

## Editorial

The publication of this issue marks the beginning of a second decade for the *Journal of Social Policy*. Since the *Journal* was launched in 1972 the field of social policy, and especially the environment within which it operates, has changed dramatically. On the positive side there are now more experienced teachers and research workers associated with the study of social policy than there were in 1972. However, the postwar consensus which assumed steady improvements in social welfare through the expanding agencies of the welfare state, made possible by the continuation of economic growth, was overwhelmed within two years of the *Journal's* foundation by the onset of prolonged economic depression. For a variety of reasons, therefore, we thought it would be sensible to look back at the record of the *Journal* during its first decade to identify ways in which it might be improved in the future. In order to do this we examined the past contents of the *Journal* and sought the views of subscribers by means of a questionnaire.

As a result of our enquiries we came to the conclusion that various policy changes should be introduced. The purpose of this editorial, therefore, is fourfold. First, to look back and present a brief analysis of the contents of the *Journal* during its first ten years. Second, to present the results of a survey of subscribers. Third, to announce various changes in editorial policy, and in the format of the *Journal*, which are in the process of being implemented. Finally, to encourage a continuing dialogue between subscribers and members of the Editorial Board about the best ways of maintaining and improving the quality of the *Journal*.

But first we take this opportunity of acknowledging the vital contributions made to the *Journal* by many people during the first critical decade of its life. Without the hard work of past and present members of the Editorial Board, contributors and referees no journal could have survived. We owe a special debt of gratitude to four people in particular: R. A. Pinker, who served throughout the first decade successively as Review Editor, Editor and Chairman of the Editorial Board; D. E. G. Plowman, who got the *Journal* off the ground and edited it for the first six years before continuing for another three as Chairman of the Board; A. M. Rees, who succeeded Pinker as Review Editor and is now in his fifth year; and Miss K. M. Slack, who has written the Digest since the *Journal* began. Without the considerable efforts of these four people the *Journal* would not be as highly regarded as it is today.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS

Since the *Journal* was established it has consisted of three component parts – articles and review articles, the social administration digest and book reviews – and table 1 shows how the space available was allocated between each of them.

TABLE 1. *Space Allocation, 1972–1981 (percentages)*

<i>Volume</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Digest</i>	<i>Reviews</i>
1	64	20	16
2	56	21	23
3	59	18	23
4	59	19	22
5	53	21	26
6	47	22	31
7	59	15	25
8	61	14	25
9	60	18	22
10	66	14	20
TOTAL	59	18	23

During the first ten years the *Journal* included 158 articles and review articles. More than 60 per cent were written by members of British universities and another 16 per cent came from foreign universities. The remainder came from people employed in government departments and independent research institutes with the exception of one article which came exclusively from a polytechnic. In the same period 713 book reviews written by 335 people were published, although 44 per cent of these were produced by just 55 people. Overall, 75 per cent of the reviews were produced in British universities, 6 per cent in British polytechnics and 3 per cent in foreign universities. Combining articles and reviews the most productive institutions were all British universities: Bristol, Kent, LSE, Southampton and York.

It is difficult to analyse the contents of the articles in a precise or unambiguous way, but it might be instructive to highlight their predominant orientation. First, most of them are concerned with issues in, or use evidence related to, Britain (67 per cent). Eighteen other countries are referred to in about one-third of the articles of which the most frequently referred to is the USA (9 per cent). Second, the articles are primarily concerned with issues of practical social administration (66 per cent). A smaller proportion discuss aspects of social research (26 per cent), but very few are concerned with what can be properly described as substantive theoretical

aspects of social policy (12 per cent). Third, the overwhelming majority of articles are descriptive commentaries of one kind or another. Relatively few employ any rigorous analytical techniques (a generous estimate would not exceed 30 per cent), and even fewer present results based upon the collection and analysis of new data sets (8 per cent). Insofar as the majority of the articles can be categorized, the largest proportion of them display a developmental and/or historical tendency. Finally, there is a clear bias towards discussing issues concerning social security (28 per cent) and the personal social services (22 per cent). In contrast, very few articles dealt with educational or employment issues. In part, of course, the distribution of articles between functional topics reflects the relative availability of specialist journals in particular areas such as education. Nevertheless, using broadly the same service headings as the social administration digest, table 2 shows the distribution of articles between them where that is appropriate.

TABLE 2. *The Distribution of Articles between Services*

<i>Heading</i>	<i>Number of Articles</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>
Social Security	45	28.5
Public Health and the NHS	28	17.7
Education	8	5.1
Housing	21	13.3
Personal Social Services	34	21.5
Law and Offenders	2	1.3
Employment	16	10.1
Race Relations	7	4.4
Voluntary Action	8	5.1
Local Government	9	5.7

The typical article to appear in the *Journal of Social Policy* during its first decade, therefore, can be characterized as follows: it was a descriptive and/or historical account of one or other of the policy areas which are the responsibility of the DHSS in England. However, it should be pointed out that in recent years an increasing number of articles have been submitted which either employ more scientific methodologies or contribute to middle range theorizing about social policy.

#### SURVEY OF SUBSCRIBERS

It was decided in the autumn of 1980 that in contemplating the future of the *Journal* it would be helpful to canvass the views of subscribers. Consequently a brief questionnaire was enclosed with vol. 10, part 1, in January

1981. The response was very poor and, because the views of members of the Social Administration Association (SAA) were thought to be particularly valuable, a further copy of the questionnaire was sent to them with the SAA newsletter. The number of completed questionnaires which were returned by the end of June 1981, however, was only seventy-five. Of these, fifty-nine were from SAA members which represents about 25 per cent of the total membership. We cannot disguise the fact that this was a disappointingly low response. Nevertheless, a number of people requested that the results be made available in some form and so the most relevant have been included in this note. It should be emphasized, however, that these results were only one of the factors taken into account by the Editorial Board in making decisions about the future.

The first question asked respondents whether they would 'like to see any changes in the space allocated to the constituent parts of the *Journal* bearing in mind the overall constraint of 144 pages per issue?' Not everyone answered in a consistent manner, but the aggregate results are shown in table 3. They indicate quite clearly that any redistribution of space should be towards articles and review articles and away from the digest, in particular, and book reviews.

TABLE 3. *Attitudes about the Allocation of Space (N=75)*

<i>Component</i>	<i>More</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Less</i>	<i>No Opinion</i>	<i>No Answer</i>
Articles	26	29	1	3	6
Review Articles	37	31	3	2	2
Social Administration					
Digest	4	36	28	2	5
Book Reviews	4	51	13	2	5

The second important set of questions asked for opinions about various changes which might be introduced in the *Journal*. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they approved of the changes or not. On the whole the aggregate answers were in the affirmative as is shown in table 4. Subscribers were also asked to provide any general comments about the *Journal* as a whole or about the content, style or presentation of the *Digest* and *Review* sections in particular. The comments varied considerably and a brief selection of the views which were expressed is paraphrased below.

Many subscribers expressed their satisfaction with numerous aspects of the *Journal*, but for our present purposes we have chosen to highlight the most common criticisms which were made. As far as the articles are concerned it was suggested that 'too many articles are simply descriptive

TABLE 4. Attitudes to Proposed Policy Changes

<i>Would you approve of the following changes?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know/No Answer</i>
An annual Prize Article Competition for younger academics.	32	31	12
Open Peer Commentary. Selected articles published simultaneously with critical commentaries by other academics and a reply by the author.	59	12	4
The introduction of brief Research Notes.	58	10	7
The encouragement of rejoinders to previously published articles.	62	8	5
Author/date referencing with a bibliography and minimal notes at the <i>end</i> of each article.	45	23	7

accounts' and that they 'do not tackle a problem from as rigorous a perspective as they might'. Possible improvements included suggestions for more papers to address theoretical questions and discuss contemporary policy issues. In addition there was support for an occasional 'thematic' issue. The most common complaint about the book reviews is that they are published too late to be really useful. There was also support for the view that the book reviews 'could either be longer or shorter rather than the present uneasy compromise between review and essay'. Views expressed about the Digest were the most varied and ranged from 'excellent' to 'drop it altogether?' Finally, a number of remarks were made about the general layout of the *Journal* and one subscriber described the typography as 'very cluttered and unattractive' and the format as 'dull and monotonous'.

#### POLICY CHANGES

The main conclusion to emerge from the content analysis and the views of subscribers is that the *Journal* would be strengthened in the future if it contained both more conceptual/theoretical contributions, and more substantive empirical investigations. Of course, this can be achieved only if people working in the social policy field submit suitable papers. However, there is some evidence that members of the academic community are beginning to move more quickly in both directions and we hope that some new initiatives taken by the *Journal* will encourage both developments. A prize article competition has been introduced to commemorate the unique contribution of Richard Titmuss to the study of social policy. The competition is open to anyone under the age of 35 on any topic within the general field of social policy, but all other things being equal preference will be given to conceptual and/or theoretical submissions. In addition, we hope to use the open peer commentary idea for particularly important or controversial

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contributions. Contributors who think that they have papers which are suitable for open peer review are invited to contact the Editor. On the empirical front it is more difficult to take specific initiatives, but short notes based on research results will be welcome as will more substantial articles based on the rigorous analysis of good data sets.

There are three other developments associated with the articles section of the *Journal* which should better meet the needs of readers. First, there is scope in the study of social policy for greater debate about the analysis and interpretation of evidence used in published articles. In the future, therefore, correspondence about, and rejoinders to, earlier published material will be especially welcome. Second, we recognize that the *Journal* has an important role to play for teaching purposes and so we propose to include policy review articles from time to time which will synthesize major contributions to the literature and discuss changes in legislation, policy direction and administrative practice. Suggestions are invited from potential contributors about *any* topics. Finally, we intend to follow the advice of a number of readers and plan an occasional special issue. The first of these will appear during 1982.

Fewer changes are contemplated in the immediate future for the Digest and Book Review sections of the *Journal*. The Digest provoked the most extreme and varied opinions amongst subscribers and the Editorial Board are in the process of considering how it might best be modified to meet the needs of readers in the 1980s. For the moment it will continue much as before, although the average length will be reduced to some extent. As far as the Book Reviews are concerned the chief criticism seems to be the long delay between the publication of a book and the appearance of its review. In large part this is a consequence of the considerable number and range of new books which are relevant to social policy. In future, however, whilst we intend to continue the policy of having longish reviews for the most important books we will publish much shorter reviews of others, and some commissioned reviews will have to be excluded altogether. Overall, the allocation of future space in the *Journal* will reflect the views of subscribers with a redistribution towards articles (67 per cent) from the Digest (10 per cent) and Reviews (23 per cent).

A number of changes have also been introduced to the appearance of the *Journal*. First, we have decided that the colour of the cover will change each year. More importantly we have adopted the Harvard system for references and a new style sheet for potential contributors is available from the Editor. Finally, we are considering possible changes to the typography and layout to improve readability.