

Social Work in the British Isles

Payne, M. and Shardlow, S.M. (eds) (2002), Jessica Kingsley, £16.95

This is an interesting study of the similarities and differences between social work in the various countries making up the British Isles. It is easily readable and contains information on the history and development of various parts of the British Isles, which would be of interest to the social historian as well as practitioners who are interested in the development of the profession or who are contemplating a move from one of the countries to another.

The editors give a background to the study, reviewing how the countries comprising the British Isles developed, exploring concepts of national identity and considering the possible effects of these on social work in the different countries.

There follows a chapter on social work in England, also written by the editors. This looks at the difficulty of separating the notion of England from the other parts of the United Kingdom in terms of culture, identity, constitution, law and social work. On social services, the history and current provision of social services for adults, including care (case) management and for children and families, including criminal and youth justice, are described, together with a brief synopsis of the development of social work education.

This is followed by an examination of social work in late modern Ireland by Harry Ferguson and Fred Powell who describe the history and development of social work in Ireland, particularly highlighting the relationship between social work and the Roman Catholic Church. The current provision of services is described, covering three main sectors: the state/statutory sector, the voluntary sector and the informal sector. The chapter ends with an interesting consideration of opportunities, dangers and the future for Irish social work.

Next comes a review of social work in Northern Ireland by Jim Campbell and Mary McColgan, who describe social work practice in Northern Ireland in the context of legal, administrative and societal contexts. As in the Republic of Ireland, the importance of religion is highlighted and the effects of the formation of Northern Ireland and the various changes in governmental arrangements since then are described. The establishment of health and social services boards in 1973 and the benefits and limitations of this arrangement are considered. Similarities and differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK in aspects of training are described. The chapter ends with a review of recent developments and the opportunities these may provide for social workers.

Social work in Scotland after devolution, by Lorraine Waterhouse and Janice McGhee, looks at the development of the political, economic and social landscape of Scotland, outlining where the legal and governmental structures diverge from the rest of the UK. It gives an overview of social work services and describes the philosophy underpinning them, highlighting the historical effects of housing, health, education and governance on the development of social work. In particular, social work in the criminal justice system is described, identifying that many local authorities have developed specialist criminal justice teams although they remain part of the local authority social work service. Children's services are described in some detail, with reference to the relevant Scottish legislation. Community care and mental health are also covered together with educational developments in social work.

The significance of language in Wales is highlighted in the chapter by Mark Drakeford and Charlotte Williams and the effects of poverty and rurality are described. There is a review of social work in Wales today, covering community care and child welfare and consideration of the prospects for future social work development in Wales, looking particularly at the foundation of the National Assembly and its possible effects.

In the chapter on Guernsey: Social Work on a Small Island, John Wolfe describes the history of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, its social and political context and the organisation of social work which differs from the other countries. The chapter concentrates on children's services but mentions the other areas of social work and the impact of housing and employment issues on the practise of social work.

The book ends with a summary by the editors of the similarities and differences in social services within the British Isles, including a chronology of oppression and resistance in England's relationships with other parts of the British Isles and the elements that arise out of this. The way in which social services have developed differently in the various countries is explored, linking this to the concept of nation and how this is demonstrated in administration, policy and law. The likelihood of greater differentiation in the future is also considered.

The editors regret that it was not possible to find anyone to write a chapter on social work in the Isle of Man and it is also regrettable that the Bailiwick of Jersey is not included, as there are differences in law and administrative arrangements between the two bailiwicks which comprise the Channel Islands. These omissions prevent the book from being a full review of social work in the British Isles. Nevertheless, it is an interesting and useful book, which includes a helpful bibliography and a subject index which facilitates quick comparison between different aspects of social work in the various nations covered.

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