

Assignment Title: The Caring Society

Introduction

This assignment will describe the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It will identify the key objectives that underpin the act and look at ways in which the act could impact on policy and legislation, not just in Wales or the UK, but in the wider global community. It will examine the importance of well-being and sustainability within the context of social care and examine the elements that distinguish it from previous legislation. The essay will look at how political history has affected approaches to social care, how policies have evolved and also consider what the future may hold in terms of developments, as well as hindrance.

Before the Well-being of Future Generations Act can be explicated, it is perhaps useful to provide some historical context for the evolution of social care within the United Kingdom (UK). The early beginnings of what is generally referred to as the 'welfare state' can be traced back to the end of the Second World War. It was during the latter stages of the war that a report was published by Sir William Beveridge. The vision outlined within that comprehensive review would provide a blueprint for a radical reform of social care, addressing what Beveridge (1942) described as the 'five evils' (Alcock and May, 2014, p.5).

A triumphant (if somewhat unexpected) victory in the first post-war election resulted in a Labour government. Led by Attlee, the socialist government began addressing the evils that Beveridge had alluded to. The state education age was increased to fifteen to address the issue of *Ignorance*, construction of new social housing would combat *Squalor* and a drive for full employment would tackle *Idleness*. The introduction of a National Insurance and Assistance scheme would deal with Beveridge's notion of *Want*. Then lastly and perhaps most notably was the creation of the National Health Service (NHS). The purpose of the NHS was not only to fight the evil of *Disease* but to provide an ambitious universal healthcare programme, using state provision, funded by contributions from the new National Insurance scheme (Alcock and May, 2014).

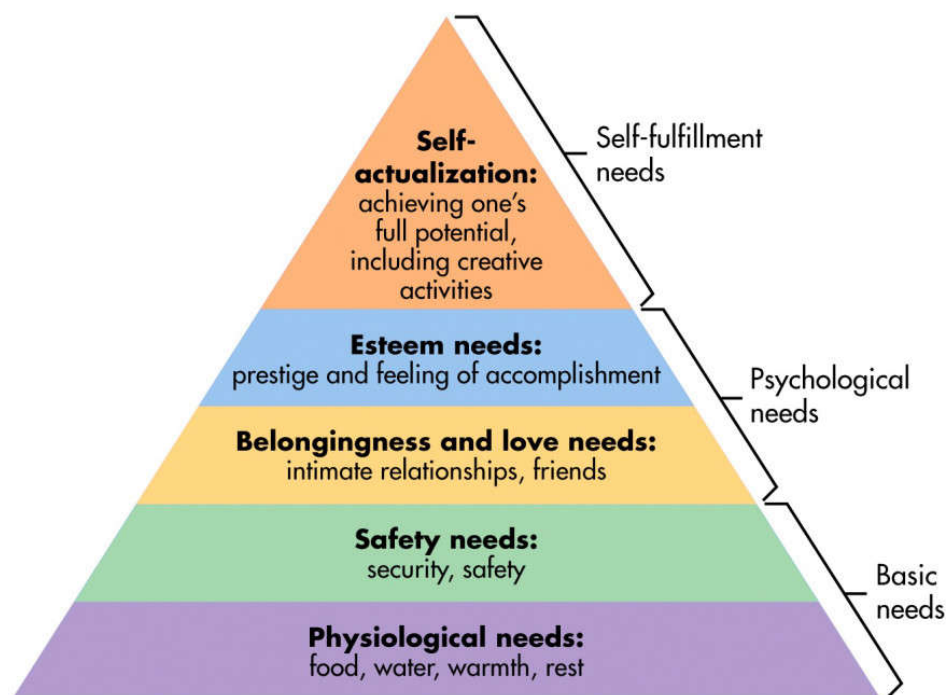
By collectively targeting these five issues, the aim was to improve the 'welfare' of citizens, not just meeting their basic needs, but improving their general health and 'well-being'. It is perhaps useful at this point to try and interpret what is meant by these terms. Spicker (2014, pp.85-95) explores the moral dilemma of trying to ascertain what a person 'needs' as opposed

to what they want and argues that there is a case for the individual to decide for themselves what is most important for their own well-being. 'Well-being' itself is a very ambiguous term and although there are obvious attributes, for example, good health (physical and mental), access basic provisions such as food, warmth and shelter, there are other elements that are maybe not so easily defined. How significant is intellectual stimulation, social interaction and freedom of choice, in relation to a person's sense of 'well-being'?

A definition for 'well-being' appeared as early as 1946 in the constitution for the World Health Organization (WHO), proclaiming "health is a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization, 2006).

Unlike theoretical models for determining needs, such as the 'Hierarchy of Needs' (see Figure 1) as proposed by Maslow (1943), there appears to be little in the way of formulas for measuring well-being. Not only is it ambiguous, subjective and some say intangible, it is extremely difficult to quantify, let alone define. Such is the level of confusion, even finding an agreed form of spelling appears contentious (Dodge et al., 2012, pp.222-223).

Figure 1: **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** (McLeod, 2018).



As a new age of politics emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the approach to social care by the newly appointed Conservative government became a contentious issue in itself. With the advent of Neo-Liberalism came radical changes in both policy and legislation. The term Thatcherism did not refer solely to the politics of the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, but to an ideology that shaped the political landscape for years to come. An economic downturn saw the government reassert its authority and end the socialist ideology of collectivism (Gamble, 1994, pp.1-5). Society had changed and so too had attitudes to social care.

The traditional family structure of the male provider and the female homemaker were no longer as prevalent. Feminism and gender equality had resulted in new freedoms for women. Shaking off the traditional role of carer for many, meant there were now more women in the workplace. Divorce rates were higher and many were re-marrying or re-partnering. Families were becoming separated and single parents were now commonplace. Just as families changed, the role of the carer was evolving too. With fewer people content to assume the role of informal carer and sometimes unable to because the prospect was not financially viable, the need was growing for care in a more formal capacity (Williams, 2004, pp.27-29).

The social image of the carer had fundamentally changed. Fine (2007, pp.79-83) suggests that the preconception of a traditionally female role, often caring for family without financial reward was unhelpful, not only in promoting women's independence but in developing policy itself. That responsibility began to be viewed as a 'burden of care', rather than a selfless act borne out of a sense of duty. There is a suggestion too, that those changing stereotypes may also have masked the role of male carers. Carmichael and Charles (2007, pp.798-799) draw attention to the General Household Survey from 1990 that acknowledges a growing percentage of male carers, particularly in an elderly informal setting. The percentage of working-age male carers was considerably lower and suggested they were less likely to forgo paid work in favour of an informal care role.

Social care was again at the forefront of Tony Blair's 'New' Labour government when they were elected in 1997. There was change in policy with an emphasis on promoting cohesion between the NHS and the Social Services Department (SSD). New joint funding policies for the NHS and SSD were also put in place and finally there was a pledge to address health inequalities through the reduction in social inequality as a whole (Bywaters and McLeod, 2001). A number of new departments were created under that government including a

department for tackling Social Exclusion by introducing ‘joined-up solutions to joined-up problems’ (Bochel and Bochel, 2004, pp.80-81).

The Labour party remained in power until the 2010 General Election, when they gave way to the Conservatives. With no overall majority in the House of Commons though, they were unable to govern on their own and entered into a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Although a more centre-right position was adopted than that of the previous Conservative government, there were harsh cuts to public services and austerity was re-introduced in response to a global financial crisis (Alcock and May, 2014, pp.10-11).

With the issue of financial constraint never far from the social care agenda, it is perhaps unsurprising that sustainability is such a prominent feature of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA). The intention is the accomplishments of today, should not be to the detriment of tomorrow. To achieve that aim there are seven key objectives to improve the well-being of the people of Wales, for now and in the future (National Assembly for Wales, 2018, p.2). The seven goals are as follows:

A Prosperous Wales – Promoting innovation, sustainable development, education and a skilled workforce. Creating quality, rewarding employment opportunities, using ecologically friendly strategies.

A Resilient Wales – Responsible environmental management, forward-thinking policies with ecological and economical sustainability.

A Healthier Wales – A person-centred approach to emotional and physical well-being with an ethos of choice and opportunity.

A More Equal Wales – A society that promotes equity and opportunity regardless of the culture and circumstance of groups and individuals.

A Wales of Cohesive Communities – Thriving, connected communities, rich in social capital and with improved standards of living.

A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language – A society that not only embraces, but actively promotes its diverse and cosmopolitan culture.

A Globally Responsible Wales – A versatile approach to global competitiveness, ensuring Wales competes and contributes responsibly.

To work towards the seven goals, the act brings together forty-four separate organisations and public bodies. These include local authorities, health boards, Town (or Community) Councils (with income or expenditure of more than 200k), the Welsh Sports Council and of course the Welsh Government itself. To demonstrate they are actively participating in sustainable practice they have to demonstrate they have adopted the ‘five ways of working’, as outlined in the act (see Figure 2). It is the duty of these institutions and bodies work collectively and cohesively for the benefit of their communities (National Assembly for Wales, 2018, p.3).

Figure 2: **The Five Ways of Working** (WCVA, 2018).



Recognising the need for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is not a concept confined to Wales or even the UK, but a Global ideology adopted by the member states of the United Nations (UN). The UN in fact outlines a comprehensive list of seventeen SDGs that dissect the components into greater detail, such as encompassing not only clean, but affordable energy. The UN also draws attention to the specifics of ‘Gender Equality’, ‘Life Below Water’ and ‘Zero Hunger’ (United Nations, 2018). The vision is for a long-term strategy with an emphasis on prevention rather than cure.

In 2017 the Welsh Government produced a refined list of twelve key objectives, as part of the ‘Taking Wales Forward’ programme. This re-enforced their commitment to well-being and

demonstrated the ongoing commitment to eradicating inequality, as measured by the National Indicators (National Assembly for Wales, 2018, pp.5-6). As part of the monitoring process to evaluate the well-being goals, a list of forty National Indicators was produced to measure the effectiveness of the WFGA strategies. The aim was to collate statistics for elements such as household income, energy efficiency, climate change, water quality and healthy lifestyle choices, to name but a few (Welsh Government, 2016).

Although the National Indicators were produced with good intention, they have not been without criticism. The independent charity Citizens Advice Cymru (2018), welcomed the ambition and scope of the WFGA but were critical of indicators used to measure their achievement. Citizens Advice argued that there were four key areas of indication conspicuous by their absence, namely over-indebtedness, financial capability, energy poverty and transport. As well as recommending the inclusion of additional indicators they also expressed concern over the validity of some of the data collection sources. There was a suggestion that the measurement for some of the indicators was too subjective, and that there was too much emphasis on “hitting the target but missing the point” (Citizens Advice Cymru, 2018, p.2).

In addition to the National Indicators, a Future Trends Report was introduced in 2017 with a view to identifying potential areas of development. The aspiration being that by constantly evaluating current data, it will reduce the risk of wasteful investment and optimise government administration for the future (Welsh Government, 2018).

Whilst the act has been described as ‘bold’ and ‘ambitious’ it does not mark a complete departure from previous Welsh Government policy and legislation. Instead of ripping up the rule book and starting over, it is looking to build on those existing ideas and aspirations. Modern approaches, such as Social Subscribing, builds on idea of promoting healthy lifestyles to prevent long-term problems, without the persistent need for medical solutions (Audit Wales, 2018, pp.9-27). One area where it does differ though is in the appointment of a dedicated commissioner. The role of Sophie Howe as Future Generations Commissioner involves working closely with the Auditor General for Wales. The commissioner is influential in promoting, advising and researching all aspects WFGA, including application and reporting. With the backing of an advisory panel (including Welsh Commissioners, Welsh TUC and Natural Resource Wales) , it is the duty of the commissioner to review the progress of the Public Bodies, as well as make recommendations for future advancement (National Assembly for Wales, 2018, 101-14).

Conclusion

By its very nature, the long-term scope of the WFGA makes it difficult to judge its success at this relatively early stage. The global attention it has attracted though would certainly indicate that it is at least moving in the right direction. In fact, in the commissioner's 2017-2018 Annual Report, it boldly declares "What Wales does today, the world will do tomorrow" (Assembly Wales, 2018, p.2), a statement that could leave Wales with a lot to live up to. The enthusiasm, with which the WFGA has been received though, could be beneficial for keeping the Welsh Government's 'eye on the ball' in the knowledge that, the success or failure of such a high-profile project, could lead to very public scrutiny.

The potential future success of the WFGA is perhaps more precarious than it might have been, at least at the time of its conception. A document published by the Welsh Government (2017), addresses a number of concerns regarding the UK's imminent exit from the European Union (EU). It argues that the relationship between the UK and the EU will need to be replaced with a stronger, inter-connected partnership between the central UK government and the four devolved administrations. It argues that complexities that now exist from a membership of what will realistically be approaching fifty years by the time of eventual departure, meaning that life outside the EU will be vastly different to life in the UK before it joined.

With this in mind, it is perhaps more important than ever that Wales continues to take a leading role in the creation of social policy. The global landscape is constantly changing and evolving and unless some 'miraculous' solution is found, then surely sustainable strategies can be the only way to tackle the potentially catastrophic results of issues such as climate change, poverty and social deprivation. It may not be possible to predict the future, but hopefully with joined-up thinking and collective working, it is finally possible to successfully plan for it.

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