A Comparison of Youth Policy in England and Wales under New Labour

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Although there has been a divergence in the development of youth policy across the UK, no country comparisons have been undertaken and a gap exists in the literature. This article focuses on the emergence of youth policy in England and Wales under New Labour (1997–2010), providing a cross-national comparison of policy developments in both countries. It critically explores the impact of the context for policy development and the policy content of both countries' key youth policies. The research found significant differences between the two, despite their common goals, with implications for future policy makers. This article identifies these differences, and the key similarities, providing a theoretical understanding of them and indicating lessons to inform future youth policy.

Keywords: Youth policy, England, Wales, comparative research, New Labour.

Introduction

In the current economic, political and social crisis, with major cuts to welfare and provision for young people, developing coherent and usable youth policy that understands the diversity of youth experiences in the UK is crucial. Evaluating the development of youth policy across the UK in recent decades is important to this, to understand how youth policy has progressed to its position today and to identify lessons for the future. Approaches to youth policy across the home nations have varied considerably, in particular between England and its Celtic neighbours. Through a comprehensive policy review, this article undertakes a comparison of youth policy between England and Wales. This aims to understand the implications of the context and content of policy, development and implementation within a wider grand narrative of youth policy under New Labour.[1] A number of key theoretical issues are explored, which provide the structural framework for the article, including: progressive universalism, individualism versus a rights-based approach, age fragmentation of policies and services, the role of youth work and young people's participation. These issues permeate wider youth policy debates at an international level, in particular across Europe, during an era of widespread austerity and youth unemployment.

The starting point for this comparative analysis is the problematic conceptualisation of 'youth policy' itself. Williamson (2002: 5) outlines this definitional challenge: 'The concept of "youth policy", while broadly accepted throughout the world as a necessary dimension of public policy, remains unclear and contested in relation to both its breadth and depth'. '"Youth policies" are prescriptions and plans designed to help young people and to manage the transitions from childhood to adulthood' (Coles, 1995: 2), some of which have clear age parameters, the most usual of which is up to eighteen, such as the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) framework. Broad conceptions of youth policies include those that are targeted at and affect young people, all of which require analysis across policy domains, between social groups of young people and at different levels of administration (Williamson, 2002: 14). In the UK, such policies often encompass education, child protection, youth offending and health, amongst other welfare issues. Youth policy can therefore broadly be defined as social policy that addresses the needs, rights and interests of young people. However, as a narrower definition, the article will focus on the key policies created to provide support services to young people in England and Wales and referred to by the respective governments as their 'flagship' or overarching 'youth policy', namely 'Extending Entitlement' in Wales and 'Connexions' and 'Youth Matters' in England. During the period under analysis (1997–2010), youth policy turned its attention to young people who were at risk of, or experiencing, 'social exclusion'.

Methodology

Comparative social policy has focused primarily on youth justice, education or youth unemployment policies. This research aimed to address a gap in the literature and understanding by analysing the context and content of youth policy in England and Wales through a comparison of the two. The research sought to address several key questions, including the extent to which the content of youth policy developed differently in England and Wales? How has the context within each country shaped policy? What might be learnt from the policy content and the policy-making context in both countries? This involved identifying some of the endogenous and exogenous factors that help explain why both countries vary in their policies and critically reflecting upon the influences informing policy in each. The article provides a much-needed historical policy analysis of youth policy and an attempt to narrate the disparate field of youth policy. With some of the dust having settled on the New Labour era, it is important to make sense of those policy developments. The research describes, analyses and maps the context in which young people's welfare is determined and the specific policies and responses to common issues in both countries (Doling, 1999). The cross-national comparison also demonstrates key learning through this analysis. However, there is currently insufficient comparable data to analyse the outcomes of these policies and thus the research does not attempt to address policy consequences.

Cross-national comparisons are marred by methodological challenges. For example, a wide range of social, economic, political, national and local factors must be scrutinised in the process and the specific cultural contexts of any documentation considered. Socio-economic phenomena must be analysed in relation to their institutional and socio-cultural settings (Hantrais, 1999). How to measure 'like-for-like' across countries, often without directly comparable data, remains problematic. The research therefore undertook what Doling (1999: 63) calls a 'context to content' comparative policy study, the primary purpose of which is theory testing and generation. The purpose of the content-focused comparative element was description and classification. The research strategy involved textual analysis of youth policy documentation relating to young people in both countries during the period 1997–2010. Working to a clear definition of youth policy ensured that like-for-like policies were compared, as far as was possible given conflicting conceptions of 'youth'. For example, youth policy in England encompasses

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eleven to nineteen year olds, whereas in Wales this extends to twenty-five years of age.

Policy documents were sought that demonstrated the key aspects of youth policy, including all documentation relating to and informing the flagship policies. A systematic approach to gathering comparative material was undertaken and documentary reviews were conducted of potentially relevant academic, grey and policy literature. This was integrated with detailed 'contextual analysis of the institutional framework within which discourses were articulated' (Carmel, 1999: 141). Policy documents were analysed first hand, with key themes identified, concepts developed and their relationship to the context of policy development explored. Secondary analyses of policy documentation were also utilised, often from the youth studies literature, selected based on their focus on the flagship and/or related policies, to help interpret and interrogate context and content. This 'analysis of the social construction of concepts is an essential component in the characterization of national systems' (Hantrais, 1999: 104). The strength of a qualitative approach such as this lies in attempts to reconcile complexity, detail and context (Mangen, 1999: 110). It thus became possible to develop a theoretical account of commonalities and points of divergence between the two countries (see Table 1).

Common beginnings and the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU)

Before New Labour entered power, the previous Department for Education proudly entered debates on youth policy in Europe by declaring that the UK did not have and did not want one (Coles, 2005: 7)! A haphazard collection of initiatives and policies, sporadically and chaotically impacting on young people was all that existed (SEU, 2000). The year 1997 marked the development of a coherent and identifiable youth policy for the first time in the UK, although this followed different directions in each of the four home nations after devolution. A key driver for the development of youth policy was concern with the cost of youth crime and justice. The Audit Commission's (1996) *Misspent Youth* painted a bleak picture, estimating that youth crime cost public services over £7 billion a year. Key risk factors were identified and ways of addressing prevention proposed, articulating the need to tackle the 'problem of today's youth'.

The SEU, established within the Cabinet Office following New Labour's landslide victory in 1997, played a leading role in the development of youth policy across the UK. Its first reports were concerned with young people and several specifically addressed youth policy issues, including truancy and school exclusions, homelessness and teenage pregnancy (SEU, 1998a, b, 1999a, b), and led to the development of individual Policy Action Teams (PATs), including PAT 12 on Young People (SEU, 2000). Focusing on 'joined-up solutions' for 'joined-up problems' was a key tenet. In recognition of the lack of systematic research evidence, the SEU commissioned new, less methodologically constrained research for *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999b). Despite an 'England-only' remit, the Celtic nations all watched and learned from the developments, before producing their own flagship policies for children and young people (Finlay and Egan, 2004). The features of the SEU shaped youth policy in England distinct from the rest of the UK.

The SEU has been chiefly criticised not for what it did achieve, which was considerable, but for not achieving enough. Some departments continued to diverge in their interpretation of policy for young people, preventing a truly 'joined-up' approach,

and without greater power to enforce departments to implement their recommendations, it risked becoming a mere 'think-tank' (Cabinet Office, 1999). However, it is too easy to pick out the SEU's flaws whilst considering it as a surrogate ministry for youth. This was never its remit, and it triumphantly initiated a cross-departmental committee on children and young people, a minister for youth located within the Home Office (HO) and a new unit located within the DfEE for England.

Other developments taking place within the wider field of social policy also affected the course of youth policy in England and Wales. For example, following the Crime and Disorder Act (Great Britain, 1998a), the criminal dimensions of the Youth Justice System remained under the control of Whitehall, but youth offending services, including the new multi-disciplinary Youth Justice Boards, were devolved. The new National Assembly for Wales (NAW) used this opportunity to develop a distinct approach to youth justice, locating the services within the Health and Social Services portfolio and not Crime Prevention and Community Safety in the HO as in England. This was 'a decision made with the conscious intention of promoting a child-centred ethos in the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)' (Cross *et al.*, 2002: 153) and indicates the future divergence of policy between the two countries. This area of policy was later subsumed into Wales' Extending Entitlement through the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy, with the belief that 'youth offending might be prevented through the more effective extending of entitlement' (Williamson, 2007: 208). This importantly promotes a 'child first' as opposed to 'offender first' approach, as in England.

Devolution and policy development

The development of social policy under New Labour embraced a number of key principles. Embedding a managerialist and target-driven culture within the public sector, they sought to tackle poverty and social exclusion, but conversely chose to ignore issues around income inequality. These are complex themes of recent social policy with competing perspectives and there is not space to fully critically engage with that literature here.[2] For example, contentious debates around the concept of social exclusion abound, as the term is 'culturally defined, economically driven and politically motivated' (Barry and Hallett, 1998: 9). However, this research is located within a critique that places New Labour within a 'social integrationist discourse'. This was dominated by the inclusion of marginalised groups through paid work (Levitas, 2005), under the banner of 'welfare to work'. Their model for policy became a narrow economically focused conception, ignoring age-old inequalities in attempts to combat social exclusion through reducing unemployment (MacLeavy, 2008). Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 112) argued that a shift took place 'promoting individual responsibilities and weakening collectivist traditions', contending that life chances still remained highly structured.

However, the pursuit of comprehensive and effective youth policy played out differently across the home nations, including the processes of policy formulation and implementation. Devolution appears to have had a similar influence across the surrounding Celtic regions after years of domination by Whitehall, and they have 'adopted far more consultative, consensual and one might argue democratic approaches to the policy process than have been adopted by Westminster' (Finlay and Egan, 2004: 12), drawing on the evidence, skills and expertise of professionals within their own countries. Broadly speaking, within the area of youth policy, a rights-based approach has been

followed in all three Celtic countries. This approach puts children and young people's rights, needs and interests first and above those of adults and institutions. The eagerness since devolution to demonstrate their commitment to children and young people can be seen in the speed that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland established Children's Commissioner roles, with England finally following suit much later.

From the outset, the NAW embarked on a process of radical and distinctive policy formulation and implementation (Quinn, 2002: 30). Free from the restrictions and scrutiny of the Welsh Office, and with no policy templates, closer relationships were formed by civil servants and the Assembly as they worked together for the first time (McAllister, 2000). With social inclusion as a guiding theme, policy rhetoric differed from England, where a deficit focus on social exclusion was gaining momentum. With devolution, Wales became able to commission new research and test different policy development models (Quinn, 2002). Alongside this, was a pledge to identify and research areas of greatest disadvantage and a statistical infrastructure and funding formulae were developed across public services to ensure these areas received more support, with policy grounded in reliable evidence.

The First Secretary, Rhodri Morgan (2002), outlined the fundamental differences between the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and New Labour, talking of the 'clear red water' dividing policy in Wales and Westminster. Drawing on Beveridge and Bevan, he argued that WAG's 'commitment to equality leads directly to a model of the relationship between the government and the individual which regards that individual as a citizen rather than as a consumer'. Thus, the Westminster market approach to public services was rejected, with Wales instead valuing responsiveness to the needs of public service users.

Other individuals played a key role in the formation of youth policy in Wales. A background in, and commitment to, young people, of senior politicians, in particular the First Minister Alun Michael, was highly influential. A former Youth Worker, he convened key ministers, who collectively agreed not to follow England and to develop a distinct Welsh approach to youth policy, establishing an Advisory Group with relevant professional backgrounds. Consequently, the group had political clout beyond the world of Welsh politics and a strong collective mandate to progress the youth agenda. Extending Entitlement became widely recognised throughout Europe and was used to inform a framework for youth policy standards within the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2003).

Divergent outcomes

The late 1990s became a crossroad for shaping youth policy and determining the mechanisms for its implementation. Whilst the NAW and New Labour Government pursued similar themes through their policies, they chose different directions for how to achieve these. Table 1 summarises these differences.

Progressive universalism

The Connexions Strategy (DfEE, 2000) outlined the direction of youth policy development, with the creation in England of a new multi-professional Connexions Service to provide advice, guidance and support for all young people aged thirteen to nineteen. This would absorb the old careers service and work alongside local authority Youth Services. One of the key principles was a form of 'progressive universalism', promoting an inclusive and non-discriminatory ethos in service delivery. This enabled a universal service to

Table 1   Differences in youth policy in England and Wales

England	Wales
Progressive universalism	Progressive universalism
Individualised deficit model	Rights based
Social exclusion	Social inclusion
Accreditation and outcome driven	Process and distance travelled driven
Age fragmentation – 13–19 focus, but 15–19 in practice	Integrated services, ages 11–25, including integrated 14–19 strategy
Sub-regional structure	Local Authority[3] structure
Imposed top-down notions of multi-agency working and partnership	Consultative partnership approach to multi-agency working
Compact with third sector	Voluntary sector as equal partners – 1998 Government of Wales Act
Competitive merging of Youth and Careers Services – replacement with Youth Support Services	Continued role for Youth and Careers Services
New profession and training	Enhanced support for existing professions, for example youth work training
Formation of Children's Trusts – imposed structural merger of education and children's social services departments	No imposition of structural change. Some local authorities chose to form children's departments, voluntarily joining up education and children's social services departments
Young people's voice – some involvement	Young people's voices prioritised (Funky Dragon etc.)
Re-focusing on children (and young people) – prevention	Partnership of children and young people

be provided to all young people, with embedded targeted services providing specialist support and interventions for those with more complex needs (HM Treasury, 2007). This also aimed to prevent the stigmatisation of those with the most intensive needs.

In Wales, the adoption of the UNCRC provided the inspiration for a specific entitlement for children and young people. Extending Entitlement was based on the idea that for young people to 'acquire the range of skills and competencies that would equip them for future "life management", they needed to have been exposed to a "package" of diverse experiences and opportunities: a "package of entitlement"' (Williamson, 2007: 205). Like England, Wales adopted a belief in progressive universalism. However, combined with a rights-based approach, universal entitlements for young people could be more practically created than in England. The policy structured this into service delivery by ensuring a 'proportionate response to those in need of extra support' (NAW, 2000b: 73). This was coupled with a strong belief in adopting a holistic approach for policy and practice, as opposed to the focus of individualism seen across the border. Despite increasing pressure, the Assembly leader has pledged to 'continue to take a distinctive Welsh approach to safeguard essential services', including maintaining levels of support for young people (WAG, 2010). This is an important tenet for future policy development and can encourage a more equitable approach to supporting the most disadvantaged in society.

Individualisation versus rights

The New Labour government focused on prevention rather than cure as a cheaper and more effective alternative, which prioritised children's issues over those of young people. The new structures introduced through the Every Child Matters (ECM) (DFES, 2003) agenda easily facilitated this shift. This focus on prevention is linked to another prevailing principle – individualisation. This can be seen through the focus on achieving individual economic success evident in ECM and later in Youth Matters. Kaplan (2008: 176) suggests that these policies can be seen as evidence for the 'advance of the "social investment state", which primarily values children in terms of their future economic potential'. Mizen (2003: 467) takes this further by arguing that this 'actually involves a process of disengagement in which the government continues to erode young people's rights over and claims upon key resources', along with 'substantial diminution of the rewards and rights that labour governments have traditionally extended to the young'. In *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999b: 6), Tony Blair explicitly stated this economic imperative, saying 'the best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience'.

The Government was explicit in its belief that individuals should take responsibility for their situations, 'particularly where their actions have an impact on those around them (there should be) a clear sense of personal responsibility . . . with clear consequences if those responsibilities are not met' (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2006: 38). This onus on individual responsibility, firmly located in the work of Beck and Giddens, dictates that young people must seize the opportunities afforded to them to elevate themselves to a higher economic status. Failing to choose these politically and economically constructed pre-mapped paths, they become responsible for excluding themselves from the accepted norms of society and thus must face the consequences.

Closely linked to this principle, was the use of a deficit model in assessing and addressing young people's needs. For example, the language used in *Bridging the Gap* places blame on young people and their families for their exclusion and future outcomes. The report described young people 'almost exclusively in terms of their lacks and needs . . . overwhelmingly, they are portrayed as deficient, delinquent, or a combination of the two, as are their dysfunctional families and communities' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 340). *Bridging the Gap* 'perpetuates such a moralistic interpretation of the problem, which locates the causes of social exclusion in the deficits of individuals, and aggregates those individuals as generalised, and pathologised, social groupings' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 341). Furthermore, SEU reports did not fully acknowledge the impact of structural factors such as class, gender and race on young people's life chances. Deep-rooted inequalities were placed to one side, along with the importance of social capital and systems of informal support. This was in direct contrast to policy in Wales, which focused on social inclusion. This rhetoric has endured beyond New Labour, prevailing today. Woodman and Wyn (2013: 266) argue that the focus on individual transitions 'impoverishes policy frameworks that seek to bring about social inclusion'. The continued focus on this discourse of individualisation and economic contribution ensures that the major structural inequalities shaping young people's transitions are not addressed. This is a key issue for future youth policy makers to reflect upon.

WAG's study that informed the development of Extending Entitlement, *Supporting Young People* (NAW, 2000b: 25), explicitly recommended that the rationale for investment

in young people 'should not be presented as responding to deficits in young people themselves, or driven by the desire to prevent, e.g. crime or teenage pregnancy'. This was later reflected in the policy, which sought to distance itself from how UK-wide government policies tended to focus on only one manifestation of young people, for example, offenders and that 'the particular policy context defines the problem rather than listening to the young people to see things more in the round and address the underlying causes' (NAW, 2000a: 23). Policy development openly acknowledged and attempted to address the structural issues facing young people and the state's ability to uphold their rights within the parameters of those issues. Extending Entitlement stated that 'the WAG has moved away from the problem oriented, negative and controlling emphasis which characterises much wider policy towards young people, and has instead established a policy framework that embodies a positive view of young people and of what can be done to achieve the vision of a better Wales' (NAW, 2000b: 9).

This commitment to holism was also reflected in the language used to describe the results aimed for through the policy. Extending Entitlement (NAW, 2000a: 8) was not exclusively outcomes focused, maintaining that 'the quality of opportunity extended to young people is sometimes more important than the specificity of outcome'. Consequently, impact measurement was at the local authority level not the individual, with incentives for adopting the Extending Entitlement philosophy, i.e. re-organising their services to reduce negative indicators and improve positive indicators. Williamson (2007: 1) has argued that Wales differs in its focus on 'distance travelled' and not just 'destination reached' as in England. The emphasis in Wales is on the processes that young people go through, how they develop through them and monitoring their personal development. Extending Entitlement aimed 'to motivate young people by encouraging them to seize opportunities in their own interests, not to comply with the agendas of others' (NAW, 2000b: 72). In England, the government was widely criticised for engendering a target and outcome driven culture (Hoggarth and Payne, 2006), assessing the quality of services with business ideology.

The most recent examination of the UK's implementation of the UNCRC (2008) raised a number of priority issues, including the discrimination and stigmatisation of children and young people in particular groups, and the use of physical restraint in places of deprivation of liberty. The report also commended the rights-based approach in Wales and praised WAG's attempts to address the issues above; but also highlighted that without further legislative power, WAG remains constrained in its ability to fully embed the UNCRC. The Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure (NAW, 2011) confirmed WAG's commitment to a rights-based approach by requiring Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC when considering proposed new legislation/policy, reviewing or changing existing legislation/policy, and when exercising Ministerial functions. If this is to be a key principle for developing youth policy, Wales provides a blueprint.

Age fragmentation

Working to three different tiers of need, Connexions aimed to provide a universal service to all young people aged thirteen to nineteen; a system of Personal Advisors (PAs) for young people with additional needs and a more intensive targeted service for young people at risk of disengaging (and usually Not in Education Employment or Training) across England (DfEE, 2000). The recommendation by PAT 12 to extend services up until the age of twenty-five was ignored, which proved problematic at both ends of the age

range, resulting in a lack of integration of services during key transition points in young people's lives (Coles *et al.*, 2004). For example, the Leaving Care Act (Great Britain, 2000b) placed statutory duties on local authorities, including a commitment to working with care-leavers until at least the age of twenty-one, or until the end of their full-time education. This fitted easily with youth policy in Wales, which applied to young people up until the age of twenty-five. However, it provided complications to structures in England, where the Connexions Service normally only supported those up to the age of nineteen.

In line with European youth policy, services in Wales have consistently targeted a wider age group (eleven to twenty-five years). This age range recognises the lengthening period of transitions into adult life; that the needs of some young people are not fully met by age eighteen; and that there are particular statutory duties in respect of young people with disabilities, or being looked after by local authorities. This extended age range also promotes greater integration of services. This is a key issue that is continually recommended in reviews of provision for young people, especially care leavers, and requires addressing in future youth policy, especially with large numbers of young people experiencing significantly extended transitions.

Structure and the role of youth work(ers)

The Connexions Service involved a complex organisational structure, which was imposed top-down before contracts were agreed, rather than allowing time for genuine multi-agency partnerships to develop. For example, most of the boards included only one representative from the entire voluntary sector. This new focus on sub-regional structuring also demonstrated a lack of confidence in local authority delivery, and success was dependant on the performance of these partnerships. In comparison, the consultation process undertaken by the Wales Youth Agency (WYA) concluded that there was no need for new structures or professions, but better partnership working and an enhanced role for the Youth Service. The Government of Wales Act (Great Britain, 1998b) also included a statutory duty to work with and promote the voluntary sector. This ensured, for example, that a number of voluntary sector organisations would sit on partnerships, as opposed to a single representative, as in England. These elements marked a key divergence in approach between the two countries.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) research identified several main barriers to effective multi-agency working, which ultimately prevented Connexions from fulfilling its vision (Coles *et al.*, 2004). A DfES sponsored study, which ran parallel to this, concluded that Connexions was having a positive impact but that issues with its complicated process needed addressing, especially partnership working (Hoggarth and Smith, 2004). For example, competition existed between local authority areas within regional partnerships, and conflict abounded over resource allocation between services and practices around confidentiality, information sharing and needs assessments. Those that invested in joint working and information sharing protocols operated considerably more successfully (Coles *et al.*, 2004).

Local authority Careers and Youth Services were also potentially undermined, as they were replaced by new teams of PAs unified within Connexions Services and an emphasis on youth *support* services. This competitive merging of the two services was a direct threat to both professions. A consultative review of the Youth Services in England (DfEE, 2002) resulted in suggestions for a changed role for Youth Services, signalling disaster for many

practitioners already wary of Connexions. The policy adopted a business model and called for targeted youth work; accredited and outcome-driven work; increased surveillance and control of young people through strengthening inspection and monitoring; and focused on how Youth Services and work could 'play their part in building the Connexions Service' (Smith, 2002).

One of the central and strategically important roles for Connexions PAs, was as 'advocates' for young people, brokering appropriate services and benefits and playing the role of a 'powerful friend' when agencies failed to fulfil their responsibilities. However, they faced structural and strategic struggles when attempting to advocate for young people, such as, if their benefits had been denied or social services had failed to fulfil their statutory obligations. This was particularly difficult in cases where an agency was in regular conflict with a young person for whom they were supposed to be advocating. Recruited from across the professions, PAs did not necessarily consistently have the key skills necessary for engaging with, and successfully supporting, the most disadvantaged and often most challenging young people. Despite all these difficulties, the JRF research concluded that these issues would ultimately be challenges for any multi-professional organisation tasked to work with young people and recommended that any future policy development should build on the Service's success (Coles *et al.*, 2004). Such aspirations could potentially have been realised given time – food for thought for future policy-makers.

The burying of this report and other evidence therefore came as a surprise with the publication of Youth Matters (DfES, 2005, 2006), which marked a new era in youth policy in England and ushered in a new re-structuring of services, arguably before the real benefits of Connexions were able to be felt (Coles, 2005). This resulted in both commendable and ill-advised changes. Marking an end to one of the government's original key principles, the new structure resulted in a move away from sub-regional working and a reverting back to local authority delivery, establishing Children's Trusts and a new Common Assessment Framework to be used by all agencies. In addition, guidelines and protocols on 'joint-working' were to be developed by partnerships, resulting in different systems and processes developing across the country. No mechanisms to resolve any potential inter-agency disagreements were established. Widening careers education to 'information, advice and guidance' through new technologies removed the personal human development element so important to young people going through transitions. Far worse was the removal of the advocacy and support of the PA system, which undoubtedly impacted on vulnerable young people the most. The Youth Service was also further weakened through the rapid developments, causing confusion for both professionals and young people in need of a competent and coherent service.

In comparison, in Wales, with a single tier system already in place in local government, WAG demonstrated its trust and belief in the efficacy of the existing structure through its implementation of youth policy at a local authority level. It stated that 'new structures are not needed – rather a local network of quality services guided by a clear vision of how young people's needs will be met' (NAW, 2000a: 17). Furthermore, its youth policy was pitched as an agenda to be promoted co-operatively across all services, including through both the existing Careers and Youth Services, signifying support for youth work methods. Young People's Partnerships (YPPs) were established to provide 'Youth Support Services' (including all voluntary sector providers) at local authority level and were to be chaired by Chief Executives, demonstrating the importance placed on the youth agenda. Consequently, practitioners continued to work with young people confident

in the knowledge of their continued support by the Assembly, as related agendas were developed within the entitlement framework.

The Assembly also recognised and explicitly supported the vital role of the voluntary sector by funding the Council for Wales' Voluntary Youth Services, in addition to giving the WYA an extra £3 million funding over three years to support the sector, including training and improvements to the quality of youth information (WAG, 2002). With the support of existing legislation, the role of the voluntary sector was further cemented in Extending Entitlement's adoption of 'a community-led approach to finding local solutions' (NAW, 2000a: 9), with local organisations expected to play a key role.

This investment in voluntary and local authority Youth Services marks another distinction in developments between the two countries. The distinctive role and contribution of youth work and the Youth Service has remained integral to the development and implementation of Extending Entitlement. However, despite estimating that £100 million of additional funding would be required, the Assembly granted just under £11 million over four years, resulting in a continued reliance on external funding sources (NAW, 2000b). By 2007, almost 40 per cent of the budget was provided by external sources (WAG, 2008), whose requirements significantly altered the focus of much youth work in Wales to the measurement of outcomes for young people, contrary to the direction espoused by the Assembly (Rose, 2008). Re-affirming its belief in the Youth Service, WAG launched a Youth Service Strategy for Wales in 2007, developed with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people and practitioners. Following the 2008 UNCRC examination, WAG developed a five year 'UNCRC Action Plan for Wales – Getting it Right' (2009) to progress the agenda with an emphasis on continued partnership with the voluntary sector.

However, the local authority structures imposed by WAG for the delivery of Extending Entitlement have proved problematic. Going against the original proposals, the Assembly arguably made a crucial mistake in instructing local authorities to establish YPPs *under*, not in parallel with, the statutory Children and Young People's Partnerships. Consequently, YPPs were often sidelined and thus less effective. This became apparent in the Assembly's progress report (WAG, 2004), which provided some evidence that YPPs were not providing strategic leadership as expected and had not responded sufficiently to the entitlements agenda. Chief Officers to practitioners have complained that the system is overly bureaucratic with too much meddling from Assembly officials (Williamson, 2007). In addition, there has been ongoing confusion about roles and responsibilities, with tensions between different services and the way they feel the entitlements should be upheld, for example between the Youth Service, schools and YOTs. This conflict of different disciplines struggling to implement the same agenda was echoed across the border in England. Local authorities feel these concerns have been ignored by the Assembly, and ministerial rhetoric has instead focused on a commitment to working together for young people in Wales (Williamson, 2007). Policy makers can learn from and build on the difficulties both countries have faced in terms of structure of services, the challenges of partnership working, the role of youth work and the need for such services to be elevated to a statutory footing.

Participation

The principle of participation can be found in policy rhetoric in both countries. In Wales, the principle of participation was embedded from the outset, and the initial policy con-

sultation process included an external steering group of professionals from the voluntary and local government sectors who worked directly with young people across the country to identify what they felt they needed and wanted from government. In turn, this aimed to ensure a sense of ownership of policy outcomes and relevance to those on the ground (Quinn, 2002: 41). This commitment to the principle of participation can be followed through a number of key initiatives, all of which were the first of their kind in the UK. For example, the WAG's Youth Policy Team quickly established Llais Ifanc (young voice), direct e-mailing to Assembly Members, a participation website, new Welsh Youth Parliament (Funky Dragon[4]) and youth forum co-ordinators in all twenty-two local authorities. WAG also set-up a participation consortium through Save the Children, with the voluntary sector taking the lead in co-ordinating participation initiatives (Entwistle, 2006).

In England, no statutory duty to involve young people in the development of all services existed, as it did, and still does, in Wales, through a distinct clause in the Learning and Skills Act (Great Britain, 2000a). This placed a duty on local authorities in Wales to ensure that all service planning reflected the needs of young people following extensive consultation with them. The fact that this remains a Wales-only clause demonstrates the difference in the importance both countries place on young people's participation in developing policy and practice.

Ultimately, the structural inequalities and constraints faced by many young people were ignored in the construction of key policies. Coles (2005: 17) succinctly concluded that Youth Matters represented a 'disempowering of young people' and threatened 'the important means to empower young people, to advocate for them, and deliver the few rights they have', which earlier policy in the form of Connexions had sought to protect and support. This was also the case in ECM, where children and young people's 'participation' and 'voices' were 'addressed independently of important considerations about power, equity and social justice that impact upon them' (Kaplan, 2008: 176).

Conclusion

The development of youth policy in England was by no means straightforward, but progressed significantly to the positive and co-ordinated shape left in May 2010. In Wales, a more focused path, influenced by the context of devolution, was followed and prevailed beyond the demise of New Labour. Despite their close geographical proximity, both countries have pursued distinctly different routes. Despite some commonalities, the distinct context of each country has informed their differing conceptualisations of both young people and youth policy. This has in turn resulted in divergence within the content of youth policy in each. This understanding has important implications for policy makers, outlined in this article, for informing future youth policy. One thing seems certain, policy development in England and Wales is likely to continue to diverge.

Notes

1 This was the re-branded British Labour Party under Prime Minister Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown from 1997 to 2010.

2 For a full critique of New Labour's discourse, see Levitas (2005).

3 Local Authorities are the local government administrative bodies that govern geographical areas across the UK.

4 Funding for Funky Dragon ceased in 2014.

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