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Speeding up or Reaching out? Efficiency and Unmet Need as Policy Priorities in Wales

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The Welsh Assembly, a devolved legislature in the UK, and its executive the Welsh Government, have a distinctly intensive commitment to equality – emphasising universality with weighty obligations on public services. This article uses the ‘discourse-historical approach’ (DHA) to critically review an eleven-year social service reform strategy (produced in 2007), and to weigh up the priorities of fiscal efficiency and universal equality. We refer to these competing priorities as ‘speeding up’ and ‘reaching out’, respectively. Our findings show an imbalance towards the former, largely sidelining the possible value of services to those currently underserved. The article discusses this mismatch in respect of the dominant policymaking framework of ‘New Public Management’ and its emphases on productivity, efficiency, and quantifiable accountability. We also show the value of DHA in analysing ‘fights for dominance’ – in this case between competing discourses within a flagship policy document.

Keywords: Discourse-historical approach, social exclusion, social policy, social services, Wales, Welsh Government.

Introduction

In this article, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) is used to explore social policy in Wales, during the New Labour era of UK government (1997-2010). We examine the tensions between two competing discourses: one concerned with efficiency and value for money, the other with equality and inclusion. We principally analyse the Welsh Government’s plan for social service reform from 2008 to 2018, *A Strategy for Social Services in Wales over the Next Decade: Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities* (Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)¹ 2007) (hereafter FLSC). Later in the article we add some further consideration of another Welsh Government policy document *Working Together to Reduce Harm* (WAG 2008), (hereafter WTRH), for comparative perspective on particular aspects.

FLSC was published in 2007 as a flagship strategy document, mapping out reforms up to 2018. Its foreword positions it among “a number of specific policy statements” set downstream of “the Assembly Government’s overall framework for public services [entitled] Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries”. WTRH, also a 10-year strategy, aims to address the harm caused by misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances. The majority of our analysis

¹ The name *Welsh Assembly Government* was changed to *Welsh Government* in March 2011; we use the latter here except in pre-2011 references.

is dedicated to FLSC, because of its broader scope in terms of the services affected. This is followed by a contrast with WTRH on certain points; we examine how more circumscribed beneficiaries of WTRH may account for the different priorities of the two documents.

For any such analysis, it is essential to bear in mind that post-devolutionary Wales is a unique political terrain, to the left of England both geographically and politically (Cairney, Keating & Hepburn 2009), so we do not assume that the thinking of the overarching New Labour UK Government would be mirrored by the Welsh Government. Indeed, the first purpose of our analysis was to assess the relative influence of these two strands of New Labour thought on specific Welsh Government policies. The second purpose was to explore the helpfulness of DHA in examining the balance between such competing strands.

A further crucial backdrop for policy analysis in Wales is the equality duty that operates across all arms of government. From their inception, the Welsh Assembly and Welsh Government (Wales' devolved legislature and executive, respectively) have made explicit claims about equality. Indeed the legislation that created both bodies, the Government of Wales Act 1998, stipulates in Section 120 (p.64) that the Assembly's "functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people [in Wales]."

This passage survived, with minor rewording, into Section 77.1 of the revised Government of Wales Act 2006, reflecting an enduring imperative. In its breadth, the all-encompassing remit of the Assembly's equality duty has "no parallel in any other devolution legislation" (Lambert 1999, 69; see also Chaney 2004, 66; 2011, 434). The duty was spread as broadly politically as it was socially: "It is singular in its non-specific phrasing and all-embracing scope and is an imperative that applies to all people and all functions of government" (Chaney 2011, 434). These jaws were given teeth by making equality an "absolute duty", inescapable on grounds of expense or proportionality (Chaney 2004, 67).

The equality duty reflected an element of New Labour thinking prominent since its first election in 1997, to "tackle social exclusion" (Fairclough 2000, 76). (Fairclough drily refers to "tackle" as "New Labour's favourite verb" in that it does not entail actually solving an issue: *ibid.* p.62.) Reaching those people inadequately served by social policy was a putative objective in Tony Blair's first major speech as Prime Minister, in which he promised there would be "no forgotten people and no no-hope areas" (Stewart 2009, 427).

Although social exclusion is a contested term, New Labour used it to encapsulate a range of concerns, including poverty, deprivation and inequality (Milbourne 2002, 287–288). Lack of access to services was a factor believed to bring about exclusion. One large-scale research project on the topic developed the following working definition:

"Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole." (Levitas et al. 2007, 9)

Moreover there are various inter-relating facets of social exclusion, including (but by no means

limited to) mental health, low income, lack of social networks, joblessness (Sayce 2001, 121), and poor access to housing (Stephens et al. 2002) – housing which, when it is accessed, can be in poor condition, unstable in tenure and otherwise unreliable (Smith & Twomey 2002). Levitas et al. (2007), and the literature they cite, show that these multiple forms of social exclusion correspond with marginalisation from the attention of much social policy, on account of irregular combinations of need. The chaotic nature of these combinations has led to vagueness and inattention in social policy. Much policy discussion has been in terms of “hard to reach” groups, a term that Brackertz (2007, 1) deems unsatisfactory, because it implies a level of homogeneity, and of blame for non-receipt of services. Brackertz also notes a lack of agreement as to which groups are “hard to reach”, and identifies a large number that have variously been placed under this heading, for example:

- Minority ethnic groups
- Newly arrived residents
- Illicit drug users
- Gay people
- Sexually active teenagers
- Homeless people
- Sex Workers

Despite these conceptual difficulties and lack of consensus, the quest to ensure services are delivered to those currently under-served is treated in this article as central to any effective attempt to tackle something called social exclusion – and, moreover, to fulfil the Welsh Government’s equality duty.

Politics, however, is the art of the possible (van Bismarck 1895, 248). What is deemed possible in a given socio-political context is the result of overarching fiscal limitations, and of policymaking discourses that contour the distribution of resources. What was the shape of this political landscape in early twenty-first century Wales?

A key influence in policymaking at this time has been ‘New Public Management’, a governance framework that originated in New Zealand in the 1980s (Schedler & Proeller 2002, 163) and gradually spread to the UK (indeed worldwide in various forms). NPM has three broad elements. First is for the state to grow beyond *reactive* – dealing with events to maintain the status quo – and become *proactive* – improving society above necessities of economics or security (Wilson 2001, 293). Second is to seek continuous improvements in services, regardless of deficiencies. Third is a focus on costs and accountability, more reminiscent of NPM’s predecessor, Thatcher-Reagan neoliberalism (see Mitchell 1987). These three elements encourage a broadening of state activity, but intense introspection based on measurable outcomes: a government doctrine designed to micro-manage behaviour and change society, but with close attention to productivity.

Applying corporate methods to public institutions, and ensuring greater managerial accountability in the public sector, were inherently attractive to governments suspicious of this sector (Cairney 2002, 380). Following the fall of Thatcher, the need to provide good quality public services at the best possible price was a feature of John Major’s Citizen’s Charter, which envisaged that choice would ensure service users were consulted about services provided (Doern 1993, 18-19). Continuity was evident in New Labour’s subsequent adoption of NPM principles: a “best value” regime was proposed in Consultation and White Papers of 1998, passed into law through the Local Government Act of 1999 (Martin 2002), and implemented in April 2000. This

regime created an imperative to seek continuous improvement in public services, regardless of specific deficiencies, and to measure these transparently with quantifiable performance targets. All this signalled “[a] movement away from input controls, rules and procedures towards output measurements and performance targets” (Hope Sr. 2002, 211). Crucially, a simultaneous effect was to de-emphasise anything that could not be measured in this way (Broadbent & Laughlin 2002, 102).

How was NPM adopted and adapted in Wales? Since its formation, the Welsh Government has been led (either alone or in coalition) by the Welsh Labour Party, which is further to the political left than the UK Labour Party. (Rhodri Morgan, First Minister of Wales and leader of Welsh Labour 2000-2009, famously said in 2002 that “clear red water” ran between the two parties – BBC News 2002.) But as Boyne et al. (1999) show, from interviews with Welsh politicians and civil servants, the Best Value regime actually proceeded “at a faster pace than in England” (p. 68), “driven by the concern of the Welsh Office and the Welsh Local Government Association to tailor Best Value to the circumstances of local authorities in Wales” (p. 84). It is our intention here to explore how NPM has contoured Welsh policymaking, and its importance relative to the equality discourse, using FLSC as a case study with some later reflection on WTRH.

FLSC sets out to reform and improve social services across Wales. We set out to gauge the balance between the priorities of measurable efficiency (characteristic of NPM) with universal equality (specific to Wales, as noted earlier) – which we refer to respectively, for ease of reference, as ‘speeding up’ and ‘reaching out’.

A central dichotomy for NPM in relation to social services is between service users and non-service-users. NPM concentrates on providing services more efficiently, in a measurable way according to definable outcomes. This goal may be hard to assert when ‘reaching out’ to new groups who are not current users of services, but who may nevertheless benefit from intervention – those who face multiple complex forms of social exclusion which have so far prevented engagement with services. Indeed, there have been occasions when NPM principles have been used to suggest that people should be excluded from services. For example, in a written response to a 2009 Welsh Assembly inquiry into mental health services, the Cardiff and Vale Mental Health Forum reported that people are often removed from support workers’ caseloads if they have missed appointments with doctors, crisis resolution services and some Community Mental Health Teams. In another response to the same inquiry, in a discussion of equality, the College of Occupational Therapists similarly acknowledged that it might be deemed necessary to exclude some people from services, but also pointed to severe consequences when this happened:

“Equality for those with other disabilities, such as those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and addiction problems also need to be considered far more effectively than is currently the case. Inclusion and exclusion criteria can assist services to manage referrals and direct people to the most appropriate service. However, if they are used inappropriately or exclude people when there is no alternative this leaves people without any access to services and may lead to severe illness and hospital admission.”

The issue of services disengaging from individuals facing complex social exclusion resonates with a range of prior research: there may be unusual difficulties in accessing treatments for people seen as “difficult” (Breeze & Repper 1998), or in receipt of diagnoses for which there is

apathy (Markham & Trower 2003) or active disinterest (Lewis & Appleby 1988). Foreclosure of services due to unpredictable behaviour can exacerbate marginalisation from the statutory care system. There are also reports of individuals avoiding services on the one hand, and services themselves failing to actively engage on the other (Lewis & Appleby 1988; NIMHE 2003). This is despite good evidence of improved outcomes for people where services take a proactive approach to engage with them (Crawford et al. 2009). With individuals such as these, there is a potential conflict between the cost of engaging with them (a key concern of NPM) and the inequalities arising from services not being provided (the onus of the equality duty).

Methodology

We first review the principal influences on our empirical approach before laying out our specific means of data collection and analysis. Our approach emanates from a concern in Critical Discourse Analysis that documents such as FLSC not only describe but also constitute “institutions” (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, 258; Chia 2000, 514), and that untangling this constitutive function is an important job in revealing power relations. “Fights and struggles over words have wide implications, for they are fights over a wide range of important social meanings” (Wodak 1999, 191; see also Wodak & Meyer 2009, 10). We ground our analysis of FLSC in the focal insight that “power is legitimized or de-legitimized in discourses. Texts are often sites of social struggle in that they manifest traces of differing ideological fights for dominance and hegemony.” (Reisigl & Wodak 2009, 89)

In attempting to weigh up competing emphases in texts, we draw further inspiration from Koller & Davidson’s (2008) work on British social policy texts (also on the theme of social exclusion) and from Chaney’s (2011) “policy discourse analysis” of policy texts on equality and human rights in the devolved UK administrations. Koller & Davidson begin by taking a quantitative approach to show that “social inclusion” (the ostensible goal) is significantly under-articulated by comparison to “social exclusion”. They show the problematic consequences of this mismatch, and ultimately call into question the use of this metaphor in the policy domain.

DHA, as a form of Critical Discourse Analysis, attempts to situate discourses and texts in their socio-historical contexts, whilst taking a critical perspective not cowed by normative implications. DHA was developed to analyse socially and historically embedded forms of discourse, for example anti-semitism in post-war Austrian politics (Wodak 2002). Our purpose is to highlight pressures and priorities in Welsh Government policy, and relate this to ambient concerns over cost, accountability and equality, showing how this relationship has contoured an understanding of the role of social services in addressing social exclusion. To this end we view discourse as “a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral, or written tokens” (Wodak 2001, 66), or “a coherent and systematic way of talking about things that constrains what can be said about them” (Barchas-Lichtenstein 2013, 41).

Wodak (2001, 64–65) argues that DHA incorporates three elements of critical thinking: examining internal tensions within a text; making use of the wider social and political context to show how the document seeks to manipulate opinion; and highlighting text that could be more

clearly stated or avoid prejudicial language. Our analysis mainly covers the first two of these. We aim to understand how FLSC balances New Public Management (continuous improvements, measurable accountability, etc.) with the equality duty – respectively, ‘speeding up’ and ‘reaching out’ – and the ways these two appear to be in tension. In relation to the context, Fairclough (2010, 421) argues: “we cannot understand particular events or particular texts, or the significance of these for participants, without exploring or asking about these wider intertextual chains”. Here the context includes the election of New Labour to UK Government in 1997, 2001 and 2005, the creation of the Welsh Assembly in 1999 (and political devolution), and other salient socio-political details as discussed earlier.

In looking for examples of the two eponymous discourses of ‘speeding up’ and ‘reaching out’, we draw on Reisig & Wodak’s (2009, 89) remarks, as noted earlier, about “differing ideological fights for dominance and hegemony.” We analyse the “fight for dominance” of these two competing discourses, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Our purpose here is to clarify FLSC’s “discursively created” legitimacy (Vaara et al. 2006, 793), which answers the questions “Why should we do this?” and “Why should we do it this way?” (van Leeuwen 2007, 93).

Turning to the practicalities of the data collection and analysis, the first coding categories emerged during our initial readings of FLSC; these were then gathered together in higher-level groups for transparency of reference and analysis. Some of the categories were keywords, where we were able to tally collocates and semantic roles in which they occurred. Others, such as ‘plans to recruit more staff’, or ‘earlier interventions and other preventative measures’, were worded variously, and required manual trawling. This coding and trawling process was repeated for each category until saturation was reached, and the process repeated by two authors then verified by two more.

As noted, as the analytical categories emerged from the text, we separated them into thematic groups; this was in order to illustrate more clearly the balance between competing discourses. The groups were as follows:

- *Focusing on existing user groups vs. finding new ones.* This group contains three categories:
 - mentions of existing user groups (who require the least structural change to services);
 - descriptions of increasing demand for a service (i.e. from familiar user groups);
 - explicitly specifying potential new users of services from unfamiliar user groups.The first two of these are within the ‘speeding up’ discourse outlined earlier; the third specifies unmet need and ‘reaching out’.
- *References to familiar vs. unfamiliar social groupings.* This group is similar to the last, but focuses on named social groupings instead of abstract discussions of user groups. The list below broadly goes from greater to lesser familiarity as users of social services:
 - ‘child’, ‘children’;
 - ‘Community’, ‘communities’;
 - ‘People’ [generically] and ‘individuals’;
 - ‘Family’, ‘families’;
 - ‘Citizens’, ‘the citizen’;
 - ‘young people’;
 - minority ethnic groups;
 - non-citizens (e.g. asylum seekers);
 - ‘Hard-to-reach groups’;
 - ‘Hard-to-reach groups’ without mentioning the third sector.

The importance of the last entry on this list emerged in the positioning of ‘hard-to-reach groups’ in relation to social services and the third sector (the latter as a peripheral body more able to explore these corners of society). We return to this below.

- *Efficiency as an inherent good vs. the value of time-redundancy and flexibility.* In this final group, the notion of an ‘inherent good’ arose where notions of cost-efficiency were presented as self-evidently positive outcomes, requiring no separate justification. This sat in contrast to any articulation of the potential value of more time provided to each service user, for example to address issues more comprehensively, and to offset recurring problems. In the list below, the first five categories relate to efficiencies, while the last attends to the possible value of added flexibility. (That 5-1 split makes this list the most imbalanced, but we were limited by our initial trawls of FLSC and found no other viable opposing categories). The categories in full were:
 - Self-care, independence, and at-home solutions;
 - ‘Earlier interventions’ and other preventative measures;
 - ‘Efficient’, ‘efficiencies’ etc.;
 - ‘Value’ (for money);
 - Increasing speed of services (reducing time units of service provided);
 - Providing services for more time per user.

In all with our methodology then, we began from the socio-political context of New Public Management (‘speeding up’) and the overarching equality duty in Wales (‘reaching out’), and developed coding categories to probe the balance between these competing discourses. In this sense our approach fell somewhere between *inductive coding* – where themes emerge from the text with no prior expectations – and *deductive coding* – where the researcher decides the coding categories beforehand. We brought certain broad areas of interest to the text, but allowed the precise groups and categories to emerge during our initial trawls.

We omitted non-relevant incidental uses of keywords. For example one of our keywords was ‘child’, but we ignored e.g. ‘UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’ which is simply the title of a separate document. We also avoided qualifying/adjectival uses of these keywords since we were chiefly concerned with nominals categorising groups of people. For example, for the keyword ‘public’, ‘among the public’ is of interest, but ‘public spending’ is not.

The subjective nature of discourse analysis in general, and DHA in particular, is widely acknowledged (see, for example, Wodak 2011, 35). As Baker (2012) notes, even when using the apparently objective approach of analysing every incidence of a particular term, subjective judgement still plays a role. We might also note the sustained critique of the claims and methodology of CDA in Jones (2007) and Collins and Jones (2006). However, in any form of qualitative data analysis, there is not a requirement to remove the subjective element but to ensure that it does not become bias by applying tests of validity (Harding 2013, 171-173). We discuss these concerns further below.

Findings and discussion

FLSC is 14,353 words long (52 pages). Its foreword serves as a good inroad to the overall balance of priorities. It provides five “Key areas where action is required”:

- “leadership and accountability, so that social services have strong accountable leadership politically, professionally and managerially;
- commissioning which is effective in securing high quality, reliable and accessible services that people need, in a balanced and managed market;
- performance management arrangements which provide robust scrutiny and lead to year on year improvements in standards;
- partnership arrangements which put the citizen at the centre and work effectively across sectors and organisations using care pathways to support people; and
- a single workforce which is well trained for modern needs, well motivated, and makes best use of scarce skills.”

It is initially instructive that none of these explicitly mentions expansion of service provision into unfamiliar categories of service user – those who currently do not receive services at all. In contrast, there are references to various concepts central to New Public Management: the need for accountable leadership, performance management, and efficient deployment of staff. Although we were naturally more concerned with the text as a whole, nevertheless this gives a preliminary indication of a balance of emphases. We turn now to the findings in the four thematic groups and the categories within them.

Focusing on existing user groups vs. finding new ones

FLSC is ostensibly about service development and reform. As well as nominating beneficiaries, there is much attention to who will direct and influence these reforms – that is, whose needs could be better met. Almost exclusively this is constrained to existing users of services, in familiar user categories, as well as their carers and families, for example:

“[T]he changes described here cannot be realised unless users of services and their carers, service providers in all sectors and the workforce are actively engaged in making the changes happen.” (Foreword)

Mentions of “service users”, or variants thereof, occur primarily either in the context of consultation to develop services (e.g. “shape services around users”, p.5), or as a focal point of service delivery itself (e.g. “better informed and empowered service users”, p.13). These plans to engage service users in the planning process are articulated in a way that presupposes existing contact, and successful sustained engagement.

Reprising the categories in this thematic group, we identified the following tallies:

- (Existing) ‘users of services’: 29
- Describing increasing demand for a service (from familiar user categories): 15
- Specifying potential new users of services from unfamiliar user categories: 0

In the interests of full exposition, and recalling the danger of subjectivity noted earlier, it is worth

highlighting some areas of ambiguity that could potentially be seen as attending to under-served groups. There is mention of serving “vulnerable groups” (section 3.2), and a goal to “value all local citizens” (section 3.4). These are broader in scope than the presupposed contact outlined above, but still neither one involves actively identifying new and unfamiliar groups of potential service users. Further examples of ambiguously worded phrases, that might be interpreted as encompassing under-served people, are as follows (*italics added*):

“*people who need services* will have a far greater say over what they need and how it is provided” (Foreword)

“those [young people] who are excluded from the life of their communities and others” (section 2.8)

“ensure that universal and preventative services are developed in a way which supports *a wider range of needs*” (section 3.4).

“Child protection and children’s social workers will need to [...] find new ways to support children and protect *vulnerable family members*.” (section 3.16)

The first of these, “people who need services”, could include under-served people, but equally could simply be a rewording of *service user*. The remaining three, though broader than a named group of existing services users, nevertheless do not explore who might be within these groups, or how they might be better served. The final two potentially communicate a willingness to serve “a wider range of needs” through “new ways” of offering support; yet there is no indication of how that would be achieved. And these ambiguous instances comprise the entirety of discussion beyond existing known groups of service users.

The quietude towards under-served people is salient. As Carvalho has it: “Silence can be as performative as discourse. [...] What is obscured in the text? How does the inclusion and exclusion of facts serve the creation of a certain meaning?” (2008, 171). Fairclough (1995, 106) elaborates on this point in relation to media representation (though still relevant in this case):

“Unsurprisingly, analysis of representation is mainly analysis of what is ‘there’ in the text. But it is also important to be sensitive to absences from the text, to things which might have been ‘there’ but aren’t – or, and this really comes down to the same thing, to things which are present in some texts appertaining to a given area of social policy, but not in others.”

Meanwhile, as noted above, there are fifteen references to increasing demand from existing service user groups. Some examples from FLSC:

“Social services in Wales support 150,000 people. They account for nearly £1.1 billion in public spending and employ over 70,000 people.” (section 1.1)

“Increasing numbers of children with congenital disorders and disability are surviving. They and their families require support.” (section 2.25)

“The number of people receiving a social service grew by 50 per cent (from 100,000 to

150,000) between 2001 and 2005 but growth in the workforce has not kept pace with demand.” (section 2.28)

“those aged 85 and over are projected to increase by 47.4%, from 60 thousand in 2004 to 88 thousand in 2018. The numbers of people aged 65 to 84 are projected to increase by 27%.” (section 2.30)

These can be seen as mobilising part of the NPM discourse, in highlighting the need for more efficient use of resources to meet increasing demand, i.e. ‘speeding up’. Overall in this thematic group, the text appears to place emphasis towards known groups of existing service users, and away from explicit discussion of seeking out currently under-served people.

References to familiar vs. unfamiliar social groupings

The previous group focused on mentions of ‘service users’ (and variants thereof), meaning people currently engaged with social services. The current thematic group approaches the question of known vs. unknown groups from a different angle. Here we look at how FLSC discusses categories of people in society, in relation to services. This helps further explicate the balance between the familiar (and controlling those costs) and the unknown (expanding services into areas of more complex social exclusion). Taking the tallies of our categories to begin with:

- ‘child’, ‘children’: 72
- ‘Community’, ‘communities’: 39
- ‘People’ [generically] and ‘individuals’: 39
- ‘Family’, ‘families’: 33
- ‘Citizens’, ‘the citizen’: 27
- ‘young people’: 18
- minority ethnic groups: 3
- non-citizens (e.g. asylum seekers): 1
- ‘Hard-to-reach groups’ (or any other specific socially excluded subsection): 1
- ‘Hard-to-reach groups’ without mentioning the third sector: 0

FLSC contains only two specific references to named under-served groups. The first is to non-citizens, discussed as a collective entity – i.e. asylum seekers, refugees, and other irregular migrants. These are mentioned in a short subsection entitled ‘A Service which Responds to Diversity’ (p.20):

“Expertise in some aspects of work, for example with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, is concentrated in a few areas. Local authorities will increasingly collaborate so that when culturally appropriate or specialist support is required, it will be available.”

This is laudable, and the “for example” gives some latitude in recognising unmet need. Still, this subsection is an isolated aside outside of the main discussion of familiar user groups. In contrast to this one reference to non-citizens, the term *citizen* is used twenty-seven times.

The second, broader reference to under-served groups is:

“the ‘third sector’ [...] can [...] often be more acceptable to hard-to-reach groups; and [...] be an articulate champion for those whose voices are rarely heard.” (section 4.26)

Why social services cannot access “hard-to-reach groups” remains unstated. The third sector stands in here as an alternative for more radical reform of social services to perform this kind of

reaching out exercise. This linguistic manoeuvre is akin to what Wodak (2002, 501) refers to as an “allusion”, in the sense of a “repertoire of collective knowledge”, where implicit knowledge among the audience is used to refer to a certain idea/notion/group, without needing to specifically name it. “Allusions are conscious references to common experiences; but the level and degree of this consciousness can differ” (ibid. p.502). It is enough to gesture vaguely towards hard-to-reach groups; this gesture invokes the necessary images of those whose needs do not fit existing services. The third sector then fits in as a similar known-yet-unknown piece of the puzzle, used for reaching into this social wilderness. The crucial point is that this is all buried within layers of implicit understandings, the “repertoire of collective knowledge”. It is worth repeating that these “hard-to-reach” groups are mentioned explicitly in this way a total of once.

Efficiency as an inherent good vs. the value of time-redundancy and flexibility

Chapter 1 of FLSC states that its provision of services to 150,000 people costs £1.1 billion annually and involves over 70,000 staff. An increase in the number of service users is linked to measuring the effectiveness of individual interventions. This has specific ramifications. It is particularly important in the context of fixed-term support periods, where support ends obligatorily after a certain time. A series of quick, targeted support periods with a service user, each deemed ‘effective’, could conceal repeat engagement with services, and cycles of turmoil. Potentially this could be better prevented by continuing availability of a known support worker based on a system of necessary time-redundancy. How do such possibilities weigh up in FLSC?

- Self care, independence, at-home solutions: 31
- ‘Earlier interventions’ and other preventative measures: 19
- ‘Efficient’, ‘efficiencies’ etc.: 12
- ‘Value’ (for money): 5
- Increasing speed of services (reducing time units of service provided): 3
- Providing services for more time per user: 1*

The first category, at-home solutions etc., is mentioned in the context of increasing pressure on institutionally delivered care, and routinely combined with the second category – together building momentum behind a lighter-touch, more efficient service, for example in section 3.19:

“Services will be provided as close to home as possible. They will be coordinated with other agencies to reduce the number of assessments and the amount of information gathering by lead workers. They should target support to individuals, families, and children in need at a sufficiently early stage.”

Meanwhile there is only one mention of any kind of increase in provision per service user: “ensure appropriate access out of normal hours”. This is an entry in a list under the heading “Services will be shaped by service users and their needs”, and on the question of flexibility it is somewhat ambiguous: “appropriate access out of normal hours” could potentially be achieved by rescheduling work hours, not adding more. The overall preference in FLSC then is for early interventions, self-help, and lighter involvement of workers. There is a recurrent assertion of positive outcomes as a result, but without substantive backing, for example:

“For the citizen this will mean [...] earlier interventions to promote independence and the

attainment of a person's full potential. Helping people to self care will have benefits for everyone.” (Foreword)

“services need to concentrate more on helping people to keep their independence” (section 2.19)

“Services will be rebalanced to allow services to be provided earlier, tailored to individual needs and prevent or delay people moving to a higher level of need.” (section 3.10)

Overall then, the need to meet ever increasing demand more efficiently, through more limited interventions, appears the dominant discourse of FLSC, while reaching out to under-served people – demanded by the equality duty – remains notably downplayed.

Working Together to Reduce Harm

While there is an apparent imbalance towards ‘speeding up’ and away from ‘reaching out’ in FLSC, it seemed reasonable to assume that the balance might be different in WTRH, given that illegal drug users are frequently characterised as “hard to reach” (Brackertz 2007, 1–2).

WTRH makes for an instructive contrast with FLSC, in tacitly acknowledging the constrained and at times exclusionary remit of social services. As noted earlier, our analysis of WTRH is briefer because its scope is much more circumscribed than FLSC, relating only to substance misuse. Our analysis concentrates on a few key contrasts which illustrate the way in which a different framing (Goffman 1974) reindexes relationships between messages and co-participants (Sarangi 1998, 306). The issue of efficiency is evident in WTRH, with one of the four key aims of the strategy being:

“Making better use of resources – supporting evidenced based decision making, improving treatment outcomes, developing the skills base of partners and service providers by giving a greater focus to workforce development and joining up agencies and services more effectively.” (p.1)

Indeed, existing groups of “substance misusers” are frequently noted, with an emphasis on providing “better” services to meet existing health and social care needs. However, another aim of the strategy is “increasing the availability” of services; and, in contrast to FLSC, new categories of service users are explicitly foregrounded. These groups are defined as vulnerable people such as pregnant women, victims of domestic abuse, those with mental health problems, homeless people, minority ethnic communities and those at risk of causing very significant harm to themselves, their families and communities (p.33). As the entire document concentrates on substance misusers, these groups represent sub-sets of under-served people in a population that is in itself believed to be under-served, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of social exclusion (per Levitas et al. 2007, 9).

Service expansion in pursuit of these excluded sub-groups is a central aim of WTRH, for example:

“We will expand harm reduction services for drug misusers. We will do more to engage priority and hard to reach groups through investment in youth and other outreach services and better use of arrest referral and Tier 1 workers to work with both drug and alcohol misusers.” (p.5)

“[W]e still have some distance to go to ensure that substance misusers are able to access the right types of treatment at the right time and more is done to encourage those in hard-to-reach groups to come forward. The quality of some treatment services and the resultant outcomes also needs to improve.” (p.30)

Service expansion receives in all seven explicit mentions; outreach services nine mentions. Moreover, there is a sense that services are to be geared towards finding people who may be hard to find, and indeed may not want to be found:

“The services provided must include needle exchange, harm minimisation advice, blood-borne virus testing and vaccination for hepatitis B. Access to these must be easy and convenient and include better provision via outreach services. [...] [C]ommissioners should engage with providers to ensure additional venues are available for the provision of sterile injecting equipment, such as mobile facilities, and the need to expand outreach teams, including those aimed at rough sleepers.” (pp.31–32)

This is significantly more inclusive and broad-sighted than FLSC. The emphases on outreach, and mobile facilities, alongside the explicit targeting of hard-to-reach groups within the remit of services, show that the target beneficiaries of this policy may not currently be in contact with services, and that additional resources are needed to serve them. In producing any such text, its author(s) will “recycle meanings that are already available” such that texts are situated in and surrounded by the “history of (ab)use, interpretation and evaluation” which “sticks to” them (Blommaert 2005, 46); yet, in FLSC and WTRH, very different discourse trajectories develop, despite potential for homogeneity across the two.

All this being said, there is palpable equivocation in the details of WTRH, for example the intent to establish mechanisms of case identification: “scoping the potential to pilot a brief intervention service which GPs can refer” (p.33) suggests something of a feeling-your-way-in-the-dark approach, a little wary of what one may find. Still, WTRH is measurably more adventurous than FLSC in exploring the potential for *expansion* and *adaptation* of services. To reprise our headline terms, WTRH, while not ignoring the importance of ‘speeding up’, gives considerably higher priority to ‘reaching out’.

Meanwhile WTRH also signals the shortfalls of FLSC, in a different way, more in its silence than anything else – recalling Fairclough (1995, 106) as cited earlier. WTRH mentions FLSC only twice, once in relation to the children of substance misusers (p.42), and once in relation to families (as units that contain children) (p.45). This is instructive; as we cited Carvalho above: “Silence can be as performative as discourse. [...] What is obscured in the text? How does the inclusion and exclusion of facts serve the creation of a certain meaning?” (2008, 171). Here the quietude of WTRH seems to speak to the limitations of FLSC when discussing ‘reaching out’ to underserved groups.

Critically, it is not our argument that WTRH is in any sense mopping up whatever is left out by FLSC. For a start, WTRH is only about substance misuse, and as we discussed earlier, social exclusion can take a great many forms. Our argument is more about the missed potential of FLSC – highlighted by WTRH’s different approach and its silence about FLSC – and how the specific plans of FLSC fall well short of its headline claims. FLSC has remained somewhat constrained by an overarching policymaking framework designed to meet specified outcomes and deliver measurable improvements, whilst carefully rationalising fiscal expenditure. WTRH, by contrast, marks a departure of sorts from these constraints, striking a clearer balance between ‘speeding up’ and ‘reaching out’, and finessing a more capable approach to the Welsh Assembly’s equality duty.

Conclusion

For logistical and practical reasons we have concentrated on a specific policy area in one devolved administration. This research was conducted without funding, intended as much as a primer for further inquiry and debate as it was a standalone contribution. We have received valuable feedback that similar tensions exist in social services planning elsewhere, for example in Scotland. A comparative analysis would be a sensible step forward beyond the current research. This would enable a wider interdiscursive analysis, to see how these types of thematic priorities recur in different legislatures, and in different discourses.

Taken together, our findings suggest that one of the principal priorities for FLSC is to efficiently conclude existing service interventions and minimise the time-footprint of ongoing interventions. When interventions are necessary, these are to be as early and as light as possible, and to end as quickly as possible. Efficiencies must rise within services, concentrating on familiar user categories, whose numbers are noted to be increasing. Justification for these priorities focuses on the inherent importance of quantifiable efficiency, within the wider policymaking framework of NPM. In contrast, ‘reaching out’ to marginalised and under-served people is mentioned infrequently, as the responsibility of a distantly articulated third sector.

Chaney highlights that the Welsh Government equality duty is “not aimed solely at marginalised groups but ‘all people’” (2004, 67). We would argue, based on our analysis, that this emphasis on universality lacks clarity and precision, eliding precise discussion of the most marginalised. A clearer balance may be struck if the policymaking rationale of WTRH could be spread more widely, to match the detail with the headline priorities in FLSC such as “promoting wellbeing, social inclusion and community safety” (p.1). At present, these intentions are constrained by demands on productivity and performance, reflected in the predominant discourse of NPM. The result is an emphasis on efficiency and throughput – on speeding up – to the apparent detriment of breadth and sensitivity of care – reaching out.

The use of DHA in this case demonstrates the value of analysing documents from even a recent period within their historical context. The New Labour era was particularly fruitful for this type of analysis because of the emphasis placed on language and the importance of ‘spin’ in convincing the media that the government was satisfying a wide range of agendas (Fairclough 2000). We reviewed above the influence of New Labour thinking on the nascent Welsh

Government, given its concern to implement Best Value principles as early as possible, alongside its strong equality duty.

Other studies have examined the role of language in achieving political goals (for example Unger, 2013) and of competition between discourses advanced by different groups (for example, Kotwal and Power, 2013). In this study we have examined competing discourses within the rhetoric of one organisation. This approach could be productively applied to examine the discourse of the New Labour governments. Various authors have noted tensions between different elements of their social policies. For example, when discussing street homelessness, Cloke et al. (2010, 37–39) point to the conflict between the stated wish to bring about social inclusion for homeless people – which dominated the early New Labour years – and the tackling of anti-social behaviour – which dominated the later years alongside a shift towards being ‘tough’ on activities associated with homeless people, such as begging.

Language and discourse were particularly important to the method of government of New Labour (Fairclough 2010, 171) and continue to be under the post-New Labour administrations of David Cameron. Cameron has used similar rhetorical devices to those of Tony Blair to seek to position the Conservative Party as lying outside historical political divisions, and to deliver an inclusive narrative (McAnulla 2010). The tensions between different discourses within this narrative was illustrated when the “all-out assault on poverty” – announced by Cameron at the 2015 Conservative party conference (CCHQ 2015) – clashed with the longer established discourse of cutting the deficit and public spending. This clash resulted in political difficulties for the government over proposed cuts to tax credits (Watt 2015). As politicians appear increasingly concerned to present themselves as transcending traditional political divides, and satisfying competing agendas simultaneously, analysis of fights for dominance in discourse will be crucial to establishing their true priorities.

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