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978-0-521-30900-4 - Joint Approaches to Social Policy: Rationality and practice

Linda Challis, Susan Fuller, Melanie Henwood, Rudolf Klein, William Plowden, Adrian Webb,
Peter Whittingham and Gerald Wistow

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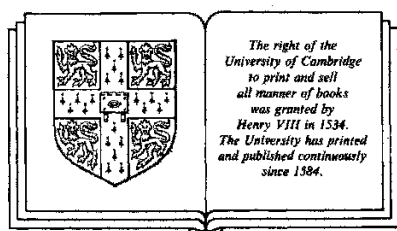
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Rationality and practice

LINDA CHALLIS SUSAN FULLER
MELANIE HENWOOD RUDOLF KLEIN
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

New York New Rochelle Melbourne Sydney

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,

Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by

Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521309004

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First published 1988

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Klein, Rudolf.

Joint approaches to social policy.

Bibliography.

Includes index.

1. Great Britain – Social policy. 2. Central–local
government relations – Great Britain.

I. Plowden, William. II. Webb, Adrian Leonard. III. Title.

HN390.K57 1987 361.6'1'0941 87-13158

ISBN 978-0-521-30900-4 Hardback

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

LINDA CHALLIS

Linda Challis is a Lecturer in Social Policy at the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy at the University of Bath. She has worked in the Personal Social Services in both a practice and research capacity. Her interest in coordination developed as a result of her work on day care for under fives, and from her present research interests in care of elderly people and the relationship between public and private provision. She has been a member of national working parties on aspects of care for both children under five and elderly people, as well as serving as a member of a District Health Authority.

SUSAN FULLER

Susan Fuller is a researcher in the Chief Executive's Department, Cleveland County Council. She obtained a BSc in Political Science at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1978. She subsequently studied for a doctorate in Political Science, which was awarded in 1985. She was a researcher at Loughborough University from 1981 to 1985, working on an evaluation of the government's Opportunities for Volunteering programme, as well as on the study of policy coordination which resulted in the present volume.

MELANIE HENWOOD

Melanie Henwood is a Research Officer at the Family Policy Studies Centre. Her major interests are in the fields of community care; child support; and housing policy and the family life cycle. Her most recent publications, which she co-authored with Malcolm Wicks, are *The Forgotten Army: family care and elderly people* (FPSC 1984), and *Benefit or Burden? the objectives and impact of child support* (FPSC 1986).

RUDOLF KLEIN

Rudolf Klein is a Professor of Social Policy, and Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy, at the University of Bath. He studied mediaeval history at Oxford, spent 20 years as a journalist and subsequently turned to an academic career. He has edited or written books about public expenditure,

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the future of welfare policies and the politics of the National Health Service. His latest book (with Patricia Day) is *Accountabilities*. He is joint editor of *Political Quarterly*.

WILLIAM PLOWDEN

William Plowden is Director-General of the Royal Institute of Public Administration. He has previously worked as a lecturer at the London School of Economics and as a civil servant in the industry and trade departments and in the Central Policy Review Staff. In the latter he was closely involved with the 'Joint Approach to Social Policies' (JASP).

ADRIAN WEBB

After graduating at Birmingham University in 1965, Adrian Webb studied at the London School of Economics (LSE) and was offered a Lectureship in the Department of Social Administration in 1966. During eight years at LSE he taught a wide variety of courses, but specialised in the Personal Social Services. He was appointed Professor of Social Administration at Loughborough University of Technology in 1976, became Head of the Department of Social Sciences in 1981 and Director of the Centre for Research in Social Policy in 1983. He is now Dean of the School of Human and Environmental Studies. He is also a member of the Council of Tribunals. He is author or co-author of ten books and monograph, the latest (with Susan Charles) being *The Economics of Social Policy* (Wheatsheaf).

PETER WHITTINGHAM

Peter Whittingham first trained as a natural scientist before transferring to sociological sciences at Kent University. Prior to joining the Bath research team he was for four years a Research Officer with Lambeth Social Services. He was Head of the Planning, Training and Community Development Unit in the Personal Services Department of the London Borough of Redbridge, and is now Assistant Director with North Yorkshire Social Services.

GERALD WISTOW

Gerald Wistow is co-director of the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University of Technology. He has a long standing interest in inter-agency collaboration and has published a number of articles and monographs on joint planning, joint finance and 'care in the community'. He is also the co-author, with Adrian Webb, of three books on the personal social services. His most recent book (with David Hunter) is *Community Care in Britain: Variations on a Theme* (King's Fund 1987).

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PREFACE

When we started the research on which this book reports, we thought that we were about to carry out a post-mortem. At the beginning of the eighties, when the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) gave us a grant for this work, the landscape was littered with ideas and institutions which had dominated the two previous decades but had seemingly not survived the cold climate of economic retrenchment and ideological change. Gone were the days when Keynesian economic management could be relied upon to make unemployment simply a bad memory. Gone were the days when the Welfare State thrived on the dividends of economic growth. Gone were the days of consensual policy making and corporate institutions. Gone, too, were the days of belief in the pursuit of greater rationality in policy making through the coordination of different policy instruments and agencies.

It was this last casualty of the transformation of the economic, social and intellectual climate which was the subject of our inquiry. The sixties and seventies had spawned a large family of initiatives designed to bring about greater rationality in policy making through coordination. Indeed both central and local government, the health services and the personal services had undergone major reorganisations largely, if not exclusively, designed to make it easier to attack social problems by bringing different strands of policy making to bear on them. And symbolic of this endeavour was the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) in Whitehall, designed to cut through the tangle of departmental interests and to bring a rational, synoptic view to the analysis of policy. In turn, it was the CPRS's report *A Joint Framework for Social Policies* (usually known as the 'Joint Approach to Social Policy', or 'JASP') which gave us the working title for our project: 'Whatever happened to JASP?'. For when we started, JASP was dead and the CPRS was clearly dying. And we thought that by taking the problem of social policy coordination as the theme for our undertaking, we would be able to explore some of the problems of modern government: our hope was that, by carrying out such a post-mortem, we would be able to explain why it was that the search for greater rationality in policy making had failed, and what might have saved it. Perhaps the search was doomed from the start; perhaps it was simply carried out too naively, in the expectation that rationality was its own reward. We did

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not know, but we hoped to find out even at the risk of illuminating only history.

We need not have worried. No sooner had we got the body on the operating table than it showed signs of life. What started as a post-mortem turned out, as we started to write up our findings, to be an inquiry highly relevant for the future of British government. Hardly a day has passed without some new government initiative involving coordination, and this from a government which had forgotten JASP, killed off the CPRS and was committed to a hands-off, market-orientated approach to social policy making. In dealing with the problems of the inner cities, the government set up a task force designed to cut across administrative boundaries. In trying to cope with the issue of law and order, the government exhorted everyone to set up coordinating bodies. In reacting to the problem of child abuse, the government stressed the need for greater coordination between the different agencies involved. In trying to cope with the effects of financial stringency, the government emphasised the importance of coordination between the National Health Service and the Personal Social Services. Coordination has, once again, become a fashionable buzz word.

The trend is evident both within and beyond Whitehall. There have been pleas for the resurrection of the CPRS. And, perhaps most significant of a wider intellectual change, the enthusiasm for coordination also reflects a growing sense of helplessness by single service agencies in the face of social complexity. Doctors and policemen, social workers and teachers are all agreed that what they do is shaped by forces beyond their control. There is a rush, as it were, to disavow responsibility, be it for ill-health or crime, child abuse or illiteracy. And if all such problems reflect multiple causes springing from a complex social environment, then obviously the only way of dealing with them is by coordinating a variety of different agencies in a common enterprise. Once again, then, coordination becomes the key to successful social action.

But if the word itself is once again back in favour, it remains precisely that: a word in search of ways of giving it effective meaning in practice. In government circulars and ministerial policy pronouncements, it is a largely rhetorical invocation of a vague ideal. The centre will prescribe; the periphery will implement. In this respect, little appears to have changed since the last time round, in the seventies, when the concept was last in vogue.

It is because of this that, slightly to our own surprise, our study has considerable relevance for the future. For what we aim to provide in this book, by looking at the practice of coordination at and between all levels of government and a variety of other agencies, is an understanding of what the process actually involves. By taking 'coordination' as problematic, by asking

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what conditions and incentives are required for it to be a successful recipe for tackling policy problems, we try to generate a series of insights about how to move from policy rhetoric to policy practice. In this, we do not provide a cook-book for policy makers. We do, however, seek to give policy makers – at all levels – some of the conceptual tools needed for thinking about how to make coordination a success. For the central message of our book, to anticipate our final chapter, is that coordination does not just happen because ministers or top civil servants say that it should. It means creating the right kind of framework and providing the right kind of incentives for the individual actors who alone can make it work.

In order to explore these issues, we have been eclectic in our research strategy. We have not only looked at the practice of coordination in a variety of settings, national and local (since by definition any research into coordination must look at the relationship both between central government departments, and between central government and local agencies). We have also tried to combine social anthropology and bureaumetrics. We have sought both to give a picture of how organisational actors in a variety of settings perceive the problems and opportunities of coordination but also to measure the actual outputs or products of coordination (a useful precedent, perhaps, for ministers setting up new coordinating machinery: perhaps they, too, should have such performance indicators to check on the success of their enterprise). In doing so, we open a window not only on the Whitehall village but also on how the inhabitants there perceive their relationship with the lesser tribes in the outlying settlements.

Finally, this study is innovative in another respect as well (although it will be for the reader to judge whether it is a successful innovation). It is itself the product of an exercise in coordination, involving three research teams based in three different institutions (The Royal Institute of Public Administration and the Universities of Bath and Loughborough). It thus illustrates both the costs and benefits of coordination, as well as perhaps the need for an outside body like the ESRC to provide the financial incentives required to make the process work. The costs include, conspicuously, the time involved in bringing three teams together and in exchanging drafts of chapters. In this respect, we found, coordination *is* expensive, and in producing this book we have stretched the patience even of a publisher used to academic dawdlings with deadlines. However, in our own view certainly, the result is a study (to turn to the benefits of coordination) where every argument and assertion has been challenged. The result may not necessarily be more coherent than if it had been by one hand, but it is certainly more rigorous than if any one of us had taken sole responsibility for its production.

For this is a collective book. Individual authors have had a special

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responsibility for different chapters. So, for example, William Plowden alone is responsible for the chapter telling the story of JASP. Four members of the team – Sue Fuller, Melanie Henwood, Peter Whittingham and Gerald Wistow – were responsible for organising and conducting the local fieldwork, for analysing the materials collected and for writing the relevant chapters (6–10). They also fully participated in planning the book as a whole and drafting other chapters. But coordination did not end with the research. It persisted throughout the long process of writing up the findings and ended with the publication of this book. If coordination can have identifiable, visible and measurable products, then this book is one.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been made possible by the help and cooperation of a large, but necessarily anonymous, army of people working in central and local government, the National Health Service and voluntary agencies. We are most grateful to them for giving us their time and advice. We only regret that, since one of the conditions of our enterprise was that our sources should not be revealed, we are unable to thank them by name. The orchestration of the work and the typing of successive drafts were tasks shared by a number of secretaries. We would, in particular, like to thank Sylvia Hodges at the University of Bath, and Lorraine Jones, Margaret Millington and Ann Tanner at the University of Loughborough. We would also like to thank the Royal Institute of Public Administration and the Family Policy Studies Centre for providing space and hospitality for the meetings bringing together the three research teams. Finally, we are grateful to Professor Michael Hill and Dr Ellie Scrivens for commenting on an earlier draft of this book.

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