

Chapter 14

The Need for Separating University Management and Administration from Service Delivery: Reviewing Disability Policy at Four HEIs in Wales

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at how suitable the current equality policies of Wales's universities are to compete in the current economic climate and the changes needed to deliver best value to people with disabilities and all other taxpayers. The chapter makes the finding that universities are too bloated, by carrying out functions, which in Wales could be better handled by the public sector that is under direct control of the Welsh Government's education minister. This would involve learning from how the telecoms and energy companies work UK wide, so that HEFCfW becomes an infrastructure provider, Estyn would become responsible for ensuring the equality of access to higher education and ensuring the standards of university education. Universities would thus consist mainly of teaching and research staff, optimising how they use the infrastructure to attract the most students to their degrees, which are homogenised. The chapter makes clear, however, that whilst this policy would likely work in Wales, it would be unlikely to in England, perhaps allowing "clear red water" between governments.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the Western hemisphere is engaged in an age of austerity in terms of national economic policy (Roy & Buchanan, 2015). This has resulted in cuts to welfare payments to some of the most vulnerable groups in society as part of an ideological battle to reduce public spending and taxes at the same time as

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9850-5.ch014

trying to repay debts that have not fallen due and grow an economy without increasing investment and encouraging consumption (Loopstra et al., 2015). The budget cuts of the UK Government have been passed on to the devolved regions, which in turn have been passed on to the local governmental bodies they are responsible for, who in turn have passed it on to their service users, who especially in the case of people with disabilities often have no one to pass their loss onto. Cutting public services can therefore be seen to adversely affect those people for whom taxes are meant to be collected to support through social programmes (Sandhu & Stephenson, 2015).

Labour's Prime Minister Tony Blair promised "education, education, education" (Hodgson & Spours, 2013) and his opposite number in the Welsh Government, First Minister Rhodri Morgan, promised "clear red water" between his administration and that of Tony Blair's (Moon, 2012). As they are both members of same political party this it can therefore be argued that education policy in Wales needs to follow a more statist agenda compared to the more market-given approach in England (Hawkes, 2013).

It has been argued that the Welsh Government is already committed to a specifically planned rather than a market-led approach to the organisation of its higher education sector (Waring, 2013). It should therefore be appropriate to find means by which the freedoms to direct one's own educational destiny so encouraged by Tony Blair can be realised in Wales, where there is a lack of willingness to use the private sector to increase standards, can instead be done through the public sector to achieve the same outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Education and public policy in the United Kingdom has in general followed a two and fro between the political party claiming to support leftist policies to the one claiming to represent the right-wing. In the case of the left wing the Liberal and Labour Parties have represented this section of the population, and the Conservative Party has represented the right. The Liberal Democrats, which formed from a merger between the Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party had tried to gain favour with the left or right depending on where they were contesting elections. Since their coalition with the Conservatives and the 13 years of New Labour there had been demands for a new party of the left, which some saw as the Green Party. The difficulty for the Conservative Party had been the rise of the UK Independence Party, which attempted to triangulate the territory the Conservatives always held in terms of being stronger on immigration than Labour or the Liberal Democrats. However, as a result of the first-past-the-post system, the Conservatives were elected with a majority, meaning that they will be able to deliver market-based public policy without hindrance. It might be that as a result of devolution, Wales will be privileged in that it will have a consistent approach to how it governs its affairs due to most of the parties in Wales agreeing to a more statist line on public policy.

Higher Education Policy in Wales

Much of the expansion of higher education in Wales and throughout the UK during the early part of the twenty-first century was accommodated by a number of government initiatives (Jackson, 2013). Since then the Welsh Assembly has matured into a de facto parliament with an executive and legislature, with strategic policies. This has included schemes like Cwricwlwm Cymreig, which seeks to embed an appreciation of Wales, the Welsh language and Welsh culture more generally (Murphy & Laugharne, 2013; Turnbull, 2003). There is also an Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

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