

This year is the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of SSRG. In 1972, social services departments in England and Wales were emerging blinking from their shells as the 'fifth social service' (Townsend, 1970). The post-Seebohm climate was a period of rapid growth and expansion for new departments experiencing levels of enthusiasm and confidence that had not as yet been undermined by public inquiries or resource shortfalls.

Superficially, social services departments at the beginning of the twenty-first century appear to have little in common with their predecessors in the early seventies. The articles in this issue testify to the penetration of the modernisation agenda into a number of spheres, including the domestic, the bureaucratic and the intellectual.

However, some themes remain consistent over the decades. Social services are still struggling to position themselves in relation to health services, the role of institutions in social care remains uncertain, the need to assert professional identity in social work continues to be relevant. Social problems appear remarkably resilient to three decades of intervention from 'unified' departments. Provision for older people remains variable, prevention survives as a key but unrealised aspiration for children's services.

While research activity has expanded in this period, taking on new and more diverse forms, some key studies such as Mayer and Timms' (1970) *The Client Speaks* and Land's (1969) *Large Families in London* had already been published by 1972. The translation of research into systems and practice is a persistent challenge. We would like to encourage contributors to *Research, Policy and Planning* to submit accounts of their experiences of making research work.

This issue includes a timely and provocative article by Janet Lewis questioning the relevance of the Department of Health's Research Governance Framework for research in social care. She offers some radical alternative models for developing ethical guidance and we would welcome responses to these proposals. While the issue of research governance is driven by the emphasis on accountability and transparency in the push for

modernisation, John Woolham's article provides evidence of the potential of new technologies for social and health care. He offers a stimulating discussion of the potential of new technologies to support people with dementia and considers the ways in which local authorities and other agencies will need to respond to these hitherto unknown systems.

Ehrich and colleagues' short report offers a valuable account of a scoping exercise undertaken in the field of continuity of care. This paper provides a useful model for those planning such research in interprofessional fields. Merrett and Adams' report describes the activities of a benchmark club which addressed the issues raised for local authorities in meeting the requirements of the Personal Social Services Performance Assessment Framework. They identify some positive outcomes from this process which will be of interest to many readers.

We are also pleased to include a new regular feature in the journal. Karen Winchester, Information Officer at the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), has drawn together information on a number of on-going research projects whose findings are, as yet, not widely available. In this issue, she focuses on projects researching children and young people's services, all of which will be completing shortly. Readers who have research underway that they would like reported in this column should contact Karen with details.

Nicky Stanley and Jill Manthorpe  
May 2002

## References

- Land, H. (1969) *Large Families in London*, Occasional Papers on Social Administration no 32, London: Bell and Sons.
- Mayer, J.E. and Timms, N. (1970) *The Client Speaks*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Townsend, P. (1970) *The Fifth Social Service: a critical analysis of the Seebohm proposals*, London: The Fabian Society.

