] and to providing academic and pastoral guidance to students throughout placements. Lastly, there must be recognition of increased time and travel costs that students face (Curtis et al, 2009).

Within Social Policy research, a people-centred 'agentic turn' (Williams, 2016) in recent decades, informed by diverse theoretical perspectives, has certainly seen scholars focusing more than in the

past on studies which aim to empower the voices of vulnerable service users (Glasby and Beresford, 2006; Becker et al, 2006; Barnes et al, 2007; Beresford, 2016). At the same time, academics such as Spicker (2004: 9) have argued that a focus within Social Policy on 'the structure and operation of services, the process of service delivery and the effect that services have on the people who receive them' is one which has become neglected despite having historically been Social Administration's 'heart and core'. Why might this be the case among Social Policy researchers? Here we may consider that resource-intensive institutional ethnographies generating 'large masses of observations' (Glennerster et al., 1983: 8) in the present day are a type of methodology more likely than others to be endangered in a higher education climate where government funding for research is being squeezed (Greener and Greve, 2013) and where, as in teaching, quantitative methods are being 'championed as the gold standard' (Ayres and Marsh, 2013: 650).[xxviii] Practical gaining of access for researchers to welfare institutions is also likely to be more difficult today than it was in the past. Such institutions have more complex, increasingly privatised governance structures than they did historically (see for example Ball and Junemann, 2012) and Pollitt et al draw attention to gatekeepers inside practitioner communities who also treat quantitative methods as being the 'gold standard', 'devaluing interpretive approaches' (Pollitt et al, 1990: 188). Disclosure and Barring Service checks create further access hurdles for researchers and Spicker (2007) notes particular dilemmas posed by contemporary research codes of ethics for scholars carrying out research in organisations.

In-depth observational fieldwork in social and public policy institutions has nevertheless persisted in parts of the social sciences. 'Policy ethnography' is a method of inquiry advanced during the 1980s and 1990s in areas including medical sociology (see e.g. Hughes, 1989; Griffiths and Hughes, 2000). Recently it has been championed by political scientists Rhodes and Bevir (Rhodes, 2011; Bevir and Rhodes, 2010; Bevir, 2013) who use deep interpretive analysis of fluid cultural beliefs and practices 'making up' government institutions to challenge traditional reified understandings of such institutions. In the realm of criminal justice policy, Stevens (2011) has carried out ethnographic work inside the UK civil service and scholars such as Phillips (2012) have carried out ethnographic work in prisons. The political scientist Dubois (2015) has written on 'critical policy ethnography' and anthropologists Shore and Wright (1997) have advanced an 'anthropology of policy'. However, there is still some way to go within academic Social Policy towards facilitating in-depth approaches which, to borrow again from the JUC, guard against a 'highly general, schematized view of social reality' (JUC, 1979: 50), uncovering insights on the inner workings of welfare institutions that will forever 'elude more extensive methods' (Ayres and Marsh, 2013: 649).

Conclusions

In conclusion, although the 1950s and 1960s may – as many critics have highlighted – have been a less theoretically pluralist and more vocationally oriented time for the subject of UK Social Administration/ Social Policy, significant 'closeness' of Social Administration students and scholars to welfare services during the mid-Twentieth Century (often deemed a central element of the subject's failing in this period) can at the same time be argued in some respects to have been valuable. Core methodological traditions of immersive observational fieldwork inside bedrock welfare state institutions during the 1950s and 1960s lent themselves well to the generation of important critical insights on 'the fit between institutions and the people' (JUC, 1970: 29). Students and scholars came to be educated in great detail on ways in which early social services did and did not work well for both welfare service providers and users. Indeed, without immersive fieldwork, it is difficult to imagine how some detailed critical insights described in this paper would ever otherwise have been garnered. Expanding elements of past Social Administration fieldwork practice may be a useful endeavour in Social Policy teaching and research today, where barriers mentioned above to such practice can be overcome and where (as far as teaching is concerned) such practice is carefully designed pedagogically and integrated well with students' wider academic learning on theories and

concepts. Such an expansion could ultimately be highly fruitful for advancing deep understandings in present-day Social Policy of dynamics, problems and successes in ever-changing contemporary welfare institutions in the public sector and beyond.

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i This paper takes a porous definition of 'Traditional Social Administration' including not only the work of scholars based within Social Administration Departments during the mid-Twentieth Century but also those in linked academic fields such as Social Work, Sociology, Economics, Politics and Public Administration. Within such related fields, there are many who are known to have been influential in early Social Administration.

ii Today the Joint University Council of the Applied Social Sciences: http://www.juc.ac.uk/

iii Originally *Social and Economic Administration*.

iv Interview transcripts are from a Titmuss-Meinhardt Memorial Fund project marking the LSE Social Policy Department's centenary in 2012.

v See for example JUC, 1970; George and Wilding, 1976; Baker, 1979; Bulmer, 1981; Kerr, 1981; Offer, 2006.

vi Quotations here are from Jose Harris (2010: 22) and David Donnison (interview – 19/12/12), respectively. See also Pinker (2017) on the 'moral earnestness' (p.107) of Titmuss the 'unequivocal welfare unitarist' (p.99)

vii See also e.g. descriptive features which ran during the 1950s in *Social Service Quarterly* such as 'Social Service in Action' and 'Councils of Social Service – Finding out the Facts'.

viii Quotations from interviews David Donnison (19/12/12) and David Downes (13/1/13), respectively.

ix See e.g. Marshall, 1965; Runciman, 1966; Crosland, 1956; Robson, 1960.

x For thorough accounts of Social Policy's intellectual development over time, see Williams, 2016; Page, 2010.

xi See JUC (1979). Details of departmental name changes can also be found on the websites of UK Social Policy departments – see e.g. Nottingham, York, Oxford.

xii See also here *Street Level Bureaucrats,* the classic US political science study by Michael Lipsky (1980).

xiii Richard Titmuss (1951: 183) once described Social Administration as being 'on the one side, a modest corner of the territory of public administration and, on the other, some part of the broad acres of sociology'. See studies such as Garner (1960), Wiseman (1963), Smith (1965), Regan (1966), Saran (1967). See also Turnbull (1957) and Willson (1960) on case study work in American and British Public Administration.

xiv See for example Whyte, 1943; Becker et al, 1961.

xv See e.g. Young and Willmott, 1957, and similar work in the same period by Townsend himself (1957).

xvi Interview with Gill Bridge (6/2/13), who prior to becoming an academic undertook the LSE Diploma in Social Administration (1963-4).

xvii Interview with Howard Glennerster – 23/4/13.

xviii Interview – 6/2/13

xix Interview – 27/2/13

xx Interview with David Piachaud – 14/6/13.

xxi Interview with David Donnison – 19/12/12.

xxii In 1962 these projects included one on district nurses, one on nursing homes, one on the hearing aid service in England and one on high rise social housing (ibid).

xxiii Glennerster on the LSE experience (interview – 23/4/13) highlights a halving of spending per capita in real terms on Social Policy students between 1980 and 1995. He argues that such rendered placements unaffordable at LSE.

xxiv http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/about-q-step

xxv https://www.hope.ac.uk/undergraduatecourses/socialpolicy/

xxvi https://www.ulster.ac.uk/courses/201819/social-policy-14157#secworkplacement

xxvii xxvii Such was a concern relating to student placements even during the 1960s – correspondence with Alex Robertson (Edinburgh University) regarding his time organizing student fieldwork at Essex University.

xxviii Powell (2016) notes that 'citation classics' in the subject of Social Policy today do tend disproportionately towards being either quantitative or 'conceptual'.

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