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Back to the future? What we can learn from the 2nd generation of Social Policy academics

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Abstract

Topics such as climate change, diversity and inequality are likely to dominate the future of Social Policy. This is also a time of a generational change in Social Policy.

In this paper I will address the questions of the future challenges for Social Policy by mapping the trajectories of the second generation of Social Policy Academics. There is much to learn from this generation such as the importance of epistemic communities, of mentoring and sustained engagement with policy-makers. However, the argument put forward in this paper is that Social Policy as it developed into an academic subject from the 1960s lost the connection to policy-makers due to expanding outside London; focusing on establishing social policy as an academic subject, academic careers and moving into comparative Social Policy. One effect of this is that an explicit focus on policy innovation and design has gone missing. Instead, this space in the policy landscape has been claimed by think tanks that continue to be highly successful in influencing government policy. A re-discovery of policy design as a key part of Social Policy together with the other lessons from this generation will be needed if we want to tackle the big challenges of tomorrow.

Keywords: Social Policy; Titmus; Impact

Introduction

Social Policy as a discipline shares certain values: namely, that it has an applied, policy-oriented focus, a desire to make a positive impact on society and a commitment to engaging beyond academia (Smith and Stewart, 2017; Alcock, 2003). Influencing the way social policy is designed and implemented has always been one of the core aims of social policy scholars and active engagement in politics either in government or lobby groups is common (Page, 2010; see also Bastow et al., 2014). Both the UK welfare state and social policy as an academic discipline are still considered front-runners in many parts of the world (see Powell, 2006; Haux, 2019). This has meant that social policy academics have been sought after as advisors to governments and teachers to students from other countries. As a discipline Social Policy has performed very well in the impact case studies of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (Smith and

Stewart, 2017). Impact in this context referred to "*an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia*" (Ref2014).

Yet, when speaking to fifteen 2nd generation social policy professors in 2013/14, there was a strong sense of discomfort with the idea of measuring impact and a clear sense of not having had much impact as academics themselves. This 2nd generation refers to the group of academics who came after the founders of Social Policy in the UK – namely, Titmuss, Townsend and Abel-Smith – and who entered academia in the late 1960s/early 1970s. This was surprising as the sample had been specifically selected as having been in senior academic positions and soon after or near retirement at the point of interview and, thus, able to reflect on their career as a whole. Furthermore, these academics would have been established experts during the time of the New Labour governments (1997 to 2010), which made evidence-based-policy-making one of their key planks of governing and almost all were part of impact case studies submitted to the 2014REF.

What transpired is that having "impact" has a particular meaning for this generation of social policy academics. Firstly, impact for them means developing or changing policy either at local, national or international level. Secondly, impact means lasting change rather than temporary victories and impact also refers to scale, e.g. impact in this interpretation would be the abolition of child poverty rather than a reduction. For many, the point of comparison was the closeness and influence the first generation of social policy academics had within Whitehall in the 1950s and 1960s.

There are now a number of articles about Social Policy as a discipline (see Wilding 2009; Glennerster, 2009; Powell, 2006; Exley, 2019; Williams, 2016). The first three focus on the tension and difference between Social Policy and Social Administrations as disciplinary foci while Williams (2016) charts the development of the discipline more broadly. This article does not focus on the content or approach of Social Policy but on the impact the work has had in terms of informing policy-making over the past fifty years and what that means for the discipline going forward. It will trace some of the reasons for the apparent loss of impact of this generation by charting an interwoven history of some of the people, institutions and the discipline from the 1940s to the present day. Given that the chosen format is an article rather than a longer formar, this history is necessarily selective and is very much driven by the qualitative interviews carried out with 15 academics from the 2nd generation.

Methodology

The work and influence of the first generation of social policy scholars such as Titmuss, Abel-Smith and Townsend is the subject of many books and articles

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(e.g. on Titmuss' life and work see Bulmer et al., 1989, Alcock et al., 2001; Dahrendorf, 1995). However, the professional biographies and influence of the 2nd generation of scholars who followed in the footsteps of Titmuss and his colleagues have rarely been documented. Scholars of this generation, mostly born in the 1940s, have now either retired or are likely to retire soon. The reasons for focusing on this generation of academics are: the development of social policy as an academic discipline closely linked to a number of more general trends such as the expansion of Higher Education in the 1960s; the radical cut in funding for social science in the 1980s; and the popularity of "evidence" under the previous Labour government. The focus of the social policy itself has changed during the last 60 years driving and driven by the changes of the welfare state itself as well as our understanding of its effect (Page, 2010) and many scholars of this 2nd generation were instrumental in the broadening of how social policy was analysed, e.g. including the impact of welfare provision on gender and class (ibid) and the internationalisation and globalisation of social policy (Wilding, 2009; Glennerster, 2009).

The design of the study is loosely based on Halsey's (2004) study of a group of sociologists. 15 qualitative interviews with academics from the 2nd generation of social policy scholars have been carried out in 2013/14 (see Haux (2019) for a fuller description of the study). This captures roughly half the academics in the generation. Respondents have been sampled to encompass a range of institutions, locations, gender and topics. The original aim had been to talk to everyone but after 15 interviews saturation was reached across a number of topics.

The early days: Titmuss, Abel-Smith, Townsend and Jones

Richard Titmuss is often seen as the founding figure in Social Policy both in terms of its intellectual and moral focus but also in terms of becoming the first Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1948. Titmuss built up a group of colleagues and later collaborators to work with him such as Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend (Bulmer et al. 1989; Dahrendorf 1995). At the time, ''the main objective of the discipline . . . was the improvement of life in Britain through the study of social needs and problems, formulation of proposals for reform and assessment of the effectiveness of social services on meeting need.' (Mishra 1989; 67). In Titmuss' obituary, Abel-Smith wrote '*Titmuss taught us that the core of Social Policy was to be found in the analysis of social values – past and present. He also taught us that we should not attempt to theorize unless and until we had a solid and compassionate comprehension of all the relevant facts. . . . the most important facts were not what any theory led us to expect about them but the impact of services and policies on individuals and families. What actually happened to consumers of services as*

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they perceived it was the most important fact of all.' (Abel-Smith, 1973, i; see also Glennerster, 2014; Welshman, 2004; Deacon, 2007; Donnison, 1979), the methodological approach mostly consisted of '*observational fieldwork inside welfare institutions*' (Exley, 2019, p. 42) and has been referred to as "*administrative anthropology*" (Glennerster, 1988). In other words, Social Policy at the time had a meleorist, problem centred and empirical approach. Ideologically, key influences were Fabian Socialism and a sense of collectivism triumphing over individualism (Mishra 1989) with immediate post-war years examples of a huge expansion/establishment of the welfare state. Rose argues that 'at its height the Titmuss paradigm ruled unchallenged over the construction of Social Policy' (1981; 484). Shortly before his death Titmuss set up the Journal of Social Policy focussing on "historical and theoretical analysis of Social Policy and with processes and problems in the implementation of Social Policy at both national and local levels" (JSP, 1972, i).

Moving into/starting out in Social Policy

It is fair to say that this interpretation of Social Policy reflected that of the first generation of Social Policy academics and very much shaped the outlook of the 2nd generation of interest here, whether they were in accordance or in opposition. However, the majority of the respondents did not encounter the 1st generation until their postgraduate degrees. The respondents in the sample went to a diverse range of universities and read a wide range of mostly Social Science subjects for their undergraduate degrees, which means they came to Social Policy later in their studies with different theoretical or methodological understandings. Respondents mentioned a number of reasons for becoming interested in Social Policy during their undergraduate degrees such as inspiring lecturers, books that chimed with personal experience (Education of the Working Classes by Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden) as well as their own political engagement. Being actively politically engaged was a hallmark of this generation with almost everyone in the sample mentioning activism of some kind during their undergraduate years. This engagement could mean being part of the social movement and/or being a member of the local child poverty action group.

At postgraduate level the gravitation towards the LSE, Essex and York was manifest and reflects the geographical concentration of Social Policy at the time. The LSE was for a long time the only university teaching Social Administration and still the most important one at the time. However, Peter Townsend first went to Essex and was later joined there by David Donnison and Adrian Sinfield as lecturers. Also, Jonathan Bradshaw, having studied with Kathleen Jones, started teaching at York and in his first year taught a whole group of students, such as Peter Taylor-Gooby and Caroline Glendinning,

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Nick Manning, Gary Craig and Sally Baldwin, who went on to become professors in Social Policy. Some of their contemporaries went into politics such as Keith Bradley and Malcolm Wicks. The concentration of post-graduate Social Policy places among three Universities meant that now this cohort would graduate well-connected with each other and with the first generation.

The expansion of universities and student numbers in the late 1960s leading to a doubling in student numbers and universities (among others Perkin, 2007) brought new opportunities and, after periods as research assistants in various places, offers of first lectureships for respondents came in places such as Leeds, Sheffield Hallam, North West London Polytechnic, Plymouth Polytechnic, the University of Kent, Manchester and Warwick, i.e. outside London and, often, at polytechnics. Frequently the initial posts were in different departments and disciplines such as geography, socio-legal studies, social and community work and sociology. Social Policy and administration then emerged initially as individual modules in those departments before becoming a degree programme of its own. For some moving into academia was a considered move and a rejection of other options. For others, it happened almost by accident. This group mention 'not belonging', or 'looking in', as a feeling present throughout their career. This was partly due to a perceived lack of expertise as many had not done their undergraduate degree in Social Policy and/or not having PhD. While the diversity of backgrounds and journeys into academia is similar to academics in other 'new' subjects (see accounts of Criminology – see Rafter, 2012), it is likely to have been at odds with the other Social Sciences such as Sociology and Economics and further deepened the sense of being impostors.

Activism and academia

Talking about the academic work of this generation only tells half the story I found. This was a generation that was coming from activism to Social Policy and in a number of ways continued to combine the two as part of their careers, be it on a local national or international level. Early activism was linked to fights against poverty for a substantial group.

> '*We formed a Child Poverty Action Group branch in Colchester, where the university was, in my second or third year. And I was the secretary of this. And we used to run a Welfare Rights stall, it was a great period for that kind of actions I support. And I suppose, this has been one of the most influential things for me, and which dictated the first part of my research career, because it was actually working with people. And I did that for quite a long time, and I become the national expert on heating additions for a year or so. But that was very influential, then I also got involved with the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) nationally and so on.*' (Academic A).

Similarly, there was a close link between the local CPAG group set up in York and the academics there, which led to involvement at the national committee

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later on. CPAG had famously been founded after the publication of The Poor and The Poorest by Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith on the 23rd of December 1965 though the foundations were laid by the Social and Economic Affairs Committee and, in particular, one of its members Harriet Wilson, having herself researched family poverty (see history of CPAG). Poverty and social security were key topics for the 2nd generation and much of their work was focussed in this area.

However, there was another group far more drawn to Marxism and Feminism who saw themselves '*as revolutionaries, as both in and against the state*' (Academic B) similar in that sense to the social workers they were teaching. This led among other things to the founding of Case Con – revolutionary magazine for social workers, to taking job in polytechnics as to move away from teaching middle class students about Social Policy (Academic C). From being involved in the Public Sector Workers Alliance, the academics moved to being '*very active, you know, in our neighbourhoods. We set up a women's health centre, we set up a women's refuge and we set up a women's discussion groups, where we used, you know, used our knowledge for people to kind of learn about health services*' (Academic D). There was a deliberate demarcation from the outlook and focus of the Titmuss' inspired Social Policy and part of a broader critique of Social Policy as atheoretical, empiristic, too narrowly focussed on social services, infused by Fabianism and too enamoured with the state as a force for good (among others Mishra 1989). Members of this group went on to set up the journal Critical Social Policy in 1981 (see below) and published influential books on the impact of Social Policy on women, race and class. The editorial note of Critical Social Policy at 40 states that the journal's aims are *'grounded in socialist, feminist, anti-racist and radical perspectives relating to the experiences of people struggling within or against the state*' (Taylor, 2020, p.3). The editorial collective at the time included Pete Alcock, Lesley Doyal, Ian Gough and Peter Taylor-Gooby (Powell, 2006).

For the other group, activism came alongside or was helped by their mentors. The close working relationship Titmuss had with policy-makers in Whitehall across a number of departments (Timmins, 1995; Oakley, 2014) to the point that he was described to be '*in and out of ministers' offices*' by a junior colleague at the time (interview data) has been described elsewhere (Haux, 2019). This level of access and influence enjoyed by Titmuss, Abel-Smith and Townsend has shaped the expectations of Social Policy scholars for generations to come (ibid). This was linked also to their practical experience working alongside their mentors setting up the Disability Alliance or learning how to raise public awareness for a subject: '*You know, I use all the academic outlets under the sun from a very early age – I mean the first published piece I had was a co-article with Peter (Townsend) on the thalidomide response, so he taught me the process of campaigning.*' (Academic E). Early experiences of researching

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the experience of unemployment led to a lifelong interest in the topic and the establishment of the Unemployment Unit (Academic F).

At this point then, the 2nd generation were all in permanent jobs in academia and establishing themselves through the publication of books and articles and probably expecting to have influence and impact on government policy over the coming years.

The 1980s and early 90s: Thatcher and beyond or the wilderness years

Said permanent jobs in universities were mostly outside London. Having moved outside of London, away from the LSE, mattered as policy-makers at the time were concentrated in London. Train travel would have been slower and less frequent then compared to now. Sally Sheard (2014) writes in her biography of Brian Abel-Smith academics based in the North of England were not invited to committees as they would not be able to attend regularly.

Also, the academics were attending to the task of setting up a new discipline, which included editing journals, setting up the Learned Society and writing books. The struggle to become recognised as an academic discipline in its own right alongside the older disciplines such as Sociology, Economics and Political Science was important at the time and would have been shared with other new disciplines such as Criminology. At the same time the discipline was maturing and diversifying. As discussed above, the split between traditional Social Policy scholars and those ascribing to Critical Social Policy approaches manifested itself in the new journal set up with that name. Furthermore, the focus shifted from policy design and implementation to analysis of policy outcomes, which contributed to the change in name from Social Policy Administration to Social Policy Association (see Wilding, 2009; Glennerster, 2009).

The political climate had changed with the Conservatives starting their long period of office, which lasted from 1979 to 1997. Discussions about the crisis of the welfare state continued and shaped by arguments from the New Right firmly bringing discourses around deservingness and welfare scroungers back to the top of the political agenda. Hopes of influencing governments and shaping policy the way it had been possible in the expansionist time of the 1950s and 1960s diminished. Therefore, engagement with policy-makers partly became about fighting rear-guard action and preventing the worst (Academic G). Academics continued to work with issue groups and later informed some of the thinking of the incoming New Labour government. However, for others it was a time when academics of this generation connected with their peers internationally – as one respondent put it, *'most of the men moved off into comparative Social Policy'* (Academic D).

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What started as international workshops often turned into long standing collaborations and advisor roles for national governments or international organisations leading to a more international outlook of the disciplines as evident by the adding of journals such as the Journal of European Policy in 1991 and, later on, Global Social Policy in 2001 and Journal for International and Comparative Social Policy (2013). The Journal of European Social Policy was set up by Graham Room with Jens Alber, Stein Kuhnle and Guy Standing as fellow editorial board members and its focus was changes in social welfare across Europe, the governance of Europe, the question of convergence and divergence and, finally, methodological approaches to comparative analysis. (see editorial) Global Social Policy was initiated by Bob Deacon and aimed to '*advance the understanding of the impact of globalization upon Social Policy and Social development. The journal will analyse the contribution of a range of international actors to Social Policy and Social development discourse and practice, and encourage discussion of the implications for Social Policy of the dynamics of the global economy*.' (GSP, 2001; 5).

Gender did not only feature as an important dimension of the work of the academics of their generation, it also shaped their work practices and opportunities. Social Policy can generally be regarded as a more inclusive discipline with a higher proportion of female (senior) academics (Haux, 2019) but also making later entries into academia possible. However, this does not mean that things were equal. Some of the women interviewed talked about typically female experiences of working part-time to look after the children, about being less geographically mobile and of following their partners. The following quote exposes how gender in work and the private life intersected within Social Policy: '*just as feminism and later anti-racism began to make inroads into Social Policy I thought it was not surprising at all that most of the men moved off into Comparative Social Policy, because that was still a stronghold or becoming a stronghold with Esping-Anderson's work of the – of the old sort of political economy view. … And I just thought it was so interesting, we were left with the sort of the national and the micro and then -. And also, they all moved off at that time because they could, you know? And it – it took the feminists quite a long time to catch up with – because we weren't floating out to visit different countries because we'd got little kids, you know?*' (Academic D).

As well as expanding their geographical focus towards Europe and, later, East Asia, the careers of this generation kept progressing. Many were now Head of Departments or had secured large research grants, which meant setting up research centres and recruiting staff. This kept them further bound to their institutions and locations and away from Westminster (see also Smith, 2010).

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The rise of the think tanks

There is some debate as to the nature and role of think tanks but for the purpose of this article, I shall use Carole Weiss' definition of "organisations of policy analysis". The number of think tanks being established grew substantially in the 1970s and 1980s and Balls and Exley argues that '*the proliferation of policy think tanks and more broadly the rise of 'policy networks' can be viewed as indicative of important global transformations in the nature of the state*' and policy-making (2010, 151). The Conservative government at the time was said to have had close links to a number of those think tanks such as the Institute for Economic Affairs (founded in 1955), the Centre for Policy Studies (1974) and the Adam Smith Institute (1977). Similarly, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR – 1988) and Demos (1993) were close to the subsequent New Labour administrations (Denham and Garnett 1996). The barriers of academics to influence on policy-makers are well established. They include working to different time-spans, focussing on depth rather than practical solution to broader problems, using different language and being regarded as outsiders and therefore not trusted (see Cairney, 2016 among others). Much of this does not apply to think tanks as '*unlike universities, think tank-researchers are free of the burdens of academic publishing, teaching and the rigors of applying for peer-reviewed research grants. They can usually respond much faster than university-based policy analysts*' and work more easily across disciplines (Talbot and Talbot, 2019).

There were two additional elements that make the proliferation of think tanks important in this context. These are what think tanks focussed on and who was in them. Pautz (2020) argues that '*think tanks are active at different "moments" in the policymaking process .... (they are) "policy entrepreneurs" who are most likely to have influence during the moments of problem framing, the search for policy solutions, and the promotion of specific solutions to policymakers and the public.*'. Finally, Ball and Exley (2010 – see also Arshed, 2017) demonstrate the interconnectedness of policy actors working in think tanks in the UK and MPs who would have been to university together and then moved between different organisations. Thus, think tanks would often be run by former or future MPs and staffed by people who either had been or would become special advisors. Thus, it was much easier to be speaking the same language, to understand the priorities and timescales but also to be trusted, when actors had those personal connections.

Second generation Social Policy academics as outlined above had been very active in setting up and supporting issue-based groups such as the Child Poverty Action Group or the Disability Alliance. However, they did not tend to be involved/work in think tanks, at least not in the 1980s and early 90s. This is partly due to the different pace and focus of think tanks as discussed, the move away from London of most academics and thus not being networked and the

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discipline moving increasingly towards analysis of existing policies rather than developing new approaches. Therefore, Social Policy Academics moved increasingly to the sidelines of policy-making/policy innovation discussions.

Evidence-based policy-making and impact

Much has been written about the relationship between policy-making and researchers during the New Labour governments (1997–2010). The New Labour governments were more open to and engaged with academics than previous generations and the 2nd generation of Social Policy academics would now all be senior academics and very well established in their field. Therefore, there was an expectation that they would not be called upon to advise government ministers the way their mentors had been. And academics of the 2nd generation did not have substantial influence on policy-making at the time. Child poverty was high on the agenda of the New Labour governments, which had been a longstanding concern of numerous members of this cohort. Therefore, 2nd generation academics were consulted in the initial setting of the child poverty targets (see interviews). Furthermore, academics from this generation broadened the understanding and measurement of child poverty by developing the concept of child well-being together with international colleagues. And, yet, experiences such as the following: "*I was saying this in, you know, '78, '82, nobody took any notice. When you are saying something that is in the spirit of what they want to do, I mean, I got a letter which I was terribly chuffed with at the time, positive impact of how – in about '98, '99, got this thing from Blair because we all worked on the speech that announced the aspiration to abolish child poverty, and I got this letter from Blair saying, "I really enjoyed this, I thought this was really interesting, this has really shaken my thinking on this". And, of course, it is complete cobblers, I mean he was instinctively pro New Deal and, you know, this was perfect because this was some sort of academic rationale about conditionality*.' (Academic G).

Similarly, another experience suggests '*a select group of us were chosen to go and listen to … key advisors . . . .and they came to tell us academics . . . "okay, we are going to talk to academics, this is going to be a new turn, we are going to talk, we are going to listen to what you have to say, but only if you tell us what you want to know." And I was, I was shocked I was shocked at the arrogance of them and I – this was the message, we don't want to hear any criticism, right?*' (Academic D).

For some others there was a sense that a generation had been skipped, by the time policy-makers were ready to engage with academics again. Altogether therefore, the involvement of academics of the 2nd generation during the New Labour years presents a mixed picture. A few individuals worked very closely with government on policy evaluations and established close links to politicians,

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think tanks and advisors. Others in this group had moved off into working on different policy jurisdictions and/or worked on topics or approaches that were not of interest to a government such as focussing on policy governance internationally.

Alongside this development, Social Policy as an academic discipline continued to develop and a book series Understanding welfare: Social issues, policy and practice was launched explaining key concepts of Social Policy, mostly to students. The titles give a good indication of the breadth of the subject ranging from social security, social care, the cost of welfare, community to disability and race and ethnicity, but also including Global Social Policy and research methods as well as more theoretical contributions on human need and citizenship. The Students' Companion to Social Policy was first published in 1997 as a guide for first year students and is now in its fifth edition. In other words, there was a clear sense of producing books about the discipline for students. Interestingly, neither the series nor the Companion covers policy ideas or innovation, thereby both reflecting and shaping the Social Policy curriculum.

What does that all have to do with today?

Social Policy today incorporates a much broader set of theoretical perspectives than ever before (Williams, 2016) and also covers a much broader range of topics such as gender, race, policy governance, comparative and international Social Policy, possibly too broad (Wilding, 2009). More recent expansions include LGBTQ+ and climate change. Social Policy performed very well on impact in the 2014REF, better than the other Social Sciences, which has increased the standing of the disciplines as a whole as well as individual academics within their institutions. In many ways, something that had for so long been a focus of Social Policy academics is now officially recognised and measured and has, therefore, gained academic currency. The now widespread use of social media as a forum of news exchange for academics that is also used by journalists has made personal networks less important and means dissemination can be achieved more easily as it does not require additional funding and is used particularly effectively by younger academics. However, all of the above has led to the rise of 'impact entrepreneurs' and notions of performing impact with all the aforementioned difficulties of defining and measuring impact applying here as well.

The Impact Case Studies from the REF2014 (2021) have shown the long-standing engagement of many academics with policy-makers and the voluntary sector. These collaborations have been further encouraged by research funders, until recently, have increasingly asked for impact statements, requiring advisory boards to be part of research proposals as well as letters of support from organisations. Similarly, a number of government departments are now

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routinely including academics in knowledge exchange and have started funding initiatives to bring in academics to do research of their administrative data. All of this has helped to establish and consolidate relationships between academics, government and voluntary organisations. However, these conversations continue to mostly be about the design and effect of existing policies rather than new policies (Haux, 2019). This domain continues to be occupied by think tanks.

And moving right to the present: a Conservative government has presided over ten years of social austerity that have left deep ruptures in the welfare state, which have been further exposed by the pandemic. The insufficiency of Universal Credit and the precarity of being on zero hour contracts, which prohibits savings or financial security more generally, has led to a sharp increase in the use of food banks. Similarly, said working conditions together with the low rate of sick pay have made it difficult for people to self-isolate after a positive Covid test. Research funders have reacted rapidly and made substantial amounts of funding available, so that the impact of the pandemic on different groups in the short and medium term will be better documented than ever before (Haux, 2019) and projects s uch as CovidRealities capturing the lived experiences of families on the breadline and Welfare at a Distance capturing the experience of (new) Universal Credit claimants during the pandemic are very good examples of such policy-relevant research.

The current increased interest in popular science books is something that could benefit Social Policy. Powell makes the point that many of the earlier books written by Social Policy academics were published by Penguin and written with a general audience in mind such as The Gift Relationship by Titmuss but also, notably, The Last Refuge by Peter Townsend, which attracted much praise in broadsheet newspapers at the time (according to Richard Crossman writing in the New Statesmen it '*combines the impact of a Dickensian novel with the detachment of social science*' (cited in Powell, 2006, p.247). This is a hard act to follow but many of the topics that academics study now such as the gig economy, lived experience of poverty or work/life balance policies lend themselves to popular books and other ways of communicating more directly with the public.

A number of commentators have speculated whether we need a new Beveridge (Kelly, 2021; Symons, 2019). The argument being that the challenges posed by the pandemic and the response by the government to get involved is comparable to the Second World War. The pandemic has exposed poverty and inequality to the public in a way not seen before. In particular, the wide-ranging effects of poverty on children have become visible and attracted public sympathy. The Black Lives Matter movement has continued to gather momentum during the pandemic and has thrown the spotlight on the barriers and discrimination of Black and Minority Ethnic Groups is this country and

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beyond. The ongoing objectification of women has also been highlighted over the past five years and the pandemic exposed but also worsened existing gender inequalities within the household. The threat of climate change requires new thinking that very much draws on Social Policy concepts such as human need, equality, risk, insurance, welfare and solidarity.

In other words, familiar as well as new Social Policy topics are very much at the forefront of policy-making today. It feels that we are at a juncture where policy ideas and innovation need to and just might be heard. However, in order for us to be involved as individuals and as a discipline we need to be ambitious and to focus on policy design. The discipline has excelled in capturing the experiences and effects of welfare provision for a broad range of groups and that analysis has shaped and improved existing policies. It is time now to add policy design back to the core activities of the discipline. In order to do that, I suggest three routes:

1) Review the curriculum at Universities for it to include policy innovation and design. By this I mean challenging students to identify policy problems and to propose policy responses.
2) Think ambitiously: thinking on the scale of a Beveridge report. UBI is one, but really the only, example of more ambitious thinking.
3) Collaborate with (international) think tanks, have internships and guest lectureships/sabbaticals

However, in addition to all that, now is the time to get back to the origins in the sense of getting involved in policy discussions from the start. To start talking regularly to think tanks, special advisers and civil servants working on new policies (i.e. not the researchers) and to suggest ambitious plans for new ways of imagining social security and social welfare in the 21st century.

Conflict of interest/s

There is no conflict of interest.

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