

THE STUDENT'S COMPANION TO

SOCIAL POLICY

EDITED BY

Pete Alcock, Tina Haux,
Margaret May and Sharon Wright



FIFTH EDITION

WILEY Blackwell

The Student's Companion to Social Policy

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Introduction

This *Student's Companion to Social Policy* is a resource book that will be of practical use to students of social policy throughout their undergraduate or postgraduate study of the subject. It aims to acquaint students with the study of social policy by covering all the main themes and issues likely to be included in any curriculum in the UK and, indeed, in many other countries. Readers are introduced to current theoretical and ideological debates, historical developments, service areas, key policy issues and the broader international context in which social policy operates. Each chapter includes a short guide to further sources, which points to some of the literature that pursues the issues addressed in the chapter in more depth and also alerts readers to major web-based sources. The *Companion* will be of value to students studying social policy on its own, as part of other undergraduate or postgraduate programmes (for instance, sociology, politics, applied social science or management studies) or as part of a professional course in a related field (for instance, social care work, nursing and health studies, public and voluntary sector management or criminology).

This fifth edition of the *Companion* has been much expanded and updated from the previous editions. New sections on Devolution and Social Policy in the UK and Welfare Governance have been included, and new chapters have been added

to take account of recent policy developments and debates, and changing political and economic configurations. Existing authors have updated their contributions; and in some cases previous authors have been replaced with others leading in research and teaching in those areas.

As in the last edition, we have asked contributors to provide readers with a short bullet-point summary of key points at the beginning of each chapter and to conclude with some brief speculation on emerging issues. To provide further support for readers, as in the last edition, this fifth edition includes end of chapter review questions and is accompanied by a new dedicated website (www.wiley.com/go/alcocksocialpolicy). This provides a range of supplementary resources designed to facilitate further reading and reflection and to enable students to make the most of the text and their study of social policy. These include:

- Internet links to websites referred to in each chapter.
- Guides with internet links to key UK governmental, international and other useful resources.
- Help sheets
- Guidance on managing the main forms of assignments in social policy, including examples from the end of chapter questions.
- Careers advice.
- A glossary.

The glossary is based on and links to *The Blackwell Dictionary of Social Policy*. This is a sister volume to the *Companion*, offering short definitions of all key terms and concepts and longer discussion of major items, and, as with previous editions, we hope that readers will be able to use the two together.

There has been an expansion of the editorial tram for this fifth edition. Tina Haux has joined Pete Alcock, Margaret May and Sharon Wright. We are pleased that Tina has been able to join us, and her role has meant that the editorial process has remained much the same for this latest edition, with a spreading of the load to cover the growing scale of the book.

All the contributors to this book, both old and new, are researchers and teachers in the forefront of social policy studies in the UK. They were selected on the basis that their expertise in their particular areas would provide readers with an authoritative introduction to a range of thinking and scholarship. Because the book has been prepared as a handbook and guide, rather than as a single text that focuses on one or two main themes, not all readers will necessarily want to read it from cover to cover. Indeed, most readers are likely to use it as a source of reference for consultation; hence, the chapters have been written so that they can be read in any order, separately or in groups.

- Part I introduces students to the concepts and approaches that underpin the study of social policy. These include a brief history of the scope and development of the subject and the ways in which it is studied and researched, together with discussion of the key concepts that students are likely to encounter in their studies.
- Part II provides readers with a guide to the theoretical and ideological context of social policy. Readers are introduced to the central themes and perspectives that provide the intellectual foundations of debates about the focus and aims of the subject.
- Part III surveys key themes and issues in the historical development of social policy in the UK, including consideration of nineteenth-century welfare arrangements, the growth of state welfare in the first half of the twentieth century, and the policies of Conservative and Labour administrations over recent decades.
- Part IV examines the impact of the devolution of political powers to the separate administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Part V explores the social, political and economic context in which policies are developed and implemented, and some of the crucial challenges that they face.
- Part VI focuses on the organisation and production of social policy. The different providers of welfare are examined by looking at the five main sectors of welfare – state, commercial, occupational, voluntary and informal – setting these in the context of a brief examination of the ways in which welfare is financed and how taxation policy operates.
- Part VII considers different dimensions of the governance of welfare, including the role of local government and the European Union.
- Part VIII comprises chapters that examine the key domains of welfare service provision, with each providing up-to-date summaries of policy developments, planning and current debates.
- Part IX focuses on the provision of services to particular social groups and analyses the extent to which these groups are advantaged or disadvantaged by different aspects of policy provision.
- Part X explores the international context of social policy. There are introductory chapters on comparative analysis and policy learning and transfer, followed by a number of chapters summarising the differing policy experiences of different groups of nations across the world.

As editors we are very grateful for the work put into this volume by the contributors. The *Companion* first set out to produce a collection of chapters written by some of the most distinguished teachers and lecturers in social policy in the UK, and in this fifth edition we have followed this with an expanded range of contributions. We asked all our contributors to write in as accessible a way as possible, while introducing complex issues in a short space. Authors in social policy are no different from other authors, however; some write sharply and clearly, others are more difficult to follow and pack difficult ideas together. This collection reflects the range of styles of writing

and the array of ideological and political positions that students of social policy are likely to encounter. All the chapters, of course, also provide only a short summary of a wide range of issues and information in their area. The aim therefore is to encourage readers to investigate further and read more widely.

While we, as editors, made the difficult, and occasionally contentious, decisions about what should be included, what should be left out and who should be asked to write, we were successful in persuading many of our authors to contribute to the *Companion* because of its long-standing links with the Social Policy Association (SPA) – the professional association for academics in Social

Policy (see Appendix). We should also like to thank Justin Vaughan and Ben Thatcher at Wiley-Blackwell for their support in the production of this new edition, and the anonymous reviewers of the proposals for revision who all gave us such helpful advice. We hope that what we have produced is worthy of all this support and will continue to be of value to the social policy community as a whole. Any shortcomings in the collection as a whole are, however, our responsibility.


Pete Alcock
Tina Haux
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What is Social Policy?

Pete Alcock



Overview

- Social policy is the use of policy measures to promote the welfare of citizens and social well-being.
 - It is also the term for the academic study of these measures, having changed its name from 'social administration' to reflect a broadening concern with the theory as well as the practice of welfare arrangements.
 - The welfare reforms in the UK in the period following the Second World War were critical in establishing the context for subsequent policy development.
 - Social policy analysts adopt a range of theoretical perspectives, leading to varying conclusions about the viability and desirability of different measures and interventions
 - Much social policy has been developed by national governments, but the role of international and global agencies has become more important, as have moves to shift policy to local and community levels.
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The Subject of Social Policy

Social policy has a dual meaning. It is used to refer to the actions taken by politicians and policy-makers to introduce or amend provisions aimed at promoting individual welfare and social

well-being. Social policy is what societies do to promote welfare. However, it is also used to refer to the academic study of these policy actions and their outcomes. Students study social policy as an academic subject, perhaps in a single honours degree, or perhaps alongside other social science

subjects such as sociology or politics, or as part of professional training for social work or nursing and a wide range of careers in public, commercial and voluntary organisations. In essence, social policy is both social action and the study of it.

The later chapters in this book explore in more detail some of the key concepts and perspectives that have underpinned the study of social policy, the major issues that inform policy development and the main areas of policy practice. Much social policy analysis concerns the actions of national governments; and most of the chapters focus on the national context of the UK. However, as is discussed in Part IV, since the turn of the century much policymaking in the UK has been devolved to the separate administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and the national programmes pursued by the parliaments and assemblies there are increasingly different to the policies developed for England by the UK parliament at Westminster.

Social policy is not just a UK phenomenon, however. Most countries across the world have developed measures to promote the welfare of their citizens. Some, particularly in the developed West, follow similar patterns of public support to that found in the UK, although the organisational forms and political priorities differ significantly. In the global South and in East Asia, however, social policy often takes a very different form. The study of social policy includes the comparative analysis of these differences (and similarities) and the varying histories of policy development in countries across the world; and the chapters in Part X of this book take up some examples of this comparative and international research.

This does not just involve exploring and comparing the different models of policy developed in different countries – sometimes referred to as welfare regimes. Comparative scholars also use statistical data gathered across different countries to analyse international trends in welfare arrangements. Such data are gathered by international bodies such as the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and in Europe by the Commission of the European Union (EU); and have been used to explore to what extent social policies may be ‘converging’ on a common model, or to what extent economic pressures may be leading to reduced commitments to policy action – sometimes referred to as welfare ‘retrenchment’.

An introduction to some of these aspects of international and comparative analysis is provided in Chapter 63. And Chapter 64 explores another dimension of international policy development, the extent to which comparative analysis of different welfare regimes can be used to inform policy development in others, through ‘policy transfer’. International bodies like the OCED and EU do not just gather comparative data about social policy action, however. In the case of the EU, the Commission has the power to introduce policy measures that apply across all member states, as highlighted in Chapters 46 and 65. There are other international bodies seeking to influence policy developments on a global scale, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); and, as discussed in Chapter 71, these agencies have become more powerful and influential in shaping social policy on an international scale.

The study of social policy therefore includes not just the actions of national governments and their impacts on the citizens living in their jurisdictions, but also the comparative analysis of different welfare regimes across the world, their influences on each other, and the role of international agencies seeking to shape policy development on a global scale. Although many of the chapters in this book focus on the UK, and in many cases England only, students of social policy will need to address the wider international dimensions introduced in the later chapters. The study of social policy in the UK, however, also needs to take account of both the history of policy development in this country and changes in its analysis, for to some extent current issues and current practices are a product of that historical journey.

The Development of Social Policy

Social policy action has a long history in the UK; for instance, the first Poor Laws were introduced in 1601 at the time of Elizabeth I (see Chapter 16). However, much recent policy development, in particular, public policy, has its roots in the political and policy debates of the early twentieth century and the reforms that followed from these.

At the centre of the arguments for public action at this time was the *Fabian Society*, established in 1884 to campaign for state intervention to tackle the social problems and economic inequalities

which its members argued had failed to be addressed by the capitalist markets of nineteenth-century Britain. Leading members of the Society were Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Sidney was a civil servant who later became a Labour MP, and Beatrice served on the Poor Law Commission discussed below. The Fabians used research evidence, such as the pioneering work by Booth and Rowntree, whose research revealed that the extent and depth of poverty in the UK at the end of the nineteenth century were both serious and widespread. This challenged conservative political assumption that markets could meet the welfare needs of all; and the Fabians used it to promote policy intervention through the state to protect people where the market had failed them.

As Sidney Webb's role as a Labour MP revealed, however, the Fabians' academic arguments were closely linked to the establishment and growth of the Labour Party as the political vehicle through which policy innovation and reform through the state could be achieved. In fact, it was some time before the Labour Party gained political power, and it was the Liberal governments of the early twentieth century who introduced some of the first major state measures for social policy.

These early reforms to social policy were informed by the recommendations of a Royal Commission established in 1905 to review the *Poor Laws*, the mainstay of nineteenth-century welfare policy. The commissioners themselves could not agree on the right way forward and so they produced two separate reports:

- a *Minority* Report, which was largely the work of Beatrice Webb; and
- a *Majority* Report, which was largely the work of Helen Bosanquet, who, with her husband Bernard, was a leading figure in the Charity Organisation Society (COS), a body which coordinated voluntary action to relieve poverty.

Both reports stressed the need for reforms to improve welfare provision; but, whilst the Minority Fabian report saw the public provision of state services as the means of achieving this, the Majority COS report envisaged a continuing central role for voluntary and philanthropic activity. This debate about the balance between state and non-state provision of welfare continued to

influence the development of social policy throughout the twentieth century, as the chapters in Part III reveal; and, as is discussed in subsequent chapters, the issue of securing the appropriate mix between public and other provision remains a key element in social policy planning.

In practice, however, it was the Fabian arguments of the Minority Report that largely won the day in the development of social policy in the early twentieth century. The Liberal government of Asquith and Lloyd George in the early twentieth century introduced a range of measures to provide public resources through the state to tackle the social and economic problems identified by the Fabian researchers (as is discussed in Chapter 17). What is more, academic study and research evidence were expanded to support this, in particular, by the establishment by the Webbs of the London School of Economics (LSE) and the incorporation within it of the COS's School of Sociology to form a new Department of Social Sciences and Administration. This was the first major academic base for the study of social policy. Its first new lecturer was Clement Attlee, who became prime minister in the reforming Labour government after the Second World War; and it remains a major centre for teaching and research on social policy today.

The Welfare State and the Welfare Consensus

The welfare reforms of the early twentieth century were followed in the middle of the century by what was probably the most important period of policy reform in the UK. As mentioned, a Labour government under the leadership of Attlee was elected after the war with a manifesto commitment to introduce a range of comprehensive measures to provide for the welfare of citizens – to create what later came to be called a 'welfare state'.

This commitment had been prefigured to some extent in Beveridge's famous report on the need for comprehensive social security reform, published in 1942 and included in Labour's manifesto promises. Beveridge had written about the *Five Giant Social Evils* that had undermined British society before the war: ignorance, disease, idleness, squalor and want. He argued that it was in the interests of all citizens to remove these evils from British society, and it was the duty of the state,

as the representative body of all citizens, to act to do this.

In the years following, between 1945 and 1951, comprehensive state provision to combat each of Beveridge's evils was introduced:

- free education up to the age of 15 (later 16), to combat ignorance;
- a national health service (NHS) free at the point of use, to combat disease;
- state commitment to securing full employment, to combat idleness;
- public housing for all citizens to rent, to combat squalor;
- national insurance benefits for all in need, to combat want.

All these required the development of major state services for citizens, and they resulted in a major extension of state responsibility – and state expenditure. The reforms were not only supported by the Labour government, however; indeed, the state education plans were introduced by a Conservative member of the wartime coalition government (R. A. Butler) in 1944. And the Conservative governments that followed in the 1950s supported the spirit of the reforms and maintained their basic structure. This cross-party consensus on state welfare was so strong that it even acquired an acronym – *Butskellism* – comprising the names of the Labour Chancellor (Gaitskell) and his Conservative successor (Butler).

For Fabian social policy, therefore, the post-war welfare state could be seen as the culmination of academic and political influence on government, after which analysis and debate focused more on the problems of how to administer and improve existing state welfare programmes than on the question of whether these were appropriate mechanisms for the social promotion of well-being. However, this narrow Fabian focus within post-war social policy provision and analysis did not last for long. It was soon under challenge from other perspectives which queried both the success and the desirability of state welfare.

Theoretical Pluralism

From the 1970s onwards the focus of the study and analysis of social policy began to move

beyond the narrow confines of the Fabian welfare state and to consider both non-state forms of provision and a wider range of political and policy issues. This was symbolised most dramatically by a change (at the annual conference of the academic association in 1987) in the name of the subject from social administration to social policy, primarily because it was felt that *administration* was associated too closely with a focus on analysing the operation of existing welfare services, whereas *policy* encompassed a more general concern with the political and ideological bases of welfare provision. This change was representative of more general trends within academic and political debate to embrace a wider range of conflicting perspectives challenging the orthodoxy of Fabianism, and moved the study of social policy towards a more open theoretical pluralism in which questions of *whether* or *why* to pursue state welfare became as important as questions of *how* or *when*.

The New Left

The predominant focus of Fabianism on the success and desirability of state welfare was challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by critics on the left. Drawing on Marxist analysis of capitalist society, they argued that welfare services had not replaced the exploitative relationships of the labour market; and that, although they had provided some benefits for the poor and the working class, these services had also helped to support future capitalist development by providing a secure base for the market economy to operate. Unlike the Fabian socialists of the early twentieth century, these New Left critics did not necessarily see the further expansion of the existing state welfare base of social policy as resolving this dilemma. Indeed, for them state welfare was in a constant state of contradiction, or conflict, between the pressure to meet the welfare needs of citizens and the pressure to support the growth of capitalist markets.

The New Right

In the 1970s and 1980s rather different criticisms of state welfare began to appear from the right of the political spectrum. Right-wing proponents of free market capitalism, most notably Hayek, had

been critical of the creation of the welfare state in the 1940s, but at the time these had been marginal voices in academic and political debate. In the 1970s, as the advent of economic recession revealed some of the limitations of state welfare, these voices became both more vocal and more widely supported – especially after the move to the right of the Conservative Party following the election of Margaret Thatcher as leader in 1975. The essence of the New Right critique is that the development of extensive state welfare services is incompatible with the maintenance of a successful market economy, and that this problem will get worse as welfare expands to meet more and more social needs. For its proponents the desirability of state welfare itself is called into question.

New social movements

The failings and limitations of state welfare were also questioned in the late twentieth century from perspectives outside the traditional left/right political spectrum. Most significant here was the challenge by feminism to the unequal treatment of men and women in the development and delivery of welfare services. As feminists point out, the provision of welfare is ‘gendered’. Others have also challenged traditional analysis of state welfare to address a wider range of social divisions and social issues in analysing social policy. Anti-racists have pointed out that welfare services can be discriminatory and exclusive; disability campaigners have suggested that the needs of certain social groups can be systematically ignored; and environmentalists have argued that existing service provision is predicated upon forms of economic development which cannot be sustained.

The new pragmatism

The new radical voices that began to influence social policy towards the end of the twentieth century have widely varying, and sometimes mutually conflicting, implications. They challenged state welfare and the orthodoxy of Fabianism, but they were also critical of the New Left and the New Right. At the beginning of this century, these differing perspectives have resulted in a theoretical pluralism which has not only transformed academic study but also shifted the focus of policymaking itself. The Labour governments at

the beginning of the new century openly eschewed the policy programmes of the Fabian left and the New Right, and appealed instead to a ‘third way’ for social policy, combining private and public provision in a ‘mixed economy’ of welfare rather than a welfare state. They also argued that, rather than policy being determined by theoretical or ideological preferences, it should be based on empirical evidence of the impact of policy measures – captured in the phrase ‘what counts is what works’.

Public austerity

Following the economic recession of 2007–8 and the change of government in the 2010 general election, however, the incremental expansion in social policy that had accompanied third-way pragmatism came under challenge. Under Labour public expenditure on welfare had begun to rise (see Chapter 20), and initially this was retained at the time of recession. However, as explained in Chapter 21, the Coalition government of 2010 was committed to reducing the growing public deficit left by Labour through extensive reductions in public spending – referred to by commentators as the introduction of a new public austerity. This was defended by the Coalition as the promotion of a *Big Society* approach to social policy development, to replace the ‘big state’ commitments to public spending; and it has continued under the Conservative government elected in 2015. In practice, however, the cuts in public spending, particularly on social security benefits and tax credits, have not been accompanied by any major expansion of community and citizen-led welfare support; and by 2015 the *Big Society* rhetoric had largely been abandoned by government.

Emerging Issues: the Future of Social Policy

Contemporary social policymaking and analysis has developed from its Fabian roots and its support for the welfare state reforms of the early post-war years to encompass a wide range of diverse – and conflicting – theoretical debates about both the value and the success of public welfare provision and a wider conceptualisation of the role of local and global action as well as

national politics in policymaking. Social policy is now characterised by theoretical and geographical pluralism. It is also characterised by ‘welfare pluralism’: the recognition that state provision is only one feature of a broader mixture of differing forms and levels of welfare service. This is sometimes referred to as the shift from the *welfare state* to the *welfare mix*.

Quite how this mix will continue to evolve in the future is always hard to predict, although some broad trends are likely to continue to be influential both in policymaking and implementation and its analysis. In particular, as the rest of the later chapters in this book suggest, there are likely to be further moves:

- away from centralised public services of the welfare state towards partnerships between public and other welfare providers, and a focus on the role of the state as a contractor, a subsidiser or a regulator of the actions of others;
- away from the ‘provider culture’ focus on who delivers welfare services, towards a greater emphasis on the role of citizens and users in defining and delivering welfare, including the transfer of power to service users through mechanisms such as personal budgets and co-production and greater reliance on self-provision;
- towards a ‘hollowing out’ of the welfare state to include a greater emphasis on the role of global forces and global actors in shaping social policy, and to address the impact of devolution on policymaking and the pressures for greater localism in the development and delivery of welfare services, even down to neighbourhood level.

Guide to Further Sources

There are no textbooks dealing with the history and development of the study of social policy, but M. Bulmer, J. Lewis and D. Piachaud (eds) (1989), *The Goals of Social Policy*, London: Unwin Hyman, is an interesting, if dated, review and history of the work of the leading department at the LSE. And an overview of the crucial role of collective investment in welfare as the core of social policy can be found in P. Alcock (2016),

Why We Need Welfare: Collective Action for the Common Good, Bristol: Policy Press.

A number of authors have sought to provide introductory guides to the subject. The most well established is M. Hill and Z. Irving (2009), *Understanding Social Policy*, 8th edn, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, which provides a service-based review of welfare policy. P. Alcock, with M. May (2014), *Social Policy in Britain*, 4th edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave, takes a broader approach covering key questions of structure, context and issues, and also includes extensive coverage of the impact of devolution in the UK on social policy. J. Baldock, L. Mitton, N. Manning and S. Vickerstaff (eds) (2011), *Social Policy*, 4th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, is a collection covering both contextual issues and service areas.

F. Castles, S. Leibfried, J. Lewis, H. Obinger and C. Pierson (eds) (2010), *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, is an extensive collection on the international and comparative analysis of social policy. P. Alcock and M. Powell (eds) (2011), *Welfare Theory and Development*, 4 vols, London: Sage, is an international collection of previously published key texts. The Policy Press publishes a major series of textbooks on social policy in their *Understanding Welfare* series, edited by Saul Becker. Finally, the Social Policy Association and the Policy Press produce an annual collection of topical essays, *Social Policy Review*.

A useful website providing introductory material on social policy is maintained by Paul Spicker at: www.spicker.uk.

Review and Assignment Questions

- 1 What is *Fabianism* and how did it influence the development of social policy in the twentieth century?
- 2 What was *Butskellism* and how did it shape post-war policy development in the UK?
- 3 To what extent did the New Left and New Right agree that the ‘welfare state’ had failed?
- 4 What is *welfare pluralism* and how accurately does it describe current social policy planning?
- 5 Do we still have a ‘welfare state’ in the UK?