

instruments (the majority of case studies used qualitative methodology), this book is exemplary in bridging the gap between the fields of social work and social policy.

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Paul Spicker (2022), *How to Fix the Welfare State: Some Ideas for Better Social Services*, Bristol: Policy Press, £27.99, pp. 168, pbk.
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This is a slim volume with a large remit. It is also refreshing. Writers looking for research excellence recognition tend to focus on detailed accounts of their understandably focused projects. Spicker, as a fellow retired person, has the luxury of being able to stand back and ponder the big picture. His focus here is the British welfare state but whether we can (still) talk about a singularly British welfare state is now highly debatable. He adopts an extensive definition of 'the welfare state' including employment services and a wide range of public services since they are central to any full meaning of individuals' 'welfare' and they interact crucially with traditional 'social services'.

He treats each service area historically looking for the major shifts in ideas, dominant values and presumptions that have driven policy. There have also been stubborn failures to change in the face of a changing world. Politicians' obsession with the 'workshy' has given us low benefits, complex rules and sanctions for working age families. Yet most beneficiaries are not workshy. The scale of demographic change could have justified a major rethink in our services for older people. That has not happened. Standardised organisational responses take too little account of the variety and vulnerability of many peoples' lives. Yet he is also sceptical of 'grand solutions'. The 'state' is too centralised and essentially incapable of letting go even when it trumpets 'devolution'. All parties have been guilty of this, responding to the temptations inherent in a highly centralised political economy. The sheer scale of complexity that has evolved is a cumulative result of many well-meaning attempts to respond to perceived deficiencies. Each year I am reminded of that as my Child Poverty Action Group Welfare Benefits Handbook (now 1918 pages long) thumps through my letter box. But for welfare workers in the field this must be a daily experience.

Spicker's menu of 'solutions', are multiple and gradual. Few are 'new' but they do add up to an extensive menu. Examples include extending the universality of the basic pension, raising child benefit substantially for those children up to three, introducing benefits for particular disadvantages, or medical conditions, making benefits less conditional. Scottish experience, seeking to make health services more sensitive to varied local situations, is drawn upon. There is a case for more multi-disciplinary team work in primary care and more variety in the design of local health and social care models. He has a sensitive discussion of the limitations of remaining 'independent' as a frail elderly person and the forced choices which families face. We need, he argues, teams of people able to help with all the necessary elements of personal care not the rushed performance of discrete tasks. This would require better paid staff with proper career development. Our present 'care market' does none of this. Schools have been forced to narrow their goals and their curriculum in the face of fewer resources and inspectorial regimes. The wider educational goal of 'human development' has been downplayed and needs to be restored and enhanced both in schools and afterwards. The final stages

of schooling, the exam system and transition to post school education needs to change. There are major failings in the standards of child protection. The public is resistant to more 'interference' in family life but is critical when things go badly wrong. More universal, well-resourced child care, would provide better support and early warning. I disagree with the author's sceptical assessment of the value of early-years provision but this is only part of the argument.

All in all then there is plenty here for those thinking about a new Beveridge phase in social policy. Yet, in my view it understates some of the fundamental dilemmas that lie behind the uncertain future of our, and other, welfare states. It quite deliberately skates round the issue of resources. There is a brief passage saying more money will be needed. Yet the scale of that dilemma is never really faced. Social policy has benefited from the state doing a lot less of other things in the past half century. The share of government spending devoted to social policy has grown substantially over the post war decades. That cannot go on. Demography has been favourable. But climate change, other growing demands, the simple maths of public spending and the British electorate's tax reluctance will impose severe constraints on simply continuing to do what we are already doing. No political party seems to have the guts to face the scale of that dilemma. The most recent addition to national insurance contributions comes nowhere near doing so and was then reversed. Then, there are some fundamental errors that were made in the founding of the welfare state – not least the division between health and social care. The uniquely centralised funding system we have evolved makes the kind of devolution and local diversity Spicker advocates difficult if not impossible to achieve. Read and discuss.

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