

Jones, Ray (2019) Act heralded end of generic social work. *Children & Young People Now*, p. 28.

2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the 1989 Children Act and 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of the post-Seebohm report's development of integrated personal social services and an integrated profession of social work in the UK.

Prior to 1970 there were separate children's, welfare and mental health departments within local authorities and eight different professional organisations for different types of social workers. In 1970 there was the advent of one professional association – the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), one professional qualification for all social workers, and social services departments (SSDs) in England and Wales, social work departments in Scotland, and personal social services combined with health services in Northern Ireland.

The prevalent model was of generic area teams, with some caseload specialisation for social workers, within SSDs managed by more senior social workers. The intention was that a social worker could work with a family across the generations and assist with the range of issues facing families, creating greater coherence, reducing duplication, and being aware of local resources and networks.

This was to change in England following the 1989 Children Act and the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act. The 1989 Act was supported by ten volumes of specialist guidance which totalled almost 1,000 pages. The 1990 Act prompted a purchaser-provider separation within SSDs. Services for children and adults were pulled in different directions. The consequence was the unwinding of generic social workers, teams and managers and the creation of separate children's and adults divisions within SSDs.

The extent and depth of the specialist 1989 Act guidance also led to greater specialisation within the children's services, with separate teams and workers for short-term intake and assessment, longer term work, fostering and adoption, disabled children, children looked after, permanence planning, and children leaving care.

It was the 2004 Children Act which led to the demise of SSDs and the establishment of separate adult and children's services. The argument was that combining education and services for schools with children's social services would lead to more integrated services for children and families, but schools through academisation and free schools are now largely outside of local authority influence.

There has also been increasing fragmentation in the professional training of social workers with the government funding Frontline, a fast-tracked non-university training programme for children's social workers, and introducing an accreditation programme which will only be applied to statutory children's social workers in England.

The 1989 Act, therefore, heralded an end in England to generic social work focussed on families across generations and communities. This has been taken much further by the 2004 Children Act and the government's separation since 2010 of statutory children's social workers from other social workers.

On the ground, however, Ofsted is finding and reporting that the best performing children's social services are re-building a family and community focus, reducing organisationally-required disruptive hand-overs between social workers, and integrating mental health, drug and alcohol, and domestic violence workers in to local children's social services teams. A new balance is being found in how local authorities are handling the generic and specialist debate – integrated local services encapsulating specialist workers - which seems well tuned to the 1989 Act's intentions of helping families within communities care for children in need.

535 words

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