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The contested jurisdiction of Social Policy in UK universities since 1972

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Abstract

Utilising Abbott's work on professions and disciplines we trace the broad development of Social Policy in UK universities over the past 50 years. As with all subjects, Social Policy is enmeshed in continuous boundary protection, and at the same time may seek to extend jurisdiction by laying claim to areas and activities undertaken by others. We draw on a range of sources to inform our analysis including: overviews of contributions to Journal of Social Policy; reviews of selected available UK Social Policy Association documents such as newsletters; reviews of research quality (Research Assessment Exercise/Research Excellence Framework) submissions; and student numbers data. In conclusion we consider whether reassessment of some of the jurisdictional battles of the past 50 years might provide routes forward for the subject to flourish in the current environment.

Introduction

Social Policy emerged as a distinct subject of study in the United Kingdom (UK), reflected in titles of departments, professional associations, journals, and degree routes. Such nomenclature is distinctly British in origin; it soon transferred to a number of Commonwealth countries, and there has been more recent growth in some regions such as East Asia, but it remains a cuckoo if found in European and North American settings. The Journal of Social Policy's (JSP) 50th Anniversary is an opportune moment to reflect on how the subject's culturally and institutionally specific path has unfolded in UK universities during this period.

We use Abbott's (1988; 1999) work to frame our account of the rise of Social Policy as an academic discipline. His work on professions encourages the study of *jurisdictions*, areas of work over which occupational groups compete. This highlights interdependency and dispute, how successful professions and disciplines maintain a 'strategic heartland monopoly' (1988: 26) over a core jurisdiction, and whereby disciplinary change is interrelated with a *system* of disciplines, and wider social context, as well as activity of an individual discipline.

A focus on jurisdictions and competition contrasts with functionalist or teleological accounts of disciplinary development, whereby academic Social

Administration/Policy develops as an outcome of post-1945 welfare state consolidation. Rather, seen through the lens of jurisdictions, the subject seeks to position itself and exert control over terrain with both continuous boundary protection and laying claim to areas and activities undertaken by others (Isaksson and Larsson, 2017). Boundary maintenance includes selected canons and curricula for undergraduates, and policy knowledge and disciplinary expertise accepted as legitimate by state and public (Lybeck, 2019). Jurisdictional settlements are rarely full and never final. For Abbott (1988) there are different types of jurisdiction settlement; each implies greater or lesser control over the activities and may serve as a transition to another form[1].

We utilize elements of Abbott's typology to assist in tracing the emergence of UK Social Policy. In particular, *intellectual jurisdiction* involves a profession retaining a distinct knowledge base but where several competitors create ongoing instability and there is "little preventing the outsiders from developing academic, cognitive programmes of their own" (Abbott, 1988: 75). Drawing on contributions to JSP, reviews of UK Social Policy Association (SPA) documents such as newsletters, research assessment submissions and student numbers data, we look back on the development of Social Policy as an academic subject in the UK over the past fifty years. In a four-part discussion (professional organisation, research quality assessment, undergraduate teaching, policy advice) we assess how UK Social Policy has retained some terrain but ceded other ground. It will be useful for international readers to know that UK higher education institutions (HEIs) were formally categorised into 'universities' and 'polytechnics/colleges' prior to this 'binary divide' being removed in 1992.

The 'British' Tradition of Social Administration/Social Policy

Given our geographically specific focus, we first outline the culturally distinctive nature of the subject's development in the UK before 1972. While origins of the subject are naturally contested, a common narrative is that growth of academic study of Social Administration/Policy was prompted by the rapid expansion of the post-war welfare state, Titmuss's appointment as the first Professor of Social Administration in 1950 marking the moment the subject came of age (Alcock and Oakley, 2001; Jones, 1964). The subject expanded over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, but with somewhat fuzzy boundaries, a point acknowledged in early studies. For example, Donnison (1962: 35) referred to "an ill-defined but recognisable territory" and Brown (1971: 11) noted "social administration is not an easy field to define".

In the 1960s, Donnison (1961) and Jones (1964) undertook surveys of the field for the Joint Universities Council for Public and Social Administration (JUC) that highlighted the subject's growing institutional base, generalist social studies departments morphing into separate sociology, social administration

and social work specialisms as the social sciences grew in UK universities. As Social Administration gained an institutional foothold in the 1950s and 1960s, carving a mission that was distinct from the vocational concerns of Social Work was often key in jurisdictional battles. At the London School of Economics, for example, Titmuss "made it clear that social work training was going to be subordinated to a scholarly and practical engagement with the emerging 'welfare state'" (Stewart, 2017). Jones's JUC review (1964: 64), argued that "historical accident has resulted in the formal linking of Sociology, Social Administration and Social Work Theory and Practice, [but] there is no general agreement that they should continue to be linked because of the nature of the subjects themselves."

Early jurisdictional boundary disputes concerned the relationship with Social Work and Sociology, but there was also an unclear relationship with Public Administration. In the 1930s separate JUC groups for Social Studies and for Public Administration were combined in recognition of their overlapping agendas (Cree, 2019), but by the 1960s inter-subject disputes resulted in separate JUC (sub)committees for public administration, social administration and social work being formed (Beith, 1971). Indeed, Titmuss's (1951: 183) inaugural lecture acknowledged that creation of the LSE's first Chair of Social Administration raised jurisdictional questions, creating a role for "someone to invade on the one side, a modest corner of the territory of public administration and, on the other, some part of the broad acres of sociology".

These jurisdictional battles over which subject did what were sometimes shaped by power relations in key institutions rather than distinctive intellectual agendas, power inequalities arising from the differing gender composition of different fields, and interpersonal disputes in some key institutions, playing important roles in shaping early jurisdictional debates (Oakley, 2014; Beith, 1971). While textbooks provide post-hoc intellectual rationalisation for the subject's boundaries, self-interested early decisions may also have been important in laying down the unusual path the UK followed in this period (Cree, 2019).

By the 1970s, the UK's internationally distinctive approach was a common point of observation. Donnison (1979: 148-152) argued that British scholars had created "one of the few, small areas of the social sciences which were not overwhelmed by the Americans during the generation after the Second World War", but argued its rationale was weakening as the UK welfare state faltered. Catherine Jones (1979: 509) observed the subject is "supposed to be unique to Britain as a university subject", but noted other European countries explored the same issues in an interdisciplinary fashion rather than through a separate field. Kay Jones noted the restricted international reach of the subject and how legacies of imperial power had shaped its spread, the subject developing on similar lines in a number of countries closely tied to the UK through the

Commonwealth, in sharp contrast to its limited reach and currency in the United States or much of Europe (Jones, 1986: 7).

Even this brief tour of the subject prior to 1972 underlines the complexity in tracing the subject's evolving jurisdiction. Rather than presenting a chronological narrative, our analysis is organised in four sections that examine different domains in which jurisdictional battles have played out over the past 50 years: first we review the move away from 'Social Administration' as the subject sought to exert its jurisdiction amongst social sciences; second, we examine how research quality exercises have created jurisdiction tensions; third, we explore the competition for students; and, fourth, the jurisdictional skirmishes around policy advice.

The Break from Social Administration

The subject's early roots in applied social studies, and its close connection to Social Work, reflected a practical focus on training for the different branches of the growing welfare state (Jones, 1964). The label 'Social Administration' captured this, but debates over how far the field should be defined by a vocational orientation or a wider policy focus were central to early jurisdictional debates. Exley's (2019) study of the emergence of Social Administration highlighted its closeness to social services and a vocationalism that fed into its low 'academic' status. Similarly, Culyer (1981) saw Social Administration's 'identity problem' and lack of unifying intellectual tradition as linked to its training origins and lack of theoretical base. The absence of a theoretical base was often seen as limiting Social Administration's ability to consolidate, abstraction said to be central to cementing a knowledge system's acceptance, providing legitimacy and protection within organisational contexts, and setting 'academic' apart from 'craft' (Abbott, 1988:56).

The widespread relabelling of 'Social Administration' as 'Social Policy' in the 1980s signaled a clear break from early vocational roots. During its 1987 Annual General Meeting the UK Social Administration Association voted to change its name to the Social Policy Association, often seen as a watershed moment (Glennerster, 1988); by the end of the 1980s most relevant UK university and polytechnic departments and higher education funding bodies had updated terminology accordingly. The move was, in part, an attempt to enhance claims to abstract knowledge and to consolidate legitimacy within the academy. Page (2010: 332) suggests "This change of title reflected the desire of a new generation of academics to expand the parameters of the subject by looking at the wider social, economic and political context of social policy developments" and the "emergence of more career-minded academics" keen to secure professional reputation. Indeed, as early as the late 1970s Smith (1979, p.435) suggested that the

"disinterested servility" and "lack of concern with academic or professional status" that had characterised Social Administration in the 1950s was being assailed.

While the name change perhaps added to further international confusion – pointing to terrain often covered by sociology, politics, public policy and economics elsewhere, for example – its significance in creating a definitive break with the past might have been overstated. Key figures from Social Administration's earliest days, including Donnison and Titmuss, saw the field in broad terms, even if curricula often defaulted to a narrower vocational view (Walker, 1981). Indeed, in seeking to define Social Policy, Titmuss (1974: 24) argued "The greatest semantic difficulty arises, inevitably, with the word 'social'" which he argued should not be associated narrowly with government interventions alone.

Perhaps the most significant change in the 1980s was not, then, replacing 'Administration' with 'Policy' but the lower key conversion of common understandings of the word 'social', broadening the scope of the subject well beyond vocational concerns in order to develop a distinctive theoretical base. In explaining the need to move towards a critical approach to Social Policy analysis Williams (1989: 8) argued "At the heart of mainstream social administration was empiricism: the collection of facts and evidence about social problems [. . .] what it took for granted – economic growth, the family, the capacity of the welfare state to solve social problems, the supremacy of 'British' welfare, imperialism, the recruitment of cheap labour from the Commonwealth – was as significant as what it questioned; and what it ignored – international economic forces, racisms, the sexual division of labour – was as significant as that which it studied".

But the broadening of Social Policy's jurisdiction soon followed in quite subtle ways as scholars in the field adapted the subject in pursuit of redefined intellectual goals. The growth of comparative cross-national study within Social Policy is a key example. Jones Finer (2002) recollected "'taking on' successive university audiences in the 1970s-1980s, with the mere idea that the comparative study of social policy could and should be on a par with, say, the comparative study of systems of government". The publication of Esping-Andersen's (1990) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* accelerated abstraction in Social Policy through comparative welfare regime analysis. Following in its wake, Social Policy's comparative turn was underpinned by significant conceptual abstraction that could bolster arguments for the subject's 'academic status', developing distinctive technical and conceptual knowledge that clearly resided in the academy and had limited vocational currency. Such work has moved to become a strategic heartland: JSP included just 20 papers with a comparative focus during the 1970s, and a similar number in the 1980s. By the 2010s over 40% of 344 papers published in JSP during the decade were cross-national/comparative.

Research Assessment

Battles over jurisdiction are not only about intellectual agendas but also concern the allocation of resources to activity. Formal, subject based, audit mechanisms have become central parts of the HE funding landscape in recent decades, and jurisdiction issues have been evident in the government mandated Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and subsequent Research Excellence Framework (REF) processes used to determine core research funding since the mid-1980s.

These processes provide a site for jurisdictional battles between subjects and a strategic heartland for some. For Social Policy, an unstable intellectual jurisdiction has prevailed with academics from disciplines including Economics, Sociology and Law, and sub-disciplines (e.g. Criminology, Health Services, Health Economics), regularly submitting to a Social Policy labelled unit of assessment. The 2001 exercise (RAE2001, 2001) proved a watershed for Social Policy with 47 institutional submissions (from 40 in 1992) and a large increase in the number of staff submitted to the Social Policy assessment unit compared to 1996. The panel saw this positively, concluding "The strength and vitality of Social Policy is attested to by its expansion since RAE1996" and noting "The panel received submissions covering people from within a range of differently labelled departments [who . . .] chose to submit to this panel because the title Social Policy identifies their concerns most appropriately" (RAE2001 Panel Summary). Others, however, saw things differently and questioned how far tactical shifts had driven the growth. Craig (2002: 8) queried whether the comparatively lower scores awarded by the Sociology Panel in RAE1996 had prompted some tactical moves to Social Policy in 2001 and asked "what proportion of those staff new to the social policy submissions were recognisably social policy academics".

Jurisdictional concerns were heightened by the sharpening financial impacts of RAE outcomes. Craig (2002) noted that nine institutions submitted to the Social Policy & Administration unit of assessment in 1996 were not returned in 2001, mainly new universities that had received a low grade and/or where undergraduate Social Policy courses had closed, reflecting the very real consequences of resource allocation decisions. RAE2001 was accompanied by further concentration of funding on the top grades. Social Policy placed only 21.3% of submissions in the top 5/5* 'internationally excellent' bracket, far fewer than comparable disciplines (McKay, 2006: 4). Cook (2002) noted 25% of lower ranked Social Policy research – despite being judged as of 'national significance' – would no longer be funded, affecting post-1992 institutions in particular, creating fears about the future of individual departments.

The SPA took forward these concerns, arguing against greater selectivity in the allocation of RAE related funding (Deacon et al., 2003), but there was less agreement on how far it needed to defend the subject's jurisdiction in the RAE. Clarke (2002: 6) argued "I am reluctant to collaborate in a project to clarify the 'real social policy' [. . .] the subject itself and the 'social policy community' will

suffer in the process". Others, however, acknowledged practical challenges from porous boundaries, the Social Policy panel chair reflecting on whether the low proportion of submissions rated 'internationally excellent' reflected difficulties in fitting multidisciplinary work to the RAE subject panel structures (MacGregor, 2002).

While contemporary SPA documents presented a sense of crisis arising from RAE2001, a different view emerged over time. The importance of defending the subject's institutional base in research quality exercises was later noted by a former SPA Chair who said "the existence of a separate Social Policy panel has served the subject well." (Alcock, 2004: 3). In discussions ahead of RAE2008 and REF2014 there was a clear push from the SPA to protect, and even expand, the purview of the Social Policy panel. For example, the SPA advocated a maximal approach in defining the panel's jurisdiction for RAE2008[2], making particular claims over health policy and criminology (Bauld and Dean, 2004). Conversely, ahead of REF2014 SPA responded robustly to a suggestion that the Social Policy and Sociology sub-panels be merged, citing risks to multidisciplinary and applied research (Glendinning, 2010: 2).

Competition for Students

Questions of jurisdiction also play out in the delivery of undergraduate degree programmes, not least because of their clear role in establishing an institutional base in universities. In this section we trace the territory of the subject by exploring how the Social Policy undergraduate student base has shifted over time. This means using documents that capture the headline scale of the subject in terms of its presence in undergraduate degree programmes rather than unpacking documents articulating common programme curricula.

The SPA's 2011 audit of Social Policy teaching hinted at better times when the subject had a clearer institutional base in undergraduate teaching, noting:

> "it is increasingly difficult to identify where, how and who does this. Very few Departments of Social Policy now exist [...] and there are equally few Single Honours Undergraduate Degrees in the discipline; Social Policy teaching is likely to be located alongside courses in Sociology, Social Work, Criminology or Applied Social Science." (Glendinning in Patrick et al, 2011: 4).

But, 20 years earlier a review of the subject in polytechnics and colleges similarly noted:

> "[Social Policy] courses are taught in a variety of departmental and faculty structures, often in more than one department in an individual institution" (Council for National Academic Awards, 1990: 9)

This review painted an upbeat picture of the subject, suggesting 'buoyant demand'. However, only half-a-dozen programmes in polytechnics and colleges

were single honours Social Policy & Administration degrees, courses falling under the subject's heading including degrees such as Applied Social Studies, Community Studies, Economic Development and Planning, Health Studies, Housing Studies, Police Studies, Town Planning, Urban Studies to name a few (Council for National Academic Awards, 1990). The report noted single honours courses in Social Policy were more likely to be a focus of undergraduate teaching in the universities. Indeed, a formal 1989 review counted Social Policy teaching in 32 universities (University Grants Committee, 1989), though a bottom-up JUC/SPA review of the subject identified Social Policy teaching of some form in 43 universities, suggesting a fragmented base was a feature in some universities also (Collis, 1989 cited in Leaper, 1989). Indeed, a key theme of the JUC/SPA review was that the subject was under considerable pressure and in a 'struggle for survival' in some places (ibid).

While there are apparent continuities in the fragmented base of the subject in the 1980s and 2010, in the intervening period there was an attempt to assert a more singular identity when the 'binary divide' between universities and polytechnics ended. Subject based Teaching Quality Audit (TQA) introduced at this time provided a new site for jurisdictional claims and a documented record of programmes on offer (see: Higher Education Funding Council for England, 1995; Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, 1998; Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, 2001). The TQAs identified Social Policy provision in 55 HEIs in the mid/late-1990s, compared to 38 HEIs with a clearly identifiable Social Policy offering in the 1980s reviews. Comparing the list of courses in these reports shows new Social Policy labelled programmes were introduced in a number of institutions in the 1990s – e.g. London Guildhall University, Luton, Middlesex and Sheffield Hallam universities – perhaps reflecting an attempt to consolidate fragmented provision under a clear 'Social Policy' label, widening the subject's jurisdictional claims over the previously more specialised or vocational offerings. There was likely growth in some established programmes too, the Universities Central Council on Admissions data reporting a significant rise in the number of Social Policy acceptances in the pre-92 universities; by 1993 the subject had recovered ground lost against other subjects in the late 1980s[3].

However, the attempt at widening the subject's territory soon faltered in the face of competition from other subjects, showing year-on-year falling numbers from 1995/6 through to 2000/1, by which point the number of first year full-time UK domiciled first degree students stood at just over half the level of 1994/5. SPA documents reported considerable concerns about recruitment at this time, suggesting very real pressures were being felt, with risks of department closures and withdrawal of provision reported (May, 2001, Deacon and Glendinning, 2002). For some institutions recruitment trends interacted with the outcomes of RAE2001, with particularly acute pressures in some post-92 universities here.

While SPA documents in the 2000s often highlighted student finance reforms as a threat to the subject, by 2008/9 the subject had recovered significantly from the low base of 2000/1, numbers more than doubling, but the net effect of changes since 1994/5 was a relative decline in scale compared to Politics and Sociology degrees. By the 2010s, the SPA reported considerable fear about the strength of the subject as a taught offering (Patrick et al., 2011) but also found the numbers of single honours programmes had remained stable following steep increases in tuition fees in some institutions (Mackinder and Hudson, 2016). However, they also noted (Mackinder and Hudson, 2016) that single honours Social Policy degrees tended to be rather modest in scale, meaning the majority of students falling under the subject's banner were studying combined programmes or those with a different label their HEI classified under Social Policy, again with echoes of the 1980s reports.

While a strong undergraduate base is important in establishing jurisdiction, it appears Social Policy has struggled to establish a clear base over much of the past 50 years. This has affected the strength of the subject's jurisdictional claims, with combined programmes or specialist programmes that do not use the 'Social Policy' label long being a very significant part of the student numbers base. While there appears to have been an attempt to grow a 'pure' form of the subject in the early/mid-1990s, this seems a short-run moment that had limited success. Instead, the long run picture is one of a messy, fragmented, cross-disciplinary subject at undergraduate level, with Social Policy fairly significant in scale but found under many headings and with single honours programmes a small part of this overall picture. But this conclusion itself assumes some of the programmes often counted under a Social Policy heading should continue to be classed as such, pointing to ongoing jurisdictional battles. Notably, the rapid growth in Criminology student numbers since 2012 has significantly affected the composition of the student base in many Social Policy units, but some argue Criminology is a separate discipline; indeed, the draft version of the 2021 Criminology subject benchmark statement did not even cite Social Policy as one of the subjects that informs the field (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2021).

Policy Experts and 'Thinktankland'

An applied policy focus is often highlighted in debates about Social Policy's jurisdiction, but the discourse can be Janus-faced, the world of policy to be kept close, but not too close, for fear it might dilute intellectual concerns. For example, at the SPA 2004 Annual Conference plenary, Ellison (2004: 12) highlighted the risks for the subject in tying its fortunes to a close relationship with government and becoming a research 'service industry', akin to a jurisdictional settlement whereby Social Policy is subordinated to other professional activities.

Similarly, Sinfield (2004: 10) warned against letting "more technical work lead to context-stripping" that ignores 'upstream' political economy issues. This balancing act can be difficult to perform. Indeed, the RAE2001 panel summary suggested a key weakness in the subject was that "more attention still could be given to ensuring that the results of research are communicated appropriately to wider audiences".

A challenge for academic Social Policy is that this space is also occupied by non-academic research organisations who resist jurisdictional settlement by developing cognitive programmes of their own. Think tanks steer clear of 'discipline oriented social science' that Social Policy has striven so hard to model, emphasising instead problem-focused and transdisciplinary approaches to tackling policy complexity. In this shifting knowledge environment universities no longer have a monopoly on expertise (Tchilingirian, 2018).

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is an example of an 'advocacy tank' combining a strong ideological bent with "aggressive salesmanship and efforts to influence current policy debates" (Weaver, 1989, p. 567). Aiming to "contribute to public understanding of social, childhood and youth transitions, economic and political questions through research, discussion and publication" (IPPR, 2004), its substantive focus has mirrored *JSP's*: education and employment, health and social care, youth offending, in-work poverty, migration, criminal justice, fuel poverty, housing, public services, public involvement.

IPPR sits within an increasingly competitive marketplace of ideas: including the New Economics Foundation, Social Market Foundation, Resolution Foundation, Demos, Legatum Institute, Reform, and Nesta. Moreover, long established institutes have also repositioned their work in recent years; e.g. the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has placed less emphasis on funding external research and more on employing in-house analysts in order to strengthen their social change impact. Organisations have sizable resources that leave them well placed to occupy Social Policy jurisdiction. Resolution Foundation draws income from the Resolution Trust's assets of over £50 million and its 2019 research funds of £1.8 million compare favourably with established university centres of Social Policy (Resolution Foundation, 2020). The JRF's work is underpinned by an endowment valued in 2020 at almost £450 million (JRF, 2020).

The move of think tanks into space once more clearly occupied by academic Social Policy illustrates jurisdictional transition, with the subject struggling to adapt its activity in the face of more agile competitors in this jurisdiction. The transition is beyond that of an 'advisory' settlement (Abbott, 1988: 75) whereby think tanks 'interpret and buffer' academic Social Policy knowledge; instead they now compete for some activities core to the 'strategic heartland' aspirations of Social Policy.

The rise of think tanks in policy advice perhaps mirrors a drift away from 'real world' connections in academic Social Policy, an outcome of shifting jurisdictional boundaries as scholars in the field looked to assert tighter control over key spheres of activity in universities, emphasising the primacy of academic expertise in so doing. In an early JSP article Jones (1979) reviewed the subject's development in the UK compared to other European countries and noted that, elsewhere, practitioners were much more likely to be involved in the delivery of degree programmes, a difference she put down to the boundaries Social Policy/Administration specialists in UK universities placed around their work, asking whether an applied subject like Social Policy should "expect to become self-contained and self-perpetuating as a university subject, producing the bulk of its own specialists for the future?" and observing "No one outside Britain seems to think so" (Jones, 1979: 526). Departmental resource decisions have reinforced this approach, Exley (2019: 56) noting the prevalence of fieldwork in degrees declined rapidly when resources tightened in the 1980s.

A move away from real world connections arguably plays out in JSP itself too. For example: in the years 1975-9 nearly one in five JSP articles had non-academic authorship/co-authorship (18.5%), including the Department for Health and Social Security, Conservative Party, ILO, and non-University research institutes; during 1985-9 this was under 5%; and, by 1995-9 it had fallen to around 2%. Taking JSP editorial board memberships at five year intervals from 1972-2021: in the 1970s and 1980s, with the exception of 1982, at least two board members at each point, including the Chair of the Board, had non-HEI affiliations. By contrast, in the years sampled from 1992-2021 only two board members in *total* listed a non-academic affiliation.

We should not overplay the extent of this, but the loosening of 'real world' connections seems a significant theme and perhaps at odds with the descriptions of the applied nature of the subject often invoked in jurisdictional 'battles'.

Reasserting jurisdiction?

By way of conclusion, we reflect on what the documents we have reviewed might tell us about contemporary jurisdictions and border crossings that may consolidate the subject's future.

Jurisdiction 1: competition for students

While the SPA has understandably often focused on safeguarding single honours undergraduate programmes as a key 'strategic heartland monopoly', the larger part of Social Policy's undergraduate base has likely always been in the form of contributions to broader multi-disciplinary programmes. Thinking more carefully about the subject's relation to other social sciences and how they should come together at undergraduate level may be a more

productive conceptualisation of the subject's jurisdiction. Moreover, this would better fit with the common textbook descriptions of the subject as an applied multidisciplinary social science. This was clear in the early days of the subject, Donnison (1961: 218) concluding that the other social sciences were logically prior to Social Administration and that "strictly speaking, there can be no first-year course in the subject".

Relatedly, it may be that the applied and multidisciplinary nature of Social Policy means it ought to be viewed first and foremost as a postgraduate subject. Hill (2003: 8-9) expressed this view in an earlier debate on the future of the subject saying "The study of social policy seems to me to particularly come into its own at postgraduate level" where students often have vocational experience that draws them to its applied concerns.

Jurisdiction 2: policy experts/thinktankland

Think tanks have become an important part of the policy landscape. With the impact space being inherently dynamic, and with external funding pushes, the likelihood of mingling may increase. The UK's main social science funding body, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), has become more instrumentally focused on research impact. Recent research quality exercises have placed greater weight on engagement and real-work impact. Traditionally, think tanks had strategic advantages around practical skills and brokering knowledge (Tchilingirian, 2018) but this position is relative and could change. Boundary blurring and incursion by universities means traditional 'think tanks' are losing some organizational distinctiveness (Stone, 2007). Indeed, a number of universities have established in-house think tanks and policy labs. There may be significant opportunities for Social Policy here.

Jurisdiction 3: revisiting the policy/administration debate

The Social Policy *versus* Social Administration debate was a rare example of formal revision of the subject's jurisdiction. However, we might ask whether the policy/administration dichotomy is a false one. Glennerster (1988: 84) argued this at the time, asking "Is it not social policy *and* administration we should be studying?". But this was clear too in the early days of the field; as Donnison (1962: 41) put it "Policy-making and administration are not separate activities". Spicker (2002) made the bold claim that the most interesting developments in the subject since the 1980s had been in Social Administration (e.g. users movement, collaboration, social inclusion partnerships). Does the absence of 'Administration' from the subject's title perhaps downplay some concerns that are central to the subject's student base, particularly postgraduate programmes targeted at those working as policy makers or managers in public services?

A focus on administration raises the underexplored question of why Social Administration and Public Administration developed separate paths in UK

HEIs. It is unlikely that this has served either well. Dunleavy and Talbot (2020: 1) recently noted "Britain lacks a strong focal-point for expertise on Public Administration and Management broadly defined" and launched a series of initiatives to address this. There may be a chance to correct the fragmentation of these two fields that occurred in the mid-20th century.

Jurisdiction 4: Research Assessment

The history of the JUC reminds us of the role professional associations can play in fostering jurisdictional competition or brokering jurisdictional alliances. We might usefully reflect on whether the SPA could adopt a strategy that minimises the former and maximises the latter.

For example, there is something of a mismatch between the broad array of policy related research submitted to the Social Policy REF/RAE unit of assessment (UoA) and the sub-set of this activity typically found at SPA conferences or in explicitly Social Policy labelled departments or groups. A debate around how tight the borders of the subject should be drawn flared up in the SPA after RAE2001. Some hoped tighter borders might protect the subject, others flagged the danger of such an approach.

We might point to the coalitions the SPA builds with other professional associations here. Rather than building formal links with other policy focused associations in order to bring together those who often do (or could) submit to the Social Policy REF/RAE UoA – e.g. British Society of Criminology, British Society of Gerontology, Housing Studies Association, JUC-Public Administration Committee, Regional Studies Association, Society for Studies in Organizing Healthcare, Socio-Legal Studies Association, United Kingdom Evaluation Society (UKES) – it has prioritised developing linkages with the relatively small number of international associations that also use the Social Policy label. In making these links the SPA expands its reach but 'doubles down' on a narrow jurisdiction of the field rather than asking more troubling questions about the reach of the subject in the UK. Significantly, the exceptions are reciprocal links with two UK associations with less policy focused agendas (British Sociological Association, Social Research Association). This risks leaving a sense that the SPA has not viewed other UK policy focused associations as fellow travellers but as rivals to a 'strategic heartland monopoly' it wants to protect, in turn risking weakening future support for a policy focused REF UoA.

Postscript

Our reflections on SPA coalitions and REF point to a key underlying question of how Social Policy should be positioned in relation to other policy studies within universities. The contradictions arising from attempts to specifically delineate social dimensions of policy analysis were noted in early volumes of JSP

(e.g. Jones, 1979; Donnison, 1979). 20 years later Hill (2003) made a plea for a broadening of outlook, arguing that the future of the subject "seems to me to lie not in attempting to reach some tight definition of our discipline" and instead he advocated locating Social Policy as a sub-field of Public Policy in order to reflect the breadth of contemporary teaching and research agendas.

A further 20 years down the road the same questions are still being asked, but, curiously, not so publicly. Yet significant discussions of this type must be going on within UK universities, not least because some key institutions have repackaged some of their degree programmes as Social and Public Policy in recent years. Perhaps it is time for a proper discussion across the subject and even some serious reflection on whether the attempt to create a tightly bound jurisdiction has served us well? Indeed, the SPA's first Chair, Donnison (1961: 218), warned against tight disciplinary borders, arguing "when social scientists are tempted to create private corners of specialist expertise, the outcome is seldom happy".

We should end by making clear we have been very active participants in, and career beneficiaries of, the jurisdiction battles that have created the corner of specialist expertise labelled 'Social Policy'. In this paper have pieced together a story of jurisdictional skirmishes in which we have been personally involved for over 25 years, meaning any criticisms of jurisdiction settlement are at least partially a criticism of ourselves. Indeed, younger versions of ourselves published reflections on the SPA 2004 Conference debate on the future of the subject in which we made upbeat assessments of Social Policy (Lunt, 2006: 381-6; Hudson, 2004:9). We share the upbeat assessments of our younger selves, but now view jurisdictional re-settlement as key to future stability.

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Competing Interests Declaration

Both authors are members of staff at a UK university (University of York) and hold Professorial roles in a unit (the Department of Social Policy and Social Work) that engages in Social Policy teaching and research. At the time of writing they also hold leadership roles in that unit, Hudson as Head of Department and Lunt as Director of Research, being members of a Department Management Team responsible for leading strategic responses to the environment described in the paper; some key strategic decisions they have contributed to reflect the

conclusions of the paper. They have served as members of some of the key institutions described in the paper; both have been active members of the Social Policy Association, Hudson serving as a member of its executive committee for 12 years in total since 1997, including a period as Editor of PolicyWorld (2004-7) which is one of the sources drawn on in the paper; Lunt is a member of the Social Work and Social Policy REF2021 Sub-Panel; Hudson was a member of the Social Policy Committee of the Joint University Council for the Applied Social Sciences (2006-2010) and an Executive Committee Member of the East Asian Social Policy Research Network (2009-2014).

Notes

1 Abbott details six possible jurisdiction settlements: full, subordinate, intellectual, divided, advisory, workplace (Abbot, 1988: 69-79)
2 Social Work and Social Policy were combined into a single panel from REF2008 onwards
3 Student numbers data in this section is drawn from annual reports from Council for National Academic Awards, Universities Central Council on Admissions and the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

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