Introduction:
Themed Section: Partnerships, Governance and Citizenship

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The issue of 'joined up' governance and partnership working (between statutory partners, between the state and the voluntary sector and between the state and the private sector) is one which currently occupies the attention of policy makers and academics across mixed-liberal welfare states such as the European Union, Nordic, Commonwealth and North American welfare regimes (Geddes and Benington, 2001; Considine and Lewis, 2003; Bradford, 2003; Ovretveit, 2003). Many of these states, the UK included, are attempting to tackle the issues of growing demands for services, the perceived ineffectiveness and inefficiency of governments in responding to welfare need and the 'hollowing out' of the state that is a feature of modern mixed-liberal welfare states, particularly those which are attempting to find a 'Third Way' between socialist bureaucracies and market-driven liberalism (Giddens, 1998). The policy response, both in the UK and internationally, has been to encourage 'partnership' working between the various arms of the state, and between the state and the private and voluntary sector, as well as emphasizing 'partnership' working between the state and local users and communities.

There therefore exists a myriad of literature on the governance of partnership working (recent examples include Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Glendinning, Powell and Rummery, 2002), and considerable national and international interest in the social policy community in the development and sustainability of inter-organisational partnerships. There is a lot of empirical and theoretical work which examines what partnerships are, how they work, what makes them fail and succeed, and some of this literature has raised questions about issues of governance (such as accountability, sustainability and responsiveness) (see for example Powell *et al.*, 2001; Glendinning, 2002; Newman *et al.*, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2003).

However, both the policy impetus and the academic debate surrounding welfare partnerships has focused largely on inter-organisational concerns, thus leaving under-developed the issues of governance, which might concern welfare users, such as user and community participation, accountability and user outcomes. It has also left largely under-developed the linked issues concerning the social rights of citizens: the effect welfare partnerships have, or might have, on the 'non-political capacities of citizens which derive from the social resources they command and to which they have access' (Barbalet, 1988: 1). Turner points out that citizenship is concerned with both the 'content of social rights and obligations' and the 'various social arrangements whereby . . . benefits are distributed to different sectors of society' (Turner, 1993: 2–3). Therefore, the way in which citizens gain access to resources to meet their needs, the way in which they participate (or do not) in the governance of welfare partnerships, and the way in which relations between individuals, communities and the state are affected by welfare partnerships are crucial questions not just for the governance of welfare, but need addressing in order to understand the role of citizenship in the welfare state.

Moreover, whilst policy makers have acted largely on the assumption that supporting welfare partnerships will, *per se*, lead to improved outcomes for users and communities, this assumption is (a) as yet unsupported by any large body of empirical work and (b) predicated on the assumption that the failure of the welfare state to respond adequately to need is down to its failure to work in partnership. Within the field of social policy there is therefore a need to address some of the empirical and theoretical gaps in the literature on partnerships, governance and citizenship. Work is needed which (a) addresses the issue of the lack of evidence for the *a priori* assertion that welfare partnerships lead to improved outcomes for users and (b) addresses the underdevelopment of empirical and theoretical work linking the organisational governance issues of welfare partnerships to the governance and citizenship issues concerning users and communities.

This themed section of *Social Policy and Society* will address some of the gaps in the theoretical and empirical literature in this field. Bob Hudson and Perri 6 and colleagues examine the issues of welfare partnerships and user outcomes, Hudson looking at children's services and 6 *et al*. at mental health services. Ruth Young examines the issue of user involvement in a time of great turbulence in health and social care partnerships, drawing extensively on theoretically informed empirical evaluations in these areas. Marilyn Taylor and Vivien Lowndes and colleagues address the issue of community participation and consultation, again drawing extensively on theoretically informed empirical work in their areas. The article by Lowndes and colleagues in particular is of interest to practitioners as well as academic audiences. In articles that are more theoretically driven but still rooted in the social policy empiricist traditions, Kirstein Rummery considers the citizenship issues raised by welfare partnerships under New Labour, and Martin Powell and Bernard Dowling examine the conceptual and theoretical issues of partnerships. Finally, Catherine Durose and Kirstein Rummery review four of the key academic pieces about governance generally, and the way in which it relates to social policy and partnership working in particular, and Tessa Brannan lists some useful internet and print-based resources in this area. It is hoped that this edition of the journal will contribute to the debate about welfare partnerships in a way that is both informed and critical.

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