THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE TO D211
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INTRODUCTION

This Guide is essential to your studies of D211. It is organized on a unit-by-unit basis and is designed to help you get the most out of the course materials. You should aim to use it throughout the course and always begin your work on any section of the course by looking at the relevant part of this Guide.

The Guide is intended to help you with D211 in two main ways. First, it draws on the experience gained from earlier years of the course in providing advice and guidance on how best to approach particular parts of the course. It enables us to pass on suggestions about how to organize your work most effectively, how to overcome points that previous students have found difficult and where to look for significant links or connections. Although every Open University course tries to be perfect, it is not always achieved in practice. This Guide is one way of trying to minimize some of the difficulties and enhance some of the strengths that we have discovered since the course was first made. The other vital resource for you in studying D211 is your tutor who will also be able to provide suggestions about how to make the most of the course.

Secondly, the Guide is also a way of addressing a different problem of Open University courses – the issue of changes that have taken place since the course was first produced. This is a particular problem for courses such as D211 whose subject matter touches on topics of public concern and is affected by changing welfare debates, policies and legislation.

Although we have used this Guide to provide new information, evidence and arguments about the topics with which the course deals, this is not a matter of simply ‘updating’ the course. D211 is organized around a number of central themes and issues which shape its approach to the study of social problems and social welfare. We still think that those themes and issues are central ones. As a consequence, where we have introduced new material we have done so selectively. We have tried to make sure that it is linked to the relevant themes and issues, rather than just being extra information that you have to take on board.

Because of this, you will find that the amount of material in this Guide increases as you go through the course. There is very little in Block 1, a little more in Block 2, considerably more in Block 3 and so on. This should mean that you can concentrate on getting to grips with D211’s approach to social problems and social welfare in the early blocks without also having to deal with a lot of updating material at the same time.

We have also tried to ensure that we have taken out parts of the old material to make enough space and time for you to use the new material effectively. That is, your studies of this Guide and other new material are not extra work ‘on top of’ the original D211 but are instead of parts of the course which have now been dropped. Thus, by the way, explains the otherwise strange gaps in the numbering of course units.

We hope that you will use this Guide to the full and that, in doing so, you will find it a valuable part of your work on D211.
1 BLOCK 1: INTERFERING IN PEOPLE'S LIVES?

1.1 Block Introduction

In your work on Block 1, you should ignore all references to a chapter by Nick Manning in the Course Reader. It has been replaced in the second edition of the Reader by a new chapter by Tom Hulley and John Clarke entitled 'Social problems: social construction and social causation' (Chapter 1).

Make sure that you have the second edition of the Course Reader, published in 1991.

D211 is a course that many students choose to study straight after the Foundation course. When it was written, much thought was given to how to ease the transition to second level study. However, some students do find important differences between studying D211 and studying the Foundation course. It may be helpful to look briefly at some of these, and their implications for your own work on the course.

D211 provides rather less by way of regular summaries of key ideas and points, and therefore makes more demands on you to draw out central issues. However, each of the first four blocks of the course has a block introduction and a block review. The block introductions set out the main concerns and organizing themes for the blocks. The reviews provide brief summaries of the central issues and arguments. The normal pattern is obviously to start with the block introduction, followed by the units of the block, then the review. Some students, however, have found it helpful to read both the introduction and the review before starting on the main units. You may wish to consider this as an alternative way of getting hold of the central issues in these first four blocks. The reviews will, of course, be making reference to material you have not yet seen, but reading them first may help you to organize your work around the main issues of the blocks as you study the units.

D211 is centrally concerned with questions about social problems and social welfare (as its title suggests!). The starting-point for the course is a consideration of what is 'social' about a social problem.

This question involves exploring the distinction we make between individual or private problems and social problems. The former may be a matter of concern to the individuals involved, their relations or friends, but is not something in which the wider society has an interest. By contrast, social problems are issues which command social concern and evoke discussion of what social institutions can or should do about the 'problem'.

This distinction is not absolute or fixed. At times, things which have been historically regarded as 'private troubles' come to be seen as matters of social concern. For example, during the first half of the 1990s, failures of mortgage repayments and the resulting repossessions of properties emerged as a social problem. What had previously been regarded as a 'private matter' (between the person paying the mortgage and the lender) came to be seen as a matter of public concern with arguments that it required collective action to solve the problem.

Such a change might be explained simply by the sharp rise in the numbers of people affected by this problem. But numbers by themselves are rarely enough to account for a set of circumstances becoming defined as a social problem. So what other factors might have played a part in mortgage repossessions coming to be seen as a social problem? Social scientists might want to ask about a range of other social processes involved. For example, did the types of people experiencing this problem make a difference? (Mortgage-holders do not fit the conventional stereotype of the homeless.) What role did social and economic institutions play in defining this as a social problem? (Why did the lending institutions present this as a matter of public concern?) How did the presentation of this problem link with other significant ideas? (Did it make any difference that a Conservative government was in power which was committed to the extension of a 'property-owning democracy'?)
There are certainly other questions that might be added, but this brief list indicates that the emergence of some issue as a social problem needs to be examined by looking at the social processes involved. This is a central and recurring concern in D211. A glance back at the preceding paragraphs will indicate a second theme that is essential to D211. A variety of phrases such as 'is seen as', 'is defined as' or 'as regarded as' indicate that social problems involve questions of perception—how they are understood by members of society. This means that social scientists have to be concerned with processes of social definition or social construction. The mortgage example referred to above is marked by a shift in how the 'problem' is socially constructed, moving from a perception of it as an individual or private matter to a social problem.

Processes of social construction influence how a society understands its problems, both in terms of which problems are seen to be social (not private) and in terms of how they are explained. Let us explore this second aspect of social construction a little further. We might all agree that 'poverty' is a social problem, but there are at least two different social constructions (sets of meanings) about why poverty exists or persists. On the one hand, there are constructions that identify poverty as resulting from the failings of the poor themselves (being 'work-shy', being bad at budgeting etc.). These are 'individualist' constructions. While they treat poverty as a social problem, they identify its causes as individual ones. On the other hand, there are constructions of poverty which treat its causes as 'structural' (in the patterned distribution of wealth and income, for example). These are 'structuralist' or 'social causation' constructions. In exploring the content of D211, you will frequently come across these sorts of distinctions between different types of social constructions.

If we return to the problem of mortgage repayments again, it is possible to see how this distinction between individualist and structuralist constructions might apply. Individualist constructions aimed at explaining the problem would focus on the attitudes or behaviours of those people unable to maintain their payments. Were they too greedy? Were they unable to make proper financial plans? Were they 'bad at budgeting'? Structuralist constructions would point to the social causes at work: the creation of a property boom, the workings of the housing market, or the impact of economic recession and unemployment, for example.

Such social constructions matter because they are more than just ideas about social problems. They shape how a society perceives these problems and influence what society does about them. They affect 'social intervention'. For example, a society which believes that poverty is the result of personal failings may decide not to intervene at all ('people get what they just deserve') or may intervene at the individual level (to punish the 'work-shy' or to provide training in 'budget management skills'). By contrast, a society that believes poverty is socially or structurally caused may intervene at the structural level (redistributing wealth or income to remedy structural inequalities).

D211 is concerned with such connections between social constructions of social problems and the nature of social interventions (including non-intervention) aimed at remedying social problems. Block 1 examines these issues by looking at the social problems associated with particular 'stages of life' (childbirth; childhood; adolescence, and old age). It examines how these 'stages of life' as well as the problems associated with them involve social constructions and social interventions.
The Block 1 Introduction poses four key questions which are used to organize our thinking throughout the course. They are:

1. What is social about a social problem?
2. When does a matter of private concern become a social problem?
3. What is the appropriate level of intervention?
4. What are the consequences and outcomes of intervention?

An important aim for you, as you study D211, is to begin to integrate the concepts, themes and theories that the course uses, into your own thinking about and analysis of social problems and interventions.

As you work through Block 1, you may find it helpful to make a start on this, by beginning to build up your own ‘map’ or record of concepts or themes that you meet that seem important or useful – and perhaps to note down examples and illustrations that bring them to life, or references to places in the course materials where you have found a useful explanation or discussion of them.

How you do this depends on your own experience of making notes and of what suits your ways of thing and working. However, this is a task that might be suited to a flexible approach. You could build up your map using index cards, perhaps using Blu-tack to arrange them on a large sheet of paper or a space on your wall. This enables you to play around with them, grouping them in different ways, or picking out ones that seem important for a particular essay you are working on.

Figure 1 is an example of an attempt to start such a ‘map’. As it isn’t complete, you can add your own ideas and examples to build on it. Alternatively, you could make your own. Don’t worry if yours comes out looking different, the aim of this process is to think about how the ideas and themes in Block 1 interact and relate to one another, so there are different ways of looking at it. This exercise is a chance to work on one approach to note-making that you might find useful for other parts of the course, or as an aid to revision.

It is important to bear in mind that the course is trying to introduce you to ideas that you can use in thinking about and analysing social problems and social interventions. This has implications for how you make your notes on the course. The detailed material you will meet in the units in Block 1 is there to help you explore and illustrate the main ideas and questions in the course, rather than for its own sake. You will not be expected to remember all the events, information and authors referred to in the units, although this kind of material will often be useful to illustrate and support points you want to make in your essays.

People often find the essays in D211 rather different from those in the Foundation course. They tend to be broader questions, asking you to focus on and illustrate the themes, questions and ideas that you have identified as particularly relevant to the answer. This has important implications for how you work on your essay. It is usually helpful to look carefully at the essay questions and student notes before you begin to read the course materials they cover – as this enables you to keep your eye open for relevant materials as you work through the block and to focus your work. This, then, can form another important approach to your note-taking on D211.

As you move on through the course, it may be useful to draw on ideas and examples from across several units, or to refer back to material from earlier parts of the course. Indeed, when it comes to the exam, you will be rewarded for showing that you can make links between the different parts of the course.

Each block of the course has a different focus, and targets a different level. So, Block 1 looks at the life-stages that individuals pass through, Block 2 focuses on the family, Block 3 explores social work as a form of intervention, and Block 4 examines the wider context of welfare policies and politics. However, these areas are not absolutely separate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE QUESTIONS</th>
<th>IMPORTANT THEMES AND ISSUES</th>
<th>USEFUL IDEAS/CONCEPTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is social about a social problem?</td>
<td>Social construction e.g. 'childhood'</td>
<td>Labelling 'abnormal', 'deviant', 'delinquent'</td>
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<td>Social causation e.g. poverty in old age</td>
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<td><em>Natural/universal</em> e.g. 'old age'</td>
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<td>When does a matter of private concern become a social concern?</td>
<td>Public-private e.g. infant mortality rates</td>
<td>Stereotypes/ expectations e.g. old age/decline</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the appropriate level of intervention?</td>
<td>Competing explanations/levels of explanation</td>
<td>Role of interest groups/social movements e.g. NCT, Kids Lib</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the consequences and outcomes of intervention?</td>
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<td>Care and control e.g. monitoring pregnancy</td>
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<td>'Individualizes' problems e.g. medical intervention</td>
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<td>Resentment of 'care'</td>
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<td>Creation of new categories of need e.g. juvenile crime</td>
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<td>'Contaminates' problems e.g. youth</td>
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While a particular issue may be considered in detail in one part of the course, material in other units or blocks may well relate to it. You may find it helpful to bear in mind that this is to be expected, because of the way the course is structured. The same topics may recur but they will be approached from different angles or with different questions in mind. You may find it helpful to use the margins in the units to note down your own questions and observations about how you see the current material relating to other parts of the course. Towards the end of the course, we believe you will have built up a deeper understanding of social problems, social constructions and social interventions, and will be able to see them from different angles. In doing so, this will enable you to draw on and make use of material from across the course. So, we hope you will find this an interesting and challenging course to study.

1.2 Unit 1: In the Beginning

Unit 1 touches on all four of the key questions discussed in the Block 1 Introduction and provides useful illustrations of the idea of social construction. Section 2 looks at the different sorts of advice received by pregnant women and uses this to show how even a process as apparently natural as birth can have social dimensions. Section 3 explores three different ‘models’ of childbirth, focusing on the differing views they embody about the question of who has power in the social process of childbirth. In so doing, it illustrates the contested nature of the definitions of the ‘problems’ of childbirth and the different ways in which these have been socially constructed. Section 4 focuses on social causation and investigates some of the causal factors underlying raising or lowering maternal and perinatal mortality rates. It also points out how policy decisions about appropriate forms of intervention to improve mortality rates are rarely made on the basis of such causal explanations alone, and that other factors, including ideological views, affect what are seen as appropriate solutions. Section 5 raises the problem of how some interventions can produce the need for further interventions. As you read this unit, try to keep these themes in mind. You might also think about whether there are any continuities or any changes since the unit was first published in 1988

Now read Unit 1 and listen to Audio-cassette 1B at the appropriate point in the unit. When you have finished, return to this Guide.

One of the continuities which may have struck you is that women still have remarkably little control over their own processes of giving birth. For example, it remains difficult to arrange to have a home delivery today. Even when there appears to have been some change, where some hospitals and doctors are now more willing to provide relaxed regimes of care or allow women to decide what is the most comfortable position in which to give birth, the medical model remains the dominant model.

To the degree that there has been some change, you may have started thinking about how to explain it. Could a more relaxed approach, giving women a degree of choice in how they give birth, be because of a shift in the acceptance of different ‘criteria of success’ for childbirth? Perhaps obstetricians have widened their ‘frame of reference’ for assessing the success or otherwise of a birth, to take into account the more holistic view which characterizes mothers’ views of birth. If they have, why might this be? Point 6 on page 31 of the unit says that ‘... controversy between different perspectives and the forms of organization to which they give rise is the process whereby practices change’. So perhaps the pressure from feminists and groups like the natural childbirth movement highlighted in the unit have indeed forced doctors to take a wider view, and to change their practices. However, the fact that such changes are relatively small serves to underline the overarching power and dominance of the medical model. There have also been findings from medical research which challenge the use of interventions such as inductions and Caesareans, which may also have contributed to changing medical practice.
In thinking about change, you might also have considered the evidence put forward in Section 4 which indicated that perinatal and neonatal mortality rates were twice as high in the lowest socio-economic classes as in the highest (DHSS, 1980). You may have remembered that amongst the social factors mentioned by the Social Services Committee on Perinatal and Neonatal Mortality quoted in the unit (p. 48) as causing babies not to survive were 'lack of education, poverty, poor housing, possibly poor nutrition, unplanned pregnancy, smoking, drinking alcohol to excess etc'. More recent evidence underlines this 'health divide' and argues that there is a 'growing body of evidence that material and structural factors, such as housing and income, can affect health' (Whitehead, 1990, p. 62). There is also interesting new research which suggests that income distribution, or how big the differences between rich and poor are...seems to be the most important determinant of health standards in the developed world' (Wilkinson 1991, p. 21). This research makes a link between widening income differentials in Britain in the 1980s and the failure of social class differences in death rates in Britain to diminish, despite rising average income levels. Neither the article by Whitehead nor that by Wilkinson directly addresses the question of change in perinatal or neonatal mortality rates, but they set the context in which any changes need to be considered. They also re-emphasize the question implicitly raised in the unit, if social causes are so important why are they given relatively little weight in thinking about intervention?

1.3 Unit 2: Kid's Lib: The Politics of Childhood

Unit 2 is about the social construction of childhood, and about how the power of adults to define childhood and children's rights may not always be in the best interests of the child.

To suggest that childhood is a socially constructed concept may strike you as odd. Just as it is easy to assume that childbirth is primarily a 'natural' or a 'biological' event (until one thinks about it more systematically), so it seems 'only natural' that the most obvious characteristic of the child is as a dependant of adult carers who 'know best' and who will act in the child's best interests. Section 1 examines some of the processes which have been involved in the construction of childhood as a period of dependency in which parental rights predominate. Section 2 argues that such a construction can be seen as being more in the interests of adults than children. Section 3 contrasts the view of children as 'natural' and passive inhabitants of this adult-defined 'niches' of childhood, with a view of them as active agents in the construction of their own social realities in order to make sense of, and negotiate, their processes of growing up. One significant issue is that they have few rights in this process. Section 4 concludes by looking at how giving children a 'voice' might lead to improved welfare outcomes for the child.

You should now read Unit 2 and watch the two television programmes (TV1 and TV2) associated with it. It might be useful, as you do so, to think especially about the issues of children's rights raised in it, and whether there is a clash between according appropriate rights to the parent and ensuring the welfare of the child.

When you have finished, turn back to this Guide.

As you are probably aware, one of the main policy changes affecting children since the unit was written has been the Children Act 1989 which affects the conditions under which children and young people are cared for. The Act is examined in more detail in the Hitchhiker's Guide for Unit 15. But it is worth noting that the Act was developed in the context of arguments about the different – and sometimes conflicting – rights of children, parents and the state.

The issues of parental versus children's rights, and the rights of the state (through social workers in particular) to intervene, were brought into stark relief by the cases of suspected child sexual abuse of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Again these are discussed later in the course so we will not go into detail here. However, it is worth
nothing at this point that one reason that intervention (especially removing children from homes where abuse is suspected) is so hotly disputed is the challenge which such intervention poses to parental rights.

One might conclude that the predominance of parental rights over children’s rights may be changing. Some support for this view was given by Lord Mackay (then Lord Chancellor) when the Children Bill was discussed in the House of Lords. He pointed to the Bill’s concept of ‘parental responsibility’ rather than ‘parental rights’, arguing that

[It] emphasizes that the days when a child could be regarded as a possession of a parent – indeed when they had in the past a right to his services and could sue on their loss – are now buried forever. The overwhelming purpose of parenthood is the responsibility for caring for and rearing the child. (House of Lords, 6 December 1988)

You could also consider what such changes (or continuities) tell us about the relative powers involved in determining children’s rights. Is the balance of power changing? Whose interests are being served? What are the processes of social construction which may be going on, and what may be the outcomes?

The Children Act was one of the UK’s aspects of good practice in relation to Children’s Rights identified by a United Nations monitoring committee in 1995. The committee was examining progress on the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK became a signatory in 1991. The committee’s report suggested that the UK was, in many respects, failing to live up to the convention commitments; see Figure 2.
1.4 Unit 3: Depraved or Deprived? The Problem of ‘Adolescence’

Unit 3 focuses directly on the third and fourth key questions discussed in the Block 1 Introduction: ‘What is the appropriate level of intervention?’ and ‘What are the consequences and outcomes of intervention?’ It also illustrates how processes of social construction may be significant for welfare outcomes. How ‘problems’ concerning youth have been defined affect some of the forms of response. Section 2 looks at how a particular view of youth as ‘potentially troublesome’ has been reinforced in current popular imagery. Section 3 looks back historically at how different interpretations of the concept of adolescence have contributed to this view and introduces the idea that ‘adolescence’ as a problematic stage of life has been socially constructed over time. Section 4 then looks at how such social constructions have informed particular forms of intervention in youth ‘problems’, not all of which are necessarily benevolent (as exemplified in the ‘care versus control’ dichotomy).

Section 5 opens up the debate about youth as a ‘social problem’ by considering the characteristics that differentiate youth and which determine what it actually means to be young – and thus reminds us that the problems that individuals face result from real social contexts as well as from the ways in which such problems are socially constructed.

You should now read Unit 3. While doing so, you might think about whether the social problems and constructions that it discusses have changed in any significant way. When you have finished, turn back to this Guide.

In thinking about continuities and changes we would like to pick up two of the points highlighted in the summary. One is the idea that media images of youth, as either deprived or depraved, have exaggerated the problem of youth to the extent that the reality of the conventional normality of the majority of young people is overlooked. The other is the argument that many of the institutional responses to the problems of adolescence (whatever these may be) tend simply to reinforce the idea that adolescence is a problem, and that intervention often appears not to serve the interests of young people themselves but more to serve the interests of those ‘in the business of youth control’.

Thinking back to the portrayal of young people by the media and to your analysis of the newspaper articles you collected, do you get any feeling as to whether the portrayals of youth have changed at all?

We would expect you to have found little change in the images of youth. Youth and crime (and concerns about rising crime rates) remain a major source of fascination for the media today, much as they were when the unit was written. Yet, even though the picture painted is more frequently one of a rising rather than a declining crime rate, the reality is that, since the mid-1980s, the juvenile (10 to 17-year-olds) crime rate, as measured by police recording and official statistics, has declined markedly. Despite this, new law and order strategies continue to be aimed at the young, largely because a quarter of known offenders are aged under 17. This in turn fuels the recurrent fear that the juvenile offender of today heralds the adult criminal of tomorrow. What, then, should we make of evidence which suggests that youth crime is on the decrease? Why should such ‘good news’ be generally overlooked by the media?

You might have reflected on the points made in Section 2.1 of Unit 3, on page 9, that ‘the state of youth acts as a social metaphor for the state of society’, and a perception of
youth as being dangerous 'as the cornerstone of a number of key concerns about a disordered present'. So perhaps the apparent failure to take a cool look at the evidence may be a barometer for more general feelings about the state of society by those whose interests are dominant. Are we genuinely living in a more 'disordered' present or is this a case of overreactions by adults in the face of what they perceive to be a breakdown of moral values? Is there a new crisis of law and order threatening traditional authority?

Looking more broadly, it does seem that there may be new fears about social stability which have crystallized around youth. For example, a continuing concern with the use of drugs became, in the early 1990s, associated in the public mind with theft, increasing violence and crime. This was part of a growing feeling that youth were 'going too far' or getting out of control. In such ways, 'dangerous youth' came to stand for a variety of concerns about wider social changes, few of which may have anything to do with young people directly. 'Dangerous youth' provides a way of talking about a range of social processes from morality to unemployment, from the state of towns and cities to patterns of family life.

It is perhaps not surprising in the light of such continued media attention and worries about the state of society as a whole that we find further evidence of the shift identified in Section 5.3 towards an emphasis on control and on more punitive forms of control. An example of such a shift is the subsequent Criminal Justice Act 1991 which emphasizes 'parental responsibility' for juvenile offences and makes parents financially responsible for their children's misdemeanours. Such moves follow fairly logically from the views of the New Right in which adolescent waywardness is seen to be 'caused by inadequate parenting supported by liberal social policies which have been orientated to meeting a child's needs rather than to the task of reproducing the established dominant morality' (Section 5.3, p. 29). But punishing the parents may simply create new tensions between them and the young adults for whom they are held responsible. An unintended consequence of such a policy may prove to be family breakdown and the further growth of homelessness among young people.

We will stop here and suggest you reflect on this apparent change in emphasis away from care and towards control of youth. Try to tease out any other processes which may be at work, and any other outcomes for young people of such shifts. In particular, consider the proposition (and probability) that solving problems in one area may bring other problems to the surface.

### 1.5 Unit 4: When I'm Sixty-four

Unit 4 looks at the 'problem' of old age and at those aspects of the problem which are socially structured and which differentially affect elderly people depending on their place within the divisions of class, gender or 'race'. It also looks at how old age is socially constructed. In particular, it examines how ageing is defined as a biological process which affects all older people, and brings with it problems and extra difficulties. The unit touches on all four of the key questions discussed in the Block 1 Introduction.

Section 2 starts by identifying the 'problem' of old age as a 'crisis of care' and looks at this from the differing viewpoints of society (as a whole), of families and of the individuals concerned. Section 3 looks at some of the ways in which old age has been constructed as a state of dependency and the effects this has on all elderly people. It highlights some of the particular historical and social processes through which elderly people lost traditional jobs, and with them their role as heads of the household. But it points out that thus enforced loss of status was then 'constructed' into an assumed state of 'natural' dependency. This occurred as a result both of the negative interpretations put on the loss of status by others, and by social policies which, by emphasizing retirement, reinforced those original interpretations. Section 3 then considers the problems resulting from these processes of social construction in relation to the varying real experiences of old age and ageing. Section 4 takes a second look at the 'problem' and asks how should it (or its many aspects) be redefined to take into account the real but differing needs of elderly people, and what interventions would follow from such redefinitions.
Before reading Unit 4, you might stop for a moment and think about any changes that you think may have affected the situation of older people since the mid-1980s.

You should now read Unit 4 and the associated chapter by Walker in the Course Reader Chapter 3, ‘The social construction of dependency in old age’. When you have done so, return to this Guide.

Walker’s account of the ‘social construction of dependency’ raises some important issues about how to think of the process of social construction. For him, dependency is produced by social processes which have positioned older people in a particular way which makes them dependent on the state. That is, dependency is not a consequence of either individual or biological conditions (the ageing process) but is a social – or structural – consequence of economic and political processes. What makes Walker’s article important is that he links the idea of ‘social construction’ (the creation of dependency) to an analysis of the social processes and interests that have caused this construction. It is a structuralist account of why and how a particular social construction has come about.

Looking back at Unit 4, we think there have been two main areas of change affecting the issues discussed in it. The first of these is policy changes relating to pensions. Conservative governments between 1979 and 1993 have been committed to an expansion of occupational and personal pension plans. In addition to the various subsidies to employers to set up new schemes (e.g. more ‘lemon’ requirements for approval in the case of many occupational schemes), the core of the policy has been the ‘carrot’ of incentives to encourage people to contract out of the State Earnings Related Pensions Scheme (SERPS), and the ‘stick’ of downgrading the value of SERPS. The change to lifetime earnings (rather than the best twenty years) as the basis of pension calculations clearly militates against those who have interrupted work patterns. Similarly, the halving of the spouse’s entitlement discriminates against couples who are dependent on a single breadwinner (and will mostly disadvantage women). In addition, instead of widows and widowers inheriting their spouse’s pension in full, only half the pension can now be inherited by a spouse (Atkinson, 1991). The likelihood of poverty in old age is thus increased for those dependent on SERPS, and will affect the experience of old age for such groups, as the unit suggested.

Another area of potential change which was previewed in the unit and which will be looked at in more detail in Block 4 is that of the new community care policies. The unit raised questions as to whether the policies of the Conservative government in relation to the care of elderly people – especially in widening access to private residential care by funding elderly people in receipt of DSS benefits to go into private homes – might not bring new problems. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 provides for a greater role for market forces in the provision of community care. Its ‘community care’ provisions were implemented in April 1993. The government have argued that the need for care in old age should not mean being dependent on state facilities. The 1990 Act emphasized the need for care to be organized and provided in ways which would more closely meet the particular needs of individuals. In particular, it envisaged a shift of resources away from institutional care towards supporting people in their own homes. Community care is intended to be responsive to the wishes of those who want to stay in their homes by providing more flexible forms of support. It also aims to reduce the growing costs of residential care for older people. Before 1993 residential private care had increased at the expense of local authority provision. In the process, both the numbers of elderly entering residential and nursing homes who need funding and the overall cost of residential care have increased.

Two particular features of the old system caused concern. On the one hand, rising numbers and rising costs represented a significant pressure on Department of Social Security funding. At the same time, DSS funding for residential (rather than nursing)
homes was only adequate for the cheaper end of the market (usually involving shared
rooms and facilities). Age Concern warned of the danger of a ‘two-tier’ system, split
between those wholly dependent on public funding and those with private resources
able to pay for enhanced standards (Age Concern, 1989).

Under the new community care legislation, funds have been transferred from the DSS to
local authorities who have become responsible for assessing needs and purchasing
services to support those in need. It is this concentration of funding, assessment and
purchasing in local authorities that is supposed to tilt the balance from institutional to
community care. Even as the new system was being introduced, there were arguments
between local authorities and the government about whether the funds being
transferred were adequate for meeting needs, and a fear that the assessment system
would become a new way of rationing scarce resources.

Residential and nursing homes were equally anxious that the shift in funding and
responsibility would threaten their future, as more people became cared for in the
community. The Act also implies a greater role for ‘informal’ or ‘primary’ carers –
usually relatives – to support older people staying at home. Finally, the Act also
assumes that those receiving services will pay towards the cost of them where they
have the financial resources, while those able to pay privately for residential or nursing
homes will still be able to do so outside the assessment system.

We will be coming back to the issue of community care later in the course (briefly
in Block 3 and more extensively in Block 4). For the moment, we suggest that you
think about the following question. Given that the principle of community care has
widespread support, why is its practice caught up in so many arguments?

There is one other dimension to think about. In Section 3, the unit discussed differences
in the experience of ageing arising from gender and occupation or class. Nothing was
included about differences arising from membership of minority ethnic communities.
Yet this is an important aspect of diversity in old age both from the point of view of the
problems faced by the individuals and groups concerned and for social welfare
policies, especially as more people in ethnic communities reach retirement age. At
present only about 4 per cent of the minority ethnic population are over retirement age
– as compared to 21 per cent in white groups – but the number is expected to double
by the year 2000 as more people in the relevant groups become pensioners
(Mackintosh et al., 1990).

Some indications of the ways in which the experiences of ageing and old age are
mediated and constructed differently for ethnic minority groups can be seen in the
following excerpt.

The term ‘double jeopardy’ has been coined to describe the experience of being both
black and old. Older black people suffer both the negative effects of ageism and the added
psychological, economic and social pressures of racism. Some commentators also
include sexism to show the triple disadvantage facing elderly black women. There is also
a contrary view that old age may serve to reduce some of the problems facing people from
ethnic minority groups. Other family members may act as mediators with the outside world
so removing the stress of racism, and for some the esteem in which older people are held in
many sub-cultures may make old age a very positive experience (Mackintosh et al., 1990,
pp. 22–3).

The authors go on to caution against stereotyping black older people:

They do not all live in extended families, and cannot all rely on family support in old age
Younger family members may hold very different values from older people and be less
likely to show the same respect to elders as previous generations. Care for black older
people within the family will possibly diminish over time (Mackintosh et al., 1990, p. 23).
Other writers point out that many black people have not been in the United Kingdom long enough to qualify for a full state pension (Bryan et al., 1986). The same writers draw attention to the effects on black women of employment practices and discrimination: ‘Even our chances of being pensioned off are greater than for most Black women are the first to be made redundant, and if this happens in our forties or fifties, the likelihood of us finding alternative work is very remote’ (Bryan et al., 1986, p. 93). Other concerns of black elderly people are the lack of appropriate support and provision. As one older black man said in a report to the West Midlands Council, ‘It’s bad enough to put up with racism all these years, but to have to look forward to spending my last days surrounded by white people who do not understand me is a bleak future ...’ (Report of Review Panel, 1986, p. 47)

The same report highlights how a combination of the racism and general lack of cultural awareness, which results in, for example, black men and women in care or at day centres being offered inappropriate food, also results in them being labelled as a problem when they refuse to eat it, or ask for something different.

Many of the problems experienced by the black and Asian elderly are structurally caused by virtue of ethnic minority membership. Such problems are often compounded by a further process of labelling in which the ‘problem’ is not just that they are elderly and seen as a burden (as are white people), but that they are constructed as a burden and as being ‘difficult’ by virtue of their ethnic difference.

1.6 Unit 5: Block 1 Review

Having looked at these life-stages, the review unit returns to the four questions set out in the Block 1 Introduction

You should now read Sections 1 and 2 of Unit 5. You do NOT need to read Section 3 as this refers to a Reader article by Nick Manning which has been dropped from the second edition of the book. Then return to this Guide.

At this point, it may also be useful to stop and think about the issues that are explored in Block 1 that are also important for the rest of the course.

Block 1 has looked at the process of ‘social construction’. It has done this from several different angles.

1. Block 1 has looked at how these four life-stages are, themselves, ‘socially constructed’. We can see this by looking at evidence that shows how the nature of adolescence, or old age, say, has changed over time, or how they are quite different in other cultures.

2. In addition, it has also examined the ideas that are associated with different life-stages – what it means to say that someone is a ‘child’, an ‘adolescent’ or an ‘old person’, and the associations and implications we attach to this. In particular Block 1 has looked at the way in which each of these life-stages has come to be defined as a sources of social problems, in ways that make it seem ‘natural’ or inevitable that this should be so.

3. The focus of Block 1 on life-stages as social problems apparently leaves out the whole period of life between adolescence and old age. This is because adulthood (or ‘maturity’) is not seen as problematic as a stage of life. Indeed, it is the presumed condition of ‘normality’ against which the other stages are seen as problematic. Adulthood is the ideal state of ‘independence’ by comparison with which the other stages are problems because they involve forms of ‘dependency’. So, while there may be some ‘deviant’ adults whose behaviour requires
intervention, the assumption is that these are different from 'normal' adults. For the other life-stages, the assumption is that all those in that stage of life pose a problem of dependence.

4 Yet, throughout the block, we have seen that the ideas about these life-stages are contested – there is disagreement and conflict about them. Interest groups and social movements can be important in challenging and changing ideas. In each case, we have seen how the causes of problems, and therefore the kind of intervention that is needed to solve them, is open to dispute.

5 When there are such diverse ideas about these life-stages and the roots of the problems associated with them, this leads to the question of why some ideas come to dominate, even to be 'taken for granted' as common sense. One answer may be simple that there is some level of consensus about them in our society – an agreement that they are more convincing than other arguments. However, the units raise questions about which groups in society have power to 'define' social problems, and to shape our ideas – and who has interests in particular ways of viewing things. As you will remember, this issue was especially important in the Reader article by Alan Walker on 'The social construction of dependency in old age'.

The second issue that it is useful to think about, alongside your reading of Unit 5, is that of the distinction between individualist and structuralist explanations of social problems. Each unit looks at how problems a person of that age might face are often explained in terms of individual causes (physical decline of an old person, the lifestyle and medical history of a pregnant woman, and so on). They have also shown how such explanations contrast with those that see problems lying outside the individual themselves – in broader social structures and processes. Because D211 is a social science course, it is particularly interested in these questions about the 'social causation' of problems. This leads one to ask why certain problem conditions are more likely to arise for some people than for others, how they are patterned by structural factors, such as class, gender or ethnicity, and how they arise from broader processes of social and economic change. It also points to very different kinds of interventions that are needed to solve them.

At this point you should read Chapter 1 by Hulley and Clarke from the Course Reader. This is essential to your study of D211, as it helps to broaden your understanding of the meaning of social construction and social causation. As you go through it, pick out the main points made by Hulley and Clarke about what is involved in the social construction of problems. When you have finished, return to this Guide.

Hulley and Clarke argue that there are two main kinds – or 'levels' – of explanation of social problems. The first approach is based on explanations which focus on defective or deviant behaviour of individuals. This approach identifies social problems with deviant minority who differ for the 'normal' majority. The second approach is based on structural explanations. These examine causes beyond natural, biological and individual explanations, exploring the relationships between social problems and the organization of society, especially in relation to patterns of social inequality.

Hulley and Clarke go on to explain that ideologies and discourses are an important part of the social construction of social problems. They organize the distinctions between normality and deviance, and construct what are seen as social problems. They present relatively systematic accounts of the causes of social problems and shape the sorts of interventions chosen to 'solve' such problems.

Hulley and Clarke argue that dominant ideologies and discourses focus on identifying 'defective' individuals (violent husbands), 'problem' families (father in prison, mother on
Income Support, children truanting) and 'deviant' geographical areas (Brixton, Moss Side) as the causes of social problems. Such views of causes play a significant role in shaping the social policies and interventions intended to solve problems.

Their chapter also raises issues about the relationship between social interests, power inequalities and the definition of social problems. The Reader chapter by Alan Walker associated with Unit 4 exemplified these issues in the case of older people. He argued that the needs of economic production organized the social position of older people through enforced retirement and shaped our understandings of them as vulnerable and dependent. Social policies were then developed to address this apparently 'natural' state of dependence.

These concerns with social construction and social causation will recur throughout D211. Block 1 has explored them through the ideas of 'life-stages'. Block 2 moves on to examine the family - a social institution which is central to contemporary discussions of both social problems and social welfare.

References


DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY (1980) Perinatal and Neonatal Mortality (Second Report from the Social Services Committee), Renée Short (Chair), London, HMSO.


REPORT OF REVIEW PANEL (1986) A Different Reality, West Midlands Council

WHITEHEAD, M (1990) 'Inequalities in health' in Anderson, J. and Rucci, M (eds), Society and Social Science, Milton Keynes, The Open University

Block 2 plays a significant role in taking forward the ideas and arguments about individual life-stages from Block 1 to examine another point where ideas of the natural and the social meet – the family. Starting from ideas about the family, the block examines the social roles and expectations associated with the family, and looks at the points of intersection between the private world of the family and the public realm of politics and policy. Although we shall be introducing some more recent information, the main purpose of the Guide in relation to Block 2 is to assess whether its major themes and arguments continue to be relevant in the 1990s.

2.1 Block Introduction and Unit 6: An Introduction to the Family

The Block Introduction provides a clear and useful overview of the block material and we recommend that you read through it before starting work on Unit 6.

You should now read the Block 2 Introduction and Unit 6. Note that the chapter by Felicity Edholm, 'The unnatural family', which you are asked to read during Unit 6 is now reproduced as Chapter 8 in the second edition of the Course Reader (not in Block 2 Offprints as indicated in the unit). When you have finished, come back to this Guide.

In your reading of Unit 6 you will have noticed that some of the statistics and tables are relatively dated. In some respects, this is not a major problem since the key trends which its author highlights have remained broadly the same since the unit was written. However, one of the skills that D211 tries to develop is that of reading tables and understanding data. One important aspect of this is the problem of updating information. There is a range of potential difficulties that may be encountered in this process:

(a) One may not be able to find strictly comparable new data, e.g. the particular data series may have ceased being collected or published.

(b) Definitions may have changed: since 1979 the definition of unemployment has changed over twenty times. This means that some data will have to be amended to make them comparable.

(c) The purposes for which the data are being collected may be different and so different questions are being asked – even slightly different questions will mean that the answers are not strictly comparable.

(d) There may be no problems with (a), (b) and (c) but the presentation of the data has been changed, such that it uses different time-intervals, or includes some variables and not others.

Thus probably all sounds very offputting so it is important to stress that there is a point in digging around in data. Finding out what actually has happened to, say, employment patterns or household formation is both interesting in itself and is a key aspect of practical policy and planning. Being able to argue about what is the 'real' rate of unemployment, on the basis of clear analysis and evidence, can be both satisfying in itself and an important contribution to public debate.

One issue in Unit 6 was the distribution of types of households. We have provided an example of the original data and more recent information as the basis for comparison. Table 1 below is reproduced from Table 1 on page 23 of the unit. Table 2 appears in the 1995 edition of Social Trends. Have a good look at them and, before reading on, make a note of any points that strike you.
Table 1  Households by type, 1961-66, Great Britain (percentages)

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Table 2  Households\(^1\): by type, Great Britain (percentages)

Copyright material removed

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Probably the first thing that struck you is that the layout is different. You might also have worked out that Table 1 is derived from Social Trends whereas Table 2 is a reproduction of the table from Social Trends. So it may be that the two sets of information will not match exactly. However, they do both originate in the same publication and where you can use the same source when updating then you are definitely off to a flying start.

If you want to check this for yourself take the first line of Table 1 in the 'No family' section and read off the figures for one person (households) under retirement age, and then compare it with Table 2's figures under the heading 'One person households' for those 'under pensionable age' – in both cases the figures are 1961 = 4, 1971 = 6 and 1981 = 8. What are the figures for 'One family households' containing a married couple with 1–2 dependent children?

It might seem at this point that you can simply read off the figures for 1991 from Table 2 and that is the end of the story. But you will see that it has a number of notes. Note 1 refers you to the appendix (in Social Trends) and this is where any changes in the definitions will be listed so, strictly, you need to check what that has to say. Notes 2 and 3 also indicate the need for caution in what can be assumed under the different headings. And here, if you were being very strict, you would need to go back to the original source of Table 1 to check if similar reservations were applied then.

We do not suggest that you actively update all the other data in Unit 6 for the very good reason that, as mentioned earlier, we are confident that the general trends that it highlights remain substantially the same. However, if you are interested in doing so, then by all means do. It is all good practice in becoming more comfortable with figures and learning how to get the most out of data. We have chosen to reproduce more recent information on lone-parent families. These data give you a further opportunity to make comparisons with the trends described in Unit 6 (Table 3 below relates to Table 3 in the unit, p. 27). The other reason for including this information in particular is the centrality of the issue of lone-parent families to debates about the family in modern Britain.

Looking at Table 3, has the trend towards a greater proportion of families headed by lone parents discussed in Unit 6 (p. 26) continued? What types of lone-parent families have increased?

Table 3   Families with dependent children* by family type, and marital status of lone members, 1971 to 1981, Great Britain (percentages)

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2.2 Unit 7: Politics and the Family

The main purpose of Unit 7 is 'to explore some of the connections between the family and politics in contemporary Britain'. It does this through asking two main questions:

- What role do ideas of the family play in political ideology in Britain?
- What is the relationship between the policies of political parties and the family?

Since the unit was written there have been a number of political changes. The SDP and Liberal Alliance has been dissolved and effectively replaced by the Liberal Democratic party under the leadership of Paddy Ashdown. John Major replaced Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservatives. There has been a further General Election (the election of 1992) which was again won by the Conservatives but with a reduced majority. The leadership of the Labour Party has also changed from Neil Kinnock to John Smith and then to Tony Blair. These changes affect some of the unit's content, but do not affect the main thrust of its arguments in relation to the questions outlined above.

However, we want to suggest one or two particular areas to focus upon which we hope will help the process of linking the unit material to the political and policy developments of the 1990s. We have introduced some new material looking at the view of the family as taken by the three main political parties, aimed at helping you update Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the unit. To start with we suggest you read the unit and associated materials – and then afterwards return to this Guide and work through the new material.

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You should now read Unit 7 and its associated Reader chapters by Malcolm Wicks (Chapter 10, 'Family matters and public policy') and Carol Smart (Chapter 9, 'Securing the family? Rhetoric and policy in the field of social security'). Then return to this Guide.

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How central is the family?

One of the arguments that was implicitly developed in the unit concerns the 'centrality' of the family in public and political debate. Section 2 gave a range of examples in which ‘the family’ or ideas of the family, or what family members should or should not do, or issues which appeared to threaten cherished family values were powerful themes in public debates and acted as ‘triggers’ for social policy initiatives. A useful way into thinking about more recent developments might be to ask:

- Does the family today play a similarly 'central' role in public debate (and policy) as it did in the 1980s?

To start thinking about this, you could consider how the family, or its members, are treated in the press, on radio, television etc. What incidents are reported and how? How 'visible' is the family in public debate? To what extent do politicians refer to family values or families, in their public speeches and in Parliament? The following examples may help you to get started.

1. One debate about ‘the family’ continues to turn around the ongoing saga of the Royal Family. It is, of course, hard to separate the extent to which continuing ‘revelations’ about the state of the marriages of different members of the Royal Family simply reflect a somewhat morbid fascination about the Royals (and a press ‘circulation war’) from the extent to which they may reflect deeper concerns about the potential threat to valued British institutions (for which ‘the Royal Family’ is used both as a shorthand symbol and as a role model). But you may want to consider whether the symbolically central role of the Royal Family in relation to social structures and institutions still holds.

2. You might also consider the extent to which politicians make appeals to ‘the family’ either when trying to justify policies (‘this policy will be good for families’) or when
attacking government policy. For example, in the 1993 debate surrounding
the introduction of VAT on fuel balls, those most strongly opposed to it frequently did so
by reference to the family – ‘families will suffer’. Similarly, the ‘income tax debate’ in
the 1995 election was conducted almost entirely along the lines of whether ‘families’
(usually implicitly defined as conforming to the norm of the nuclear family) would
gain or lose. Hardly ever was ‘the family’ disaggregated and the different positions
of men and women and children within it discussed.

The family and welfare

The question of how far the family maintains its ‘central’ position in public debate is a
prerequisite to thinking about the role of the family in politics. A key argument of the unit
is the idea that there is a two-way relationship between the family and politics. This is, in
part, a discussion of the way in which the ‘family’ may be seen as a key social institution
for upholding social order (this is the concept of methodological familiaism discussed in
the unit, see p. 65). It is also a discussion of how particular (ideological) views of the
family come to dominate political and public debate. But it is also concerned with the
effect of both of these dimensions on social policy. For example, it was suggested that
state policies aimed both to reflect how ‘the family’ is and at the same time reflect
current political ideologies and images of how the family ought to be. Although social
policy is quite capable of responding to changes such as the increasing diversity of
living arrangements (outlined in Unit 6), it is also subject to various political and
ideological processes. The result is that rather than there being a direct and
uncomplicated link between the identification of need and addressing that need, social
policies may also be working ‘to reinforce the idea of the “normal” family, and the
conventional sexual division of labour within it’ (p. 56).

The unit argued (in Section 2.1) that in order to understand the place of the family in
British politics, it is necessary to identify the different political views of the welfare state.
The policy proposals of William Beveridge, the architect of the modern welfare state,
were based on a core assumption about a conventional family structure with the male
breadwinner and female dependent carer. This has been a central proposition in
subsequent welfare development. However, it does not follow from this that all
proponents of ‘the welfare state’ want to uphold the traditional family form, nor that all
welfare-state opponents want to treat everybody as separate individuals with choices
unrelated to their family relationships. Instead the unit suggested that we can best
understand the various different ‘political’ positions taken on the family and welfare by
reference to two key dimensions: the first is whether a pro- or anti-state welfare
position is taken. The second is the view taken about equality. Commitment (or not) to
‘equality’ is seen as representing a broadly ‘left’ or broadly ‘right’ position on the
political spectrum. These, in turn, represent approaches to policy which attempt to meet
individual need and promote individual choice as compared with promoting ‘the family’
as the main unit of analysis and social organization.

This point is important. Where there is an ideology of ‘the family’ as a ‘lynchpin’ of
society, one might expect that social policies will be devised accordingly and that ‘the
family’ rather than individuals will be the focus of social policy. However, the unit
pointed out that it is by no means the case that actual policies neatly map on to political
principles in this way. Thus is a central concern of the Reader chapter by Carol Smart –
who argued that there is often a ‘gap’ between rhetoric and reality.

We suggest you check that you have understood the different approaches to
welfare and the family which are represented by the ‘boxes’ in Figure 3 of Unit 7
(p. 58). Also check that you have a reasonably clear idea of where in the boxes,
on the basis of your reading of Sections 4, 5 and 6, you would have located the
1980s’ Conservative, Labour and the (then) Alliance parties, as a prelude to
looking in the next section at some of their 1990s’ policies and the implications
of these.
Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat: the parties in the 1990s

The following quotations are from Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs and party publications about their views of 'the family' as an institution, and the role of government in relation to the family.

Conservative

Marriage is natural, the family is natural. Even if marriage didn't exist individuals would quickly invent it because it is the best way of securing stability and happiness for children and parents alike (Speech by Angela Rumbold to the International Congress of the Family, 15 July 1990)

It is a fundamental principle of Conservatism that the interests of families should be promoted and preserved at every opportunity. It is within the family that children learn the values and attitudes that will guide them throughout their lives. Quite simply, the love, care and support of a family is the very best start any child can have in life (Speech by Ann Widdecombe to a Conservative Central Council Conference in Southport, 22 March 1991)

Without families individuals are like a frantic whirl of atoms, attached to no one, responsible to nothing, creating a vapid society. (Virginia Bottomley on hearing that there was a record number of children in lone-parent families, quoted by Melanie McFadyean in The Observer, 5 May 1993)

Labour

Families can sustain their full responsibilities towards society only if society fulfills its responsibilities towards them by providing opportunities, not just for the fortunate few, but for all. Our policies will create new chances for women and men to bring all their abilities to fruition and to live full and satisfying lives. (Neil Kinnock in Labour party pamphlet, Family Prosperity, 1990)

We ought to support family life as one of the foundation stones of a good society and in consequence fight determinedly against the unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunity by which it is so often menaced. (John Smith, Reclaiming the Ground, 1993)

It is largely from family discipline that social discipline and a sense of responsibility are learnt. It is in the family that a sense of community is born. It is a matter of common sense to say that a child brought up in a stable and well-balanced family is more likely to develop well than one who is not, and that it can be harder - financially, emotionally - to bring up children alone. (Tony Blair, quoted in The Guardian, 30 March 1995)

Liberal Democrat

The family is not collapsing but changing. We are determined to meet the social and financial needs of children, parents and elderly people. (Paddy Ashdown in Liberal Democrat policy briefing document for the family, 1991)

Liberal Democrats believe our policies must confront the financial and social problems which families face now, not moralize about supposed 'golden ages' of the past. (Statement in Liberal Democrat policy briefing document, as above)

The Conservative view, at any rate as represented by three quotes, still appears to rest on the assumption that there is only one true and 'natural' family. There is also an emphasis on 'preserving' the family. Furthermore, any form other than the 'natural form' is problematic or imperfect and might even, as Virginia Bottomley imaginatively puts it, lead us to becoming a 'frantic whirl of atoms'.

The Labour position also emphasizes the 'natural' aspects of the family - the 'nature of the family must be enabled to flourish' - and see it as a 'fundamental unit in society'. However, in this case it is closely linked with ideas about the value of community and society. There is also a hint of a drawing back from the more 'libertarian socialist' positions of the 1980s which aimed to secure greater disaggregation (treating individuals separately for the purposes of policy) and a more positive 'endorsement' of equality and choice. There are arguments about whether changing Labour Party views in the 1990s reflect a re-emergence of a 'Christian Socialist' tradition under the leadership of John Smith and subsequently Tony Blair. Such an orientation to the place and role of the family as the basis of 'community' would seem to fit uneasily with the libertarian socialist orientations discussed in the unit. The assessment of whether these
changes are significant ones (and of what their policy consequences might be) requires more evidence than can be assembled here, but we suggest that you look out for contemporary examples of Labour views of the family.

The Liberal Democrats are both easier and harder to pin down. They are easier because, according to the quotations here, they take a much more pragmatic view of the family than either of the other two parties. Unlike the Tories, and even more than Labour, they appear to accept that change in family formation and living has occurred and that the role of policy is to analyse changes and develop policies to meet the new needs which they create. They are harder in part because their origins in the old Liberal and SDP Alliance mean that it is difficult to get at which strands of the old parties have survived and in what form. At the same time, 'the family' appears to be less central in both Liberal party rhetoric and policy than either of the other two parties.

**Party policy**

How does current political rhetoric about the family match up with what each of the parties propose in terms of policy? Trying to answer this question is even more difficult than when Unit 7 was originally written because of the implications of a succession of Conservative governments since 1979. In the context of analysing policies in relation to the family, this gives them a distinct advantage in comparison to the other two parties since they have been in a position to make and implement policies. Labour and the Liberal Democrats have only been in a position of making policy statements or proposals. As a consequence, any comparison of party policies will necessarily be somewhat uneven.

Below is a selection of proposals taken from either the 1992 Election manifestos or, in the case of the Conservatives, policies that they have recently implemented or adopted. On the basis of party rhetoric (as outlined above and in the unit), try to decide to which party or parties you would allocate each policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Party/parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offer nursery care vouchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provide tax relief for workplace nurseries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Provide tax relief for all forms of employer assistance with childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Encourage private/voluntary childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Raise the value of Child Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Introduce paternity benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tax husbands and wives separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Make absent fathers liable for the maintenance of their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Abolish Income Support for school-leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Promote flexible work patterns (part-time, flexi-time, job share)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Introduce flexible retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Make parents responsible for their children's crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Provide more refuges for women escaping domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Promote the provision of a marriage guidance service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>A Ministry for Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now note which policies were actually advocated by each party.

Conservatives = 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14 and 15
Labour = 3, 6 and 16
Liberal Democrats = 1 and 14
Labour and Liberal Democrat = 5, 10 and 13

Did you find any surprising party/policy alignments? What conclusions would you draw about politics, policy and the family?

We think that this exercise suggests that it is surprisingly difficult to identify policies with parties simply on the basis of the logic of party rhetoric about the family. For example, given the Conservative party appears the most strongly pro 'nuclear family' party, one would expect them to pursue policies which supported 'the family as a whole' and be anti anything which appeared to undermine traditional roles. What, then, do we make of their support for disaggregation of tax (husbands and wives to be taxed separately), or their implicit support of women working (tax relief for workplace nurseries and encouragement of private/voluntary child care)? How do you equate their wish to make absent fathers liable for maintenance with their withdrawal of Income Support from young people?

In the case of Labour the policies seemed rather less out of line with the rhetoric than those of the Conservatives. For example, there was relatively little which treated the family 'as a unit' and relatively more on looking at individuals separately. This is perhaps no more than one would expect given the policies that were devised under Neil Kinnock's leadership and he could be seen as leaning slightly more towards the libertarian socialist end of the party, than 'traditional labour'. Subsequently, however, both John Smith and Tony Blair seem to have given more emphasis to a view of the family as a social unit. But there is something else going on - the Labour party is, in broad terms, also more pro welfare state than the Conservatives as in the emphasis on 'benefits' (child and paternity benefit) and public provision (more refuges). What comments would you make on Liberal Democrat rhetoric and policy?

The Conservatives

In their 1992 Manifesto (as in 1987) the Conservatives emphasized market principles, sound money, individual enterprise, and extending home ownership. They remained committed to widening educational opportunities, doing so via encouraging schools to opt out and become self-governing rather than extending the amount of state-provided education. They maintained their 'commitment to the NHS' but pledged to move management responsibility into the hands of 'local teams'. On social security, they pledged support for the basic state retirement pension, for Child Benefit, and for disabled people. They also included encouragement for charitable and voluntary organizations. On housing they restated their policy of encouraging home ownership but coupled it with support for a strong private-rented sector.

In terms of our four 'box' categories ('one-nation Toryism', economic liberalism, traditional labour and 'new left'), the Conservatives appear to have stayed strongly in the economic liberalism camp, with its emphasis on the market place, a minimal state role, and personal responsibility - i.e., anti-state welfare. This has been further borne out by subsequent events. For example, in 1993 Peter Lilley (then Secretary of State for Social Security) announced a fundamental review of the benefits system in the context of growing public sector borrowing. There were to be no 'sacred cows,' with the principle of universal entitlement to state pensions and Child Benefit being explicitly included as subject to review.
One outcome of this anti-state-welfare position is that even though the Conservatives are broadly identified as 'pro-family', they are much less prepared to go very far to use the state to support the family. This was evident in the manifesto policies that we looked at earlier. In other words there is a clear tension in Conservative policies between the view that it is important to 'preserve' the traditional family and the 'imperatives' of the new economic liberalism. It is the existence of such tensions that mean we need to assess policies towards the family along both of the dimensions we talked about earlier. These tensions mean it is impossible to simply read off policies towards the family from rhetoric about the family'. Furthermore, such tensions emphasize the unit's point that no political party is ever a simple expression of just one ideology. Social provision (any social provision) is likely to be the outcome of political struggles between parties and within parties. It can therefore never be explained simply by reference to the imposition of one single set of dominant ideas: there will always be competing ideas.

With these points in mind, let's look again at three specific Conservative policies.

1. The disaggregation of married couples for the purposes of income tax assessment and collection (such that husbands and wives are assessed separately) which came into force in the budget year commencing April 1992.

2. The creation of a policy to 'strengthen the family' by pursuing absent fathers for maintenance payments for their children in the Child Support Act 1991.

3. Child Benefit, which was frozen for several years under Mrs Thatcher, was increased in 1991 in the first Conservative budget under the leadership of John Major, then made subject to review under Peter Lilley's 're-examination' of the whole welfare system in 1993.

It does seem that this clutch of policy changes further confirms our assessment of the complex relations between Conservative rhetoric and policy on the family. The disaggregation of married couples in relation to income tax represents a concession to long-standing opposition to the 'married man's allowance' and a recognition of the growing number of married women in paid employment (see Unit 9). It has a pro-family justification, in that it remedies the 'unfair' tax advantages of unmarried and cohabiting couples who are able to claim two single-person allowances. But it also embodies the Conservative view of a family as a private sphere within which individuals should have the freedom to make their own choices. This, as we have just discussed, stands in some tension with a more traditional view of the patriarchal family. In taxation terms, then, the liberal individualist may have overtaken the patriarchal traditionalist arguments, but elsewhere the traditionalist arguments have been stronger.

The creation of the Child Support Agency by the Child Support Act of 1991 addresses two dimensions of Conservative views about family policy. On the one hand, it embodies the commitment to 'parental responsibility' by giving the state powers to compel 'absent parents' (mostly fathers) to pay maintenance for their children. On the other, it addresses the concern to reduce the financial costs to the state of supporting families, particularly those headed by lone mothers. It is a requirement that all parents with the care of children who are receiving state benefits (except Child Benefit) must apply to the Agency for maintenance to be recovered from the absent parent. Those not receiving such benefits may apply, but are not legally obliged to do so. The Act requires the parent with care to divulge information so that the absent parent can be pursued, unless such information will cause 'harm or undue distress' to the parent with care of the children. This information requirement is backed by a threat of benefit reductions if the parent with care does not comply.

Both the Act and its operation have created considerable controversy, indicating some of the diverse views of the family that now exist in Britain. The Act has been supported for different reasons. For example, some have seen it as a welcome attempt to reduce poverty among lone parents, while others have seen it as an attempt to make fathers more 'responsible'. Critics of the Act have been equally diverse, some attacking it for the extra pressures that it places on lone mothers, while others have focused on the unreasonable financial demands it makes on 'absent fathers'.
Child Benefit was originally introduced (by the then Labour government) and represented a shift away from patriarchal assumptions about the family in that the benefit was paid to mothers rather than to the 'head of household'. During the 1980s it came to be seen as an inappropriate form of benefit for the state (since it was universal rather than means-tested or 'targeted') and its value was allowed to dwindle by not being increased in line with inflation. This was coupled with proposals to replace it eventually with a child tax allowance to be claimed by the main earner, which would have shifted responsibility back to the male head of the family – a reassertion of traditional views. In 1991 these proposals were shelved and Child Benefit was reprieved by being updated by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont. In their 1992 election manifesto the Conservatives promised that Child Benefit would 'remain the cornerstone of our policy for all families with children'. There is a further potential shift following the Peter Lilley review (1993–4) into all forms of benefit, including Child Benefit. In the context of government anxieties about public spending, can this latest shift be interpreted as a victory of economic liberalism over other considerations about the family?

This brief case study of Child Benefit illustrates well the shifting tensions around policy – how different policy outcomes may depend as much on different 'economic tendencies' or 'competing ideologies' as being the result of any single dominant view of 'the family'. In the case of Labour and the Liberal Democrats it is hard to do a detailed analysis, since in the absence of government, none of their proposals has been put to the test of being implemented as policies. We can however come to a view of where they might stand on the pro- or anti-welfare dimension.

**Labour**

Labour's 1992 Manifesto emphasized the role of government in enabling the market to work properly, promoting investment, reducing unemployment and improving skills. On education they pledged increased nursery provision and a reduction in class sizes, and they promised local education authorities a new strategic role in local school management. In the case of the NHS they pledged to stop trends towards privatization of the NHS and to return 'opted out' hospitals to NHS control. Labour argued for 'fair taxes', and saw increases in social security benefits as 'the most effective way of reducing poverty amongst the low paid'. They promised to increase pensions and child benefits. On housing the emphasis was on maintaining the right to buy, but in the context of protection for council tenants and control of rents.

On the basis of their policy proposals Labour clearly remained, in 1992, pro-welfare state. But was there any change from the 1980s? It seems noticeable that whereas even in the mid to late 1980s you would still find many Labour politicians standing up for the ideal of the welfare state as a whole, more recently this strong support has been more limited. In the case of the manifesto, to defence of the NHS, investing in education, and the protection of the poorest. The language has also changed. There is still much of the old commitment to welfare ideals but the Labour party of the 1990s, almost as much as the Conservatives, talks of the need for 'efficiency' and 'output', for social capitalism as opposed to the welfare state.

**Liberal Democrats**

Finally, we come to the Liberal Democrats. As observed earlier, because the party is based on a coalition of ideas from the previous Liberal and SDP parties (both separately and as amalgamated under the Alliance party), it is difficult to assess how they may have changed, or be changing. Nor do we think that it is necessary for you to analyse this in detail in order to understand the main messages of the unit. What we do suggest you do is try to be alert to positions taken on the family and welfare by the Liberal Democrats and think about what tensions there might be within Liberal Democrat policy towards families. As mentioned earlier, what is noticeable about the Liberal Democrats is that they appear to take a much more pragmatic approach to the family than the other two parties. While they can still talk of 'families' as building-blocks of society, they recognize change and do not appear to view this as intrinsically 'change for the worse'.

To some extent this is reflected in the Liberal Democrat manifesto for the 1992 general election. Although committed to the free market in the long term, in the face of the recession of the early 1990s they emphasized the need for government to intervene by investing in infrastructure, training and research. On education they advocated a new partnership between schools and the community in the context of greater freedom from local day-to-day control. In health they came down against tax subsidies for private health insurance, and emphasized the underfunding of the health service, while also advocating the need for ‘real choice’. In social security they proposed a new ‘Citizen’s Income’ (to which everybody would be entitled) and reforms of the tax and benefits system to ensure everyone would be guaranteed a minimum income. They supported increases in Child Benefit and pensions, and proposed a new ‘carers’ benefit’. In housing, they proposed relaxation of controls on local authority house-building and improvement in tenants’ rights, alongside a new ‘housing tax relief’ available to mortgage-holders and renters.

On the basis of this skimpily outline of Liberal Democrat policies where would you put them on the pro versus anti welfare spectrum? Where would you put them in relation to the other two parties? An obvious response is to say ‘in the middle’, but only a brief moment’s reflection will make it clear that it is not quite as simple as that. The advocacy of a universal ‘citizen’s income’ is a much more radical proposal than just about anything that the Labour party was offering. In education little appears to separate them from the Conservatives except a recognition that the state sector is underfunded. As in the case of Labour though, the proof would be in the actual policies they pursued and it is arguably easier to be ‘radical’ in opposition.

In 1995, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a major report on Families and Parenthood (Utting, 1995) which dealt with changing family patterns and their relationship to social policies. Its author, David Utting, wrote an article summarizing some of the central issues of the report and we have reproduced it here. It is useful because it highlights issues of political rhetoric and policy about the family in contemporary Britain. What do you think are the central issues about family policy that Utting identifies?
As a way of summarizing your work both on the unit and on this section of the Hitchhiker's Guide, we suggest that you now go back to the grid on page 85 in Unit 7 and try to plot where you think you would now put the three political parties. As we have been discussing and, as the unit makes clear, all the political parties contain more than one 'ideological position or tendency'. Policies and positions are in any case shifting, as we hope we have illustrated, and you may find that the outline of the parties in the early 1990s which we have given here is already out of date in some aspects by the time you read this. It is for this reason that we strongly urge you to stay alert to what is being said, by politicians and commentators, in the newspapers and on TV and radio.
When you have decided on your general positioning of the parties according to
the grid, then turn to the table on page 86 and see in what ways you might want
to change what is put in the Conservative and Labour sections in order better to
reflect your understanding of each party’s position in the 1990s. Remember that
you will, of course, have to start afresh in the case of the Liberal Democrats, so
try to decide for yourself (or in conjunction with other students) what you think
is the Liberal Democratic stance under each of the headings. In all three parties’
cases, consider what underlying tensions are there between their ideas of the
family and policies towards the family, and the relationship between both of
these and other cherished political aims and ideals

2.3 Unit 8: Masculinity, Homophobia and Homosexuality

One of the central features of the connections between ideas of normality and ideas of
the family is that the family provides the setting for our understanding of normal
sexuality. The family is the place where, as we grow to maturity, we are expected to
learn our sexual identities and then to make future families of our own. In this process,
the normal and the natural are supposed to fit happily together – the family is the place
where the ‘natural instincts’ and social roles of men and women are properly aligned for
the benefit of society.

Unit 8 explores some of the explanations of how we learn gendered identities, by
looking at how men come to be masculine. The unit then explores the connection
between social views of masculinity and the treatment and experiences of those
sometimes defined as ‘abnormal’ or ‘unnatural’: men whose sexual orientation is
towards other men. In particular the unit is concerned with the consequences of ideas about homosexuality for the definition of what is accepted as ‘normal’
masculinity

You should now read Unit 8. Note that Audio-cassette 2, Side B on AIDS (referred to
on p. 37) has now been replaced and so is not part of your work on the unit. As you
read, consider what is the significance of homophobic ideas for our understanding
of ‘normal’ masculinity. When you have finished, return to this Guide.

The question of how prevalent homophobia is within society is difficult to assess.
However, the mother who wrote the article ‘Speaking out’, reprinted here, graphically
illustrates the issues faced by those who are forced by their previous heterosexual
assumptions to rethink their own position as a result of the ‘coming out’ of a son or
daughter. For example, she shows clearly how her own views of the heterosexual norm
got in the way of recognizing her own son’s sexuality. While she admits to her grief at
being blind to her son’s struggles, she is also angry at attitudes towards gay men which
make the streets a dangerous place for her son and his partner.

Now read the article, ‘Speaking Out’, reprinted as Figure 4.
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Source: The Guardian, 10 April 1991
In the article reference is made to Clause 25. This refers to a clause in the Local Government Bill which became Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1987. The Act forbade the spending of public money on the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality, and was aimed at two targets in particular. One was local government spending on supporting gay and lesbian self-help groups, the other was sex education in schools which might ‘promote’ homosexuality among young people. This issue was further complicated by the Education Act 1988 which placed specific responsibility for sex education in schools in the hands of school governors rather than local education authorities.

Clearly, the question of reduced funding to gay and lesbian groups and limited sex education about homosexuality takes on particular significance in relation to AIDS which was labelled by many early commentators as a ‘gay disease’. But the unit makes clear that AIDS is far from being uniquely a disease of the gay community. More recently, Social Trends (1993) reported that ‘Cases of AIDS in heterosexuals are increasing at a faster rate than any other transmission category. In the year to June 1982, there was a 37 per cent increase in reports of AIDS acquired by heterosexual intercourse’ (Social Trends 32, 1993, p 100)

The evidence about HIV infection is contradictory, particularly if one compares British and global trends. While gay men have been the predominant victims of AIDS-related death in Britain, the rate of increase for heterosexual men and women challenges the view that it is solely a matter of concern to the gay community. Worldwide trends also indicate that heterosexual transmission of HIV is a major factor in the spread of AIDS.

The complications of such evidence reveal themselves in the arguments over policies for both health resources and health education. Some have argued that limited resources should be ‘targeted’ at those most evidently ‘at risk’ gay men, in particular. Others have argued that patterns of transmission mean that no group can be immune and therefore that a ‘universal’ policy of AIDS health education is needed.

In both the USA and Britain there have been claims that the identification of AIDS as a ‘gay disease’ has allowed disproportionately few health resources to be devoted to education, treatment and research. In the 1990s arguments over the allocation of limited health service resources have become more public.

You might consider what role different public definitions of AIDS might have on the claims of AIDS-sufferers on the allocation of health services resources. Do social evaluations of the moral worth of different groups affect the allocation of resources? Should they?

Since the unit was written, homosexuality has remained a significant focus for political and public attention, not least because of the efforts of gay and lesbian groups to challenge institutional and social discrimination. One central issue was the campaign to change the age of consent for sexual relationships between men from the previous age of 21 to that for heterosexual intercourse (16). In the event, Parliament voted for a ‘compromise’ motion, reducing the age of consent to 18. This ‘compromises’ sustained the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual sexual relationships, despite the campaigns aimed at abolishing the distinction. That is, what was at stake was not just a matter of age, but a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexualities.

At the same time, two major social institutions have attracted considerable attention for their responses to homosexual relationships. The Church of England has consistently argued that ‘active’ homosexuals cannot hold positions as priests within the church, while the armed forces have continued to insist that homosexuality is incompatible with military discipline. see Figure 8.
To what extent do you think that the response of the armed forces to homosexuality reflects what the unit describes as the maintenance of 'normal' masculinity?

2.4 Unit 9: Women, Work and the Family

Unit 9 examines the relationships between state policies, women's work in the home and their work in paid employment. In doing so it offers some comparisons between Britain, Cuba and what was West Germany.

When you are studying the unit, you should consider whether there have been any major changes in British society which affect the patterns and relationships described in the unit. You should now read Unit 9 and then return to this Guide.
As with Unit 6 the main patterns described in Unit 9 remain largely unchanged. However, following on the suggestions in Unit 6 about how to check this for yourself, and if you have easy access to a library, you might want to have a go at trying to find some of the more recent data. It is worth noting in this connection that the task here may be more difficult than it was for Unit 6. One of the reasons for this is the degree to which women and men's work have historically been largely invisible in official statistics. For example, in Social Trends there is, relatively speaking, surprisingly little about women per se, whereas it is in other respects remarkably comprehensive. One result is that the author of Unit 9 has had to draw on a larger number of different sources (as compared with the author of Unit 6), including smaller-scale studies, for her information.

This 'invisibility' can be explained in part by reference to the public/private course theme: much of women's work is in the home and is defined therefore as private and has not been seen as a proper area for official information. It also relates to the reasons why official statistics are collected in the first place. Typically governments have been more interested in information about 'the economy' and have ordered the collection of information to reflect this interest. Unpaid work - much of the work of women - is not counted in the official statistics because it is not defined as productive activity.

In Unit 7 we highlighted a number of policy proposals which the three main parties made in their 1992 election manifestos, including proposals for facilitating child care and the Conservatives did introduce a degree of tax relief to mothers in paid employment in respect of the cost of child care provided in their workplace. This was heavily criticized at the time on the grounds that very few employers actually provided workplace child care facilities - in other words, it only benefited a tiny proportion of working mothers. Since then the recession of 1990-93 has meant that even some of those who did provide such facilities have been withdrawing it. You might like briefly to consider whether the proposals of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in relation to child care for working mothers (in Section 2.2 above) would have been more effective.

The article by Harriet Harman MP, reprinted below as Figure 6, examines some of the present trends about women's work and suggests that they point towards new patterns of social organization of the relationships between the home and paid employment. What else needs to happen for such patterns to become established?

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Figure 6

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2.5 Unit 10: New Forms of Domestic Living

This unit explores patterns of domestic living and contrasts the emergence of diverse new forms of household with the efforts to revive 'traditional' or 'conventional' morality. The unit is associated with two pieces of supplementary reading (by Roger Scruton and Nicky Hart) in the Offprints Booklet.

The section by Roger Scruton has proved troublesome to some people studying the course in previous years. In part, this is because of the relative complexity of the language in which it is written – the language of moral philosophy. It is also because, while the extract involves a defence of familiar values, it does so through an unfamiliar set of arguments. Roger Scruton was Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, and has been closely associated with the development of New Right arguments about the state and society during the 1980s.

Scruton argues that there is a need to restore, or revitalize, traditional morality across a whole range of social issues in the face of social and political changes which have undermined commitment to such values. Traditional morality provides the best available means of integrating society or ordering human affairs. In the extract which you are asked to read during Unit 10, you will find Scruton arguing that traditional morality offers the best fit between society and nature in the shaping of human sexuality. You may find it useful to try to distinguish for yourself between what Roger Scruton is arguing in favour of, and how he goes about justifying this position. In doing so, you might like to consider why he feels the need to provide this sort of defence of conventional values. The attempt to revive such values implies that we can no longer 'take them for granted'. What has changed in British society to create this situation?

You should now read Unit 10 and the associated Supplementary Readings. You will find it helpful to listen to Audio-cassette 3, Side B in relation to the Scruton extract.

In the extracts you have just read, Roger Scruton argues from a philosophical position for a return to a traditional morality (though in his other writings he employs similar arguments in more rhetorical style in his role as a supporter of New Right ideas). More recently there has been a renewed call for a return to traditional values and a reassertion of the value of the nuclear family.

Not surprisingly, the most strident arguments in favour of a reassertion of the nuclear family as the prime family form have come from those on the right, as exemplified in The Sunday Times editorial 'Return of the Family' reprinted below (Figure 7). But other voices too have been raised in support of traditional values. For example, Professor A. H. Halsey, social scientist, talked of the need to 'strengthen traditional families', arguing that much of 'what is seen as a problem of endemic disorder' lies within a framework of a breakdown in 'family' control. His article, 'There is a cure - and our values can be rebuilt', is also reprinted below (Figure 8).

Now read The Sunday Times editorial (Figure 7) and the article by Halsey (Figure 8). Although each is arguing 'for' the family, there are important differences especially about what they see as implied for social policy by their analyses of the causes of disorder. What are these differences?
Source: Sunday Times, 28 February 1993

Figure 8
The key difference is that while *The Sunday Times* argues that the nuclear family 'needs to be preserved and nurtured' and that social policies must be directed primarily towards this end, Professor Halsey argues that 'the decline of the traditional family cannot be denied'. In other words, in contrast to *The Sunday Times*’ implicit view that we should turn back the clock, he argues that divorce, cohabitation, single-parenting etc are now part of today’s patterns of living. In his view the policy challenge is then two-fold. First, it is to find out what actually are the effects in terms of 'stability or conviviality' for the child in different 'family environments'. Second, it is to ensure that whatever domestic living arrangements children are brought up within, policies are directed so that they (and their parents) are appropriately supported. What kinds and levels of actual policy intervention do you think the approaches of *The Sunday Times* and of Halsey would imply?

Finally, and to 'round off' your picture of recent views on 'the nuclear family', you should read the article 'Once upon a time in the nuclear family'. In this a feminist, observing
what she labels as a rising 'moral panic' around the family, argues there is a need to keep a perspective on the actual realities of family life and to focus on the different problems that exist for different individuals within families, rather than harking back to a supposed 'golden age' of family life and social cohesion.

Now read the article by Suzanne Moore reproduced as Figure 9.
2.6 Unit 11: The Body Politic: Health, Family and Society

In addition to reading Unit 11, there are other elements associated with your work on this part of the block:

- TV6: 'Health visiting and the family'
- Audio-cassette 3, Side B: 'Morality, ideology and discourse'
- Audio-cassette 4, Side A: 'Health and the family'
- Yvette Rocheron, The Asian Mother and Baby Campaign: the construction of ethnic minorities' health needs (Chapter 11 in the Reader).

Competing theoretical perspectives in Unit 11

Unit 11 takes one form of state intervention into the family – health visiting – as an issue through which to explore competing theoretical perspectives about intervention. The unit is concerned to highlight how perspectives are selective in their analyses of social life and provide distinctive readings of social history, organized around their central concerns and concepts. Some of the perspectives treated in this unit may be familiar from other courses which you have studied (e.g. pluralist, Marxist and feminist approaches). Section 3 of the unit presents an approach which is less likely to be familiar. This is drawn from the work of the French writer Michel Foucault and is organized around the concept of 'discourse'. (You may remember a brief reference to this concept in the article by Hulley and Clarke in the Course Reader which you read during Block 1.)

Foucault’s work has been developed and taken up as an alternative to Marxism, not least because it provides a means of looking more closely at the relationship between knowledge and power in particular fields of social intervention. As the unit shows, by looking at how the discourse of health is constructed, we can see how public health (as opposed to private or personal health) becomes a legitimate area for intervention. One feature of discourses highlighted in the unit is the creation of 'norms' – the definition of what counts as normally acceptable patterns of behaviour. In health visiting, the relevant 'norm' (derived from medicine and psychology) is the idea of 'normal childhood development' against which the development of individual children can be checked. The sets of knowledge organized in health discourse thus legitimate areas of social life as appropriate for intervention, and provide the rules and standards around which intervention is organized.

'Ideology' and 'discourse' are central concepts in Unit 11's exploration of different theoretical perspectives. Both are closely connected to the course's concern with the social construction of social problems. It may be helpful to think of them as presenting
different ways of understanding the processes of social construction and exploring how those processes are connected to issues of social divisions, power and social intervention. Although the terminology and theoretical perspectives may be unfamiliar, the focal concerns — how social problems are socially constructed and what consequences particular social constructions have for social intervention — are ones that you have encountered since Unit 1.

In particular, discourse, and the idea that there can be different discourses or ways of organizing how we think about problems and issues, is a difficult concept to get a grip on without seeing it at work in practice. For this reason, you may find that the Posy Simmons cartoon reprinted here offers an alternative way of thinking about it. Although the focus is not on health visiting, the cartoon does offer a very good example of two quite different discourses, or sets of ideas, around similar sets of behaviour.

Now take a look at the Posy Simmons cartoon (Figure 10). How would you characterize the two discourses about youth that she portrays?

The first discourse would seem to be something as follows. Youth is basically innocent, but naughty. Kids need to ‘let off steam’ and, in so doing, may sometimes go ‘a bit too far’, but adults can view their ‘youthful misdemeanours’ relatively calmly, safe in the knowledge that they will eventually grow up and become responsible citizens. The second discourse is altogether less benign. Children (especially adolescents) are disagreeable and destructive. They have little respect and can’t be trusted to behave.
Far from feeling secure that they will become responsible citizens, adults see them as a threat to society, and a symbol of much that is wrong with society. As such they have become a social problem. Each discourse also implies a particular view about how to 'intervene' in relation to young people. What sorts of intervention would you associate with each discourse?

You should now read Unit 11. When you are studying Section 3, try to make a note of what Foucault's approach allows us to examine that is missing from a Marxist analysis of health visiting. Then return to this Guide.

**Discourse and ideology**

In Unit 11, the Marxist analysis of health visiting is primarily organized around the question 'why?'. Marxism provides an explanation of the class interests which required the health of the working classes to be improved. It sees the state as the agency through which dominant class interests can be organized and which provides the necessary intervention. This is relatively clear and straightforward. But this analysis is not very concerned with questions about how such intervention works.

By comparison, the Foucauldian analysis pays great attention to such questions. In the first place, it wants to know how such intervention is possible. Discourse analysis involves examining the conditions which make such intervention thinkable. It examines how social knowledge is organized in frameworks (discourses) which identify and legitimate something called public health as the object of intervention.

Secondly, the Foucauldian analysis is directed towards what happens in the process of intervention. What are the consequences of particular types of knowledge in shaping relationships, networks of power, and patterns of social behaviour? What are the sorts of knowledge which allow groups of agents like health visitors to enter people's homes and carry out assessments? What types of social behaviour are these interventions intended to promote?

In all this, there is the question of how judgements about norms and normality are legitimated in discourses. In particular, Foucauldian analysis explores how such judgements are given the status of 'science' and 'truth'. It is concerned with how processes and practices of intervention are based on such norms and use them to organize social reality.

Although there are many differences between Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives (and arguments between them), it is this focus on different issues that is the central one for our purposes here. Where Marxism concentrates on the links between intervention and class relationships, Foucauldian analyses organized around the concept of discourse are more likely to give their attention to questions of how knowledge and power are linked together in specific fields of social intervention. (Some of these issues are also discussed in Audio-cassette 3, Side B.)

**Health and 'race'**

The concepts of norm and normality alert us to the social judgements that are involved in social intervention, especially where they are presented as involving neutral, scientific or value-free standards. In practice, many norms embody the standards of expectations of dominant social groups, and involve evaluations of the behaviour or attitudes of other social groups as abnormal, deviant or beyond the limits of the acceptable.

On Audio-cassette 4, Side A, two researchers from the Thomas Coram Institute talk about their research on health visiting. A particular point of concern in this discussion is what norms influence the judgements of health visitors in assessing the child's development and the quality of parental care (or mothering, since it is usually assumed that mothers are the primary carers).
You should now listen to Audio-cassette 4, Side A. Before you begin the tape, look at the notes and activities related to this cassette in the Media Notes. While listening to the discussion, think about what norms are being discussed and about what consequences result from these norms. Pay particular attention to what is revealed about the racial bases and consequences of such norms. Then return to this Guide.

There have been increasing challenges to the norms embodied in the provision of social welfare which fail to recognize the existence of different ethnic groups within British society. One feature of norms is that they lay claim to a universal status: that is, they are standards or expectations which apply to all people. One consequence is that they mask the significance of social differences for the different needs which people may have. Indeed, the logic of universal norms is that those who do not fit (who fall outside the boundaries of normality) are deviant — they are a problem. When norms are based on the experience, values or expectations of one social group, they have the effect of ‘pathologizing’ the experience of others.

Much British welfare provision, including the areas of child care and patterns of child-rearing, has involved norms derived from the patterns of white, middle-class culture. This makes other social groups more vulnerable to ‘surveillance’, and makes them more likely to be identified as the cause of problems and more likely to be seen as deviant. Minority ethnic groups (and others, such as disabled people) have questioned the assumed universality of the norms which are embodied in welfare provision, and have argued that there is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) racism in the way such norms shape welfare interventions.

We can identify two different directions in which universalism can be challenged and the nature of a multi-ethnic society can be addressed. The first might be described as multi-culturalism. Multi-culturalism is a variant of pluralism. It recognizes the existence of different ethnic groups and identifies the key point of difference as being the existence of different cultures — patterns of belief, traditions, norms and guides to social behaviour. In relation to social welfare provision, it argues that discrimination against ethnic minorities happens as a consequence of ignorance and lack of understanding and appreciation of other people’s cultures. Its remedies for this situation are to promote a better understanding and awareness of cultural diversity among those working in social welfare. In addition, patterns of welfare provision and intervention should be adjusted to take account of particular cultural differences.

The alternative view argues that, while there are cultural differences, these are less significant than the fact that members of ethnic minorities are treated in racial terms in British society. That is, ethnic differences are ‘racialized’ — given a racial value which equates being non-white with being inferior. In these terms, cultural differences are only a part of a wider social structure of racial inequality determining access to power, resources and opportunities. Acknowledging cultural differences, as multi-culturalism does, still leaves untouched these structural questions of racism and inequality. In relation to welfare provision, the phrase ‘second-class citizen’ (used to describe the experience of ethnic minorities) has a particular significance. Since the welfare state rests on the idea of ‘citizenship’, the status of ‘second-class citizen’ sums up treatment which is discriminatory, disadvantaging and racist — treatment which reinforces or reproduces other structures of social inequality.
You should now read the chapter by Yvette Rocheron, 'The Asian Mother and Baby Campaign', in the Course Reader. This examines one health campaign intended to respond to the needs of ethnic minorities in relation to childbirth and child care. The chapter links issues raised here with the subject matter of Unit 1 on childbirth, particularly in respect of the factors which affect perinatal mortality rates. When reading it, you should try to make notes of how you would answer the following questions:

1. What were the motivations of the campaign?
2. What sort of view of 'race' and ethnicity was expressed in the campaign?
3. In what way does the campaign still 'pathologise' Asian mothers?

2.7 Unit 12: Block Review

You should now read Unit 12, which provides a review of Block 2. When reading Section 4, think about your reading of the article by Rocheron and your study of Audio-cassette 4, Side A. What have they added to your view of the implications of the idea of the 'normal family' and its social consequences?

Reference

Block 3 takes up the theme of the relationship between the family and social intervention and focuses on one particular form of intervention: social work. This Guide contains rather more up-to-date material for Block 3 compared to the first two blocks, in part because there have been more substantial legislative changes affecting social work in the 1990s.

One of these changes – the Children Act 1989 – is discussed extensively below. The other major change – the reorganization of community care – is more briefly considered here but is covered in more detail in Block 4. To make space for the greater amount of work you will need to do with this Guide during Block 3, we have dropped one of the original units from the block: Unit 18.

3.1 Block Introduction and Unit 13: Social Work: The Personal and the Political

The Block Introduction provides an introduction to the main themes and issues of the block. Unit 13 examines the historical development of social work and traces its special relationship with the family as a focus for intervention.

You should now read the Block 3 Introduction and Unit 13 Then return to this Guide.

3.2 Unit 14: Social Work in the Welfare State

Unit 14 develops the arguments set out in Unit 13 and links them to the major reorganization of social work services at the end of the 1960s, resulting from the recommendations of the Kilbrandon (Scotland) and Sebbohn (England and Wales) Committees. These changes established the main political and institutional arrangements for the provision of personal social services for the next two decades.

The final section of Unit 14, 'Social work in crisis?', looks at the consequences for the personal social services of the climate of rising demands, shrinking resources and the often intense public hostility towards social workers that emerged during the 1980s. By the early 1990s a series of developments had combined to transform the structure and practice of local authority social work.

Significant forces influencing the transformation of the personal social services included the tightening of central financial and political control over local government, the pressure to replace public services with those provided by private and voluntary agencies and the tendency to subordinate professional autonomy to managerial authority. These trends were both reflected in and reinforced by the Children Act 1989 and the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 which are discussed in more detail later. In the 1990s it became clear that the aspiration to provide a comprehensive and universal social work service, embodied in the establishment of the local authority social services departments twenty years earlier – the last major initiative of the post-war welfare state – had been finally abandoned.

In Unit 20 we will be looking at social work in decline: exploring the impact of economic recession and the fragmentation of the welfare state on the performance of social work in the 1980s and 1990s. Unit 14 is focused on an earlier stage in social work’s development: examining the forces that shaped social work as it emerged as a form of intervention within the framework of the post-war welfare state. The unit considers the relationship between the pressures on social work and the political, social and professional structures within which it was carried out. Like Unit 13, it gives particular attention to the forms of knowledge that have influenced social work, and to their implications for relationships between social workers and their clients.
3.3 Unit 15: Received into Care

Unit 15 is the first of three units dealing with different aspects of social work with children and young people and their families. This unit is concerned with the processes of children and young people being taken into care by local authority social service departments and with the experience of being in care.

Since the unit was written there has been a major change in the legislation relating to children, which has had an enormous impact on the processes by which children and young people are taken into care, and which is intended to improve their experience of being in care. In this Guide we will outline the main changes introduced by the Children Act 1989, and consider how some of the important changes of principle relate to the issues raised in this unit. (You will find further discussion of the Children Act and its significance in the sections of the Hitchhiker's Guide relating to Units 16 and 17.)

The Children Act 1989

The Children Act was implemented in October 1991 and was the result of the most comprehensive review of child care law this century. For the first time it brings together the public law relating to children (e.g. affecting when local authorities intervene in order to protect children) with the private law (e.g. decisions about the care of children following divorce or separation of parents). All civil law relating to children in England and Wales, apart from adoption and education, are included in this Act. The law relating to children in Scotland is currently the subject of a similar review which will result in future legislation.

The review of child care law was instigated as a result of increasing concerns during the 1970s and 1980s about many aspects of the child care 'system' – the laws, policies and social work practices affecting the ways children were taken into care. You will find that many of these issues are discussed in Units 15, 16 and 17. The main concerns were the numbers of children coming into care, evidence that being in care seriously affected children's development, particularly if they were in care for a long time, the increasing numbers of cases of child abuse and criticisms of social work's handling of such cases. In addition there was growing disquiet about the discretionary powers of social workers, and the belief that these were being used in an increasingly coercive way, undermining the rights of both children and their parents.

The aim of the Children Act was to produce a more coherent law for children, one which made social workers more accountable in their practices to the courts, which created a better balance between the power of parents and the powers of the state (carried out in this instance by local authorities). It also aimed to reduce the numbers of children in care, and to improve the position of children and their families more generally. It aimed to combine a strong emphasis on the importance of the family with a commitment to the welfare of children and their protection from abuse.

The Children Act is based very explicitly on the assumption that the best place for children to grow up is in a family and that the emphasis in law, policy and practice should be a positive one to promote responsible families. Normal families, it is assumed, do not need state intervention in order to bring up their children; but the state should intervene to support families if it will lessen the chances of family breakdown, with the heavy hand of control only being exercised as a last resort if there is a danger to children or to society.
So, we can understand the aims of the Children Act as an attempt to:

- place the welfare of children at the forefront of policy and practice;
- unify all public and private law in relation to children into one single coherent law, which is easy to understand, written in simple language, and easy to use;
- re-emphasize the importance of the family;
- be more appropriate than previous law to the needs of children and their families,
- shift the balance or power between local authorities and parents, and to encourage them to work in partnership with one another;
- shift the emphasis of state intervention from coercion (taking children into care) to prevention (through the provision of services), and hence to protect children from abuse and to reduce the numbers of children in long-term care by preventing separations from becoming permanent;
- to give more 'consumer choice' by involving children and parents in decision-making, and setting up complaints procedures;
- to make professionals (especially social workers) more accountable to families and to the courts.

Figure 11 summarizes the central principles of the Children Act

1. The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration
2. Wherever possible, children should be brought up and cared for within their own families, local authorities cannot acquire parental responsibility without a court order.
3. Parents with children 'in need' (including children who are disabled) should be helped to bring up their children themselves
4. This help should be offered as a service to the child and the family, and should:
   (a) be provided in partnership with the parents
   (b) meet each child's identified needs
   (c) be appropriate in terms of the child's race, culture, religion and linguistic background
   (d) be open to effective, independent representations and complaints procedures
   (e) draw upon effective collaboration between different agencies, including those in the voluntary sector.
5. Children should be safe, and protected by intervention if they are in danger, such intervention must be open to challenge.
6. When a child has no parents, or where parents cannot offer their children adequate standards of care, high quality substitute parenting must be provided
7. Children should be consulted and kept informed about what happens to them and participate in the decisions made about them
8. Situations where children are cared for or live away from home must be open to scrutiny, to make sure adequate standards of care and safety are maintained
9. Parents and the wider family continue to have a role in their children's lives, even when they live apart from them. Contact with their children should be safeguarded.
10. Court decisions about the upbringing of children must be responsive to the needs of children, and designed to foster their welfare. To further this aim:
    (a) the court system should be flexible and courts well informed
    (b) delay in making decisions must be avoided
    (c) the court should not make orders unless it is better for the child that it does so.


The Act involves many other changes, but these principles govern the provision of substitute care for young people as discussed in Unit 15. When you are studying the unit it will be useful to reflect on the way in which these principles affect the issues discussed in the unit.
Impact of changes in the Children Act

Section 3 of Unit 15 describes the tensions in the old laws, policies and practices around the needs, rights and obligations of parents, children and the state. If you compare this with the aims and principles of the Children Act, you will see some important changes in the ways these are now discussed.

1. The idea of parental rights has been abolished and replaced by a new term parental responsibility. The distinction is important because it emphasizes that the power which parents have over children must be exercised for the benefit of the child not for the benefit of the parent.

   Only married parents or the unmarried mother of a child automatically have parental responsibility, but the Act describes ways in which other individuals, including unmarried fathers, step-parents, grandparents, other relations and foster-carers can acquire it. Even when a local authority acquires parental responsibility, there are limits on how they can exercise it, and in most cases they are expected to share this responsibility with the parents, or with other individuals who have parental responsibility.

   In this context, the Act recognizes the importance of the ‘wider family’ in children’s lives. As well as consulting children, parents and anyone with parental responsibility about decisions for children, the local authority also has to consult ‘any other person whose wishes and feelings the authority consider to be relevant’. This means that other relatives, ‘godparents’ or other adults who play a significant part in a child’s life should be consulted.

2. Services to children and families are to be offered as support, as a way of helping parents to care appropriately for their children. This is intended to be a change in both the kinds of services that are offered and also in the way that they are offered. As part of this change there is an emphasis on local authorities working in a positive and voluntary way, in partnership with parents. This means that parents’ views should be listened to and taken seriously, and that they should be involved in decision-making.

3. The Act also strengthens what has come to be described as ‘the voice of the child’, by stating that children must be consulted and kept informed about all decisions that affect them. In order to protect the rights of children, the role and importance of guardians ad litem (referred to in Section 4.2 of the unit) is to be strengthened. Under the Act there is scope for children who are considered to have sufficient understanding to apply for, or to challenge, court orders.

4. All local authorities are required to set up and advertise independent procedures for their services and decisions to be questioned and challenged by children, parents, foster-parents and any other individuals who are involved.

Section 4 of Unit 15 describes the different ways in which children could, until October 1991, be taken into care, and it discusses some of the main principles and issues underlying the ‘routes into care’. In particular there was a distinction under the old law between ‘voluntary’ and ‘compulsory’ care. Under the Children Act this distinction has been abolished. In line with the aims outlined above, compulsion is to be used only as a last resort. Instead:

(a) Local authorities are expected to identify children ‘in need’ and to provide services that will support their families, and hence avoid the need for care. One of the most
important of these will be the provision of ‘accommodation’ as one of a range of possible support services for children in need, rather like the provision of ‘respite care’ offered to parents of children with disabilities. The concept of children being ‘looked after’ by the local authority is intended to be seen in a positive way, avoiding the stigma of ‘being in care’.

(b) The enforced removal of children from their home can only occur after a court order has been obtained (previously it could be an administrative decision) and then only if the court is convinced that making such an order is better for the child than not making an order. (You may have noticed how this is different from the ‘care and control test’ described in Section 4.1.)

(c) Even when an order has been made, every attempt must be made to keep the child in contact with his/her family, and to help the child to return home as soon as possible. Pressure from groups such as the ‘Family Rights Group’ and ‘Families Need Fathers’ concerned with the rights of non-resident parents, led to the Act including provisions that are intended to make it easier for parents to remain in contact with their children who are being ‘looked after’ by the local authority. These provisions about contact apply also to situations where parents are divorced or separated.

The Act has other significant features. First, a very important idea in the Act is that of children ‘in need’. While local authorities have discretionary powers to provide services for all children, they have a duty to provide services for those in need. Services that will help them to be cared for adequately within their family. The definition of ‘in need’ in the Act includes children whose health or development is likely to suffer if they do not receive services, and explicitly includes children with disabilities. The precise definition of ‘in need’ – that is, what conditions are seen as damaging to the child’s normal development – is the responsibility of individual local authorities. The Act also seeks, for the first time, to integrate the needs of disabled children into general child care law, and to recognize their right to the same kind of family care as other children.

Secondly, under the Act there is, for the first time, an obligation on local authorities to give ‘due consideration’ not only to a child’s religious background, but also to their ‘racial origin and cultural and linguistic background’. This has quite far-reaching implications, given the disproportionate numbers of black and ethnic minority children in care. It can be interpreted to mean that all work with, and services for, children must be non-racist and non-discriminatory, and the provision for challenging and complaining about decisions and services means that racism, or religious or cultural discrimination in these processes could be challenged.

How is the Act working?

In the three years since the Act was introduced, a number of different trends are visible. There has been an initial reduction in the number of children being ‘taken into care’ or ‘being looked after’ by local authorities. It is difficult to tell whether this represents the development of more successful partnerships with parents and the greater use of alternative preventative measures or whether reluctance to seek orders under the Act has left more children at home and at risk of abuse. Certainly, after the first two years of the Act, there was a significant increase in the numbers of children being placed on ‘at risk’ registers by local authorities. Figure 12 reports the rise in ‘at risk’ registrations, while Figure 13 looks behind the statistics to some of the issues of classification and decision-making that may have influenced the rise.
In general the Children Act has been welcomed by a wide range of groups representing different interests and of conflicting political persuasions. The Act was discussed in Parliament, and passed into law, with a remarkable amount of political consensus. The desire to protect the family from state intervention was shared by left and right, and professionals too recognized that the laws and policies governing child care had become very muddled and incoherent, so they too were interested in reform. The Act also built on developments in professional practice—such as the concern to be more ‘child-centred’, and the need to involve parents more in decision-making.

Despite this consensus, there have been many doubts expressed about some provisions of the Act, and about whether the intentions of the Act will work in practice. We shall consider here some of the criticisms and concerns that are relevant to the issues in D211.

One of the main criticisms of the Act is that it fails to consider the impact of poverty both directly on children’s lives and also on the capacity of parent(s) to be able to care adequately for their children. There is very limited scope within the Act for local authorities to provide material help for families, the emphasis instead is on helping parents to provide better parenting.

There is a related concern about the lack of resources given to local authorities. While there is a duty on local authorities to identify children in need and to provide appropriate services, there is no corresponding obligation on central government to give them the resources necessary to do this. One consequence of this is that local authorities have to find a way of rationing resources. They are likely to adopt a narrow definition of children in need, and to concentrate on the services they have a duty to provide. The main focus will be on cases of suspected child abuse, and on ‘monitoring’ parents, rather than advertising and promoting services to which people are entitled. Thus although the Act seems to provide a new framework for policy and practice on child care, government restrictions on expenditure mean that only the most desperate or most ‘dangerous’ families are likely to receive services (remember Figure 13 above).

These concerns have been restated in a recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on Family and Parenthood which argues.

While evaluations of [the Act’s] implementation show that local authorities often provide a wide range of ‘preventative’ services, it is clear that they are not being offered to an appropriately wide range of families. Researchers have identified a ‘hierarchy of access’ in which the families of children on child protection registers are given high priority and the children of, for example, homeless or unemployed parents receive very little. The result is that instead of spreading their preventative umbrella, authorities appear to be targeting services towards their traditional responsibility of protecting children at risk of harm and neglect (Utting [1995], p. 86).

There has been a general welcome for the greater attention being given to the child’s own wishes and feelings when decisions are taken. But for young children in particular, there are difficult judgements to make about what does constitute the child’s ‘best interest’. The role of guardians ad litem in representing children in court proceedings has been strengthened, but these workers are employed by the local authorities and there is concern about how independent they will be in practice. Questions have also been raised about how representative they will be, particularly in terms of ethnic origin, of the children whom they represent.

Similar questions have been raised about the possibilities of working in partnership, given the power that social workers still have. The pressure group ‘Parents Against Injustice’, representing parents who say they have been wrongly accused of child abuse, claim that parents’ rights to be listened to and involved in decision-making are being overridden by social workers. There is evidence that, more generally, parents are advised that if they do not agree voluntarily, then court orders will be taken out.

The recognition in the Act of the duty to take account of ‘race’, culture, religion and linguistic background has generally been welcomed as offering an opportunity to work in positive ways with black and ethnic minority children and their families. There has
also been a positive response to the wider definitions of 'family' that are incorporated into the Act. However, in the Act issues of 'race' are being defined in terms of culture, language and religion. While it is obviously important that services should take account of these, for example offering translations of information and providing interpreters, this focus does not address arguments that the reason why a disproportionate number of black children are 'in need' is not cultural, but due to poverty and racism. Black writers have acknowledged that this clause in the Act could have major implications, but they wait to see whether a lack of appropriate service provision for black children will be challenged legally. They also argue that 'children in need' must include those subjected to racial harassment and racial abuse, since these will clearly affect children's health and development.

Women's groups have also expressed concerns about the implementation of some aspects of the Act. For example, the duty to consult all those with parental responsibility when services are offered, means that women who are separated from their husbands find that the arrangements they are making with a local authority have to be agreed with him. There is no recognition of domestic violence in the Act, and the Women's Aid Federation England have argued that children living in refuges because of domestic violence should be considered 'in need'. Yet very few local authorities provide resources for working with these children. Local authorities have a duty to offer reasonable contact to 'parents', including unmarried fathers, who do not have parental responsibility. This has resulted in further abuse of some women whose addresses have been given to their violent partners as part of a contact order from the court.

We suggest that you might make your own summary of these issues. The core question is: why are the central principles of the new Act the focus of a high degree of consensus and conflicting claims and criticisms?

**The crisis in residential care**

By the early 1990s concern about residential care for children had grown into a major crisis. There were increasing revelations about the ill-treatment and abuse of children and young people in care, followed by a series of public inquiries and government reports which resulted in little change. Two of these scandals in particular 'hit the headlines' and also resulted in further government reports on the state of residential children's homes.

**The Staffordshire case**

The Levy/Kahan report on residential care in Staffordshire highlighted the problems of abuse of young people in care through what was known as the 'pindown' regime in some residential homes (Levy and Kahan, 1991). The report returned residential homes to the front-line of public arguments about social work, temporarily displacing arguments over intervention in cases of suspected child abuse. This report connected with many of the issues raised in Unit 15. It opened up the issue of how children's rights are to be protected when they are placed within institutional systems of care. Young people in Staffordshire had been making complaints about their treatment for over six years before anyone took their case seriously.

'Pindown' also highlighted a tension felt within residential care between the commitment to care and the requirement to control. It was developed as a system for workers to identify and respond to the needs of 'troubled' young people. Yet the report made clear that it operated as a system for disciplining and containing young people who were identified as 'troublesome'.

As a result of this report, the government commissioned a very quick report to be produced by Sir William Utting of the Social Services Inspectorate on the state of children's homes. His report offered an action plan for improving residential and child
care, focusing in particular on the bad management and lack of well-qualified staff in most children’s homes. The report did not address the issue of the rights of young people in care, and the government made no commitment to providing resources for either training or better pay and conditions for residential workers.

The Leicestershire case
Before the conclusions and recommendations of the Levy/Kahan report and the Utting report could be implemented, residential child care was hit by another scandal. It was revealed that a large number of children had been both physically and sexually abused in Leicestershire children’s homes over a period of thirteen years, in particular in regimes run by Frank Beck. As with ‘pindown’, one of the most shocking aspects of the scandal was the length of time it had been going on and the failure of a range of people in authority to take seriously the complaints of children and young people. This issue raises the question about why the ‘child’s voice’ is given so little legitimacy, an issue that – as we have seen – the Children Act is attempting to address.

Following the conviction of Frank Beck in 1991, the government set up an Inquiry under Norman Warner to look in particular at the recruitment and supervision of staff in residential children’s homes. A survey of children’s homes was commissioned, leading to the finding that there were at that time (1991) at least 1300 homes caring for at least 11,000 children. It also found that the lessons of previous inquiries were ‘largely unheeded’, so that many of the homes were inadequate, and many staff were not properly trained, managed or supervised, even though they were dealing with children described as ‘the most difficult children in our society’. The report identified the low public image of children in residential care and the low self-esteem of the staff as major problems.

In line with its terms of reference, the main recommendations of this report concerned the procedures for recruitment and selection of staff, the need for more training, and crucially for a major review of both management procedures, and procedures for the independent inspection of residential homes. Warner also proposed a national code of practice laying down standards of care for different groups of children. Following this report, local authorities were given until April 1993 to implement several key recommendations. At the same time central government refused any extra funding for this, even though this deadline coincided with the implementation of another major piece of legislation, the NHS and Community Care Act. The reports described above, and other research on residential care, have suggested that these scandals are symptoms of a crisis of major proportions in residential care. A survey by the NSPCC suggests that some of the worst abuses of children occur in children’s homes; see Figure 14.
The shift in policy towards fostering of children rather than residential care, described in Unit 15, had two impacts. It led to a decline in the numbers of children in residential homes, and also to a demigration of residential care so that it is seen as a service of 'last resort'. When gaining qualifications, residential workers were likely to move into field social work, because of its higher status, better pay and shorter, more social hours. As Unit 15 suggests, policies for substitute care have been shaped by the belief that children are best cared for by families - either their own or foster-families - and we have seen that this is a commitment restated very firmly in the Children Act 1989. Much work has been done to encourage the fostering and adoption of 'difficult-to-place' children. In that context it is easy to see how those who remain will be viewed as 'unplaceable'. These factors have an enormous impact on the morale of the staff and of the children and young people themselves. It poses an unanswered question: how can a service of last resort be equipped to provide a level of care which is at least the equal of those services which are the first and second choices of care?

Another major concern has been the failure to address issues around the rights of young people in care. Groups like NAYPIC (National Association of Young People in Care) and the Children's Legal Centre have been at the forefront of such criticisms. They have argued that more effort should be put into talking to the children and young people...
concerned, and involving them in decision-making and in drawing up codes of conduct. Complaints procedures can be very complex, and many workers feel threatened by these changes, fearing a wave of false accusations. Furthermore such procedures on their own will not stop abuse, if children are still viewed as troublesome and difficult.

The Utting Report made reference to the specific needs of black and ethnic minority children, proposing that they should be considered 'on every issue affecting the care of children'. From their study of abuse in care, NAYPIC found that black children and young people repeatedly raised questions about their identity. They did not feel valued for who they were. They experienced racist abuse and were never taken seriously if they complained. Very few children's homes reflected in their staffing the multi-racial communities that they served, and most of the black workers in the homes were in subordinate jobs.

Figure 15 shows the charter of an organization set up by a group of 'child care experts', who are determined to keep the demand for action on the agenda, on the understanding that residential care still provides a vital service for many children. You may wish to reflect on this charter in the light of some of the issues raised in Unit 15. It is interesting to note in particular that only one of the points in the charter refers to the rights of the children and young people themselves.

Figure 15
The charter drawn up by
Advancement of
Residential Child Care

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Source: Community Care, 4 March 1993
Fostering: inequality and diversity

Fostering remains the preferred option for care. Statistics from the Department of Health in 1991 show that 56 percent of children in care were in foster placements and 32 percent in residential care. The Children Act 1989 emphasizes the importance of children in care maintaining contact with their own family, and this concern is supported by research which shows that children's development in foster care is enhanced by such contact, which also improves the chances of the child eventually returning home.

We want to look here at three issues that affect children's experience of fostering. The first is poverty, which has a major impact on how successful fostering can be. We have already seen that the vast majority of children who come into care were living in poverty. Once they are in care, poverty has an enormous influence on the ease of maintaining contact with the child’s family, and on the likelihood of rehabilitation. Parents simply may not be able to afford the travel costs of visiting, and they may find it impossible to change their circumstances, so that they would be able to care for their children again. Poverty will also affect the selection of foster-carers. People living in overcrowded circumstances on Income Support are unlikely to be accepted for such a role. One consequence of this is that children from socially deprived areas may be fostered a long way from home.

The second issue concerns the duty of local authorities under the Children Act to give 'due consideration' to a child's racial origin, religious, cultural and linguistic background. When encouraging people to be foster-parents, they are required to 'have regard to the different racial groups to which children in their area who are in need belong'. This raises the policy of 'same-race placements' which aims to ensure that children being fostered or adopted should be placed in a family of the same 'racial origin' as their own. Arguments for this are based on the experiences of many black children in care whose identity as a black child was denied, and who either experienced racism directly in their family placement, or who were given no help or support by their foster family in learning to deal with the racism they would encounter in their lives. The policy also puts an onus on local authorities to recruit appropriate foster-parents, thus potentially challenging the norms of family life which are described in Section 4.5 of Unit 15. At the time of writing, there is concern from many black groups about the disproportionate numbers of children, described as 'mixed race', who are looked after by local authorities and placed with white foster-parents. However, there are also concerns expressed about the 'same-race' policy, particularly if it is applied simplistically. It is argued that many children's 'racial origin' is difficult to define. It has also been suggested that in the absence of an appropriate 'same-race placement', white foster-parents who have an understanding of racism, and of the issues facing a black child in their care, will provide a better experience for a child than residential care.

The third issue concerns lesbians and gay men who wish to foster, and the needs of lesbians and gay young people in care. As described in Unit 15, lesbians and gay men are usually not considered suitable to be foster-parents, and controversy generally surrounds local authority policies which include them. Social services are not excluded from placing children with lesbian or gay foster-parents, but the central government view is that such placements should be used only as a 'last resort'. 'Last resort' in this context, it has been suggested, means allowing lesbians or gay men to foster the most 'difficult to place' children, such as those who are disabled. Arguments in favour of accepting lesbian and gay foster-carers make it clear that this is not an argument about the right to foster, but about not excluding people on the basis of characteristics that do not affect their skill as a parent. Contrary to popular myths, there is no evidence that lesbian or gay adults are more likely to abuse children or to influence them towards homosexuality. On the other hand, it is argued that under the Children Act social workers have to work in partnership with the child's parents, who, it is assumed, would be unlikely to be in favour of such an arrangement. Social workers may also face political and public pressure against 'inappropriate' foster-parents who do not fit the family 'norm'.

There is recognition that for some young people a placement with lesbian or gay foster-parents might actually meet their needs. Some of the young people who come into care are themselves lesbian or gay, and placement in a lesbian or gay household may offer them an alternative to residential care, where they have no support and are often
subjected to harassment. For some young people, difficulties with coming to terms with their sexuality may have contributed to their coming into care, and they could benefit from living with people who have an understanding of their experience. The Children Act 1989 has also put the needs of lesbian and gay young people on the agenda for the first time, in its guidance on family placements which says that, when leaving care, the needs of lesbian and gay young people should be met.

You may wish to make your own notes on these issues here. Why do policies about fostering involve arguments about the 'normal family'?

3.4 Unit 16: Child Abuse

Unit 16 focuses on the processes by which child abuse was discovered and identified as a social problem, and then it examines the consequences of those definitions for social intervention. The unit explores the public, political and professional pressures which have surrounded social work intervention with abused children. There are three areas of change which are important for the issue of child abuse.

The first concerns the awareness of sexual abuse of children as the focus of public attention. The unit is primarily about the physical abuse of children which was indeed the major focus of attention in the first part of the 1980s. Although some groups (particularly women's groups such as Rape Crisis and Women's Aid) were concerned with and trying to raise the issue of sexual abuse of children and young people, it did not become a publicly recognized issue, nor a matter of particular concern for social workers, until the later 1980s. Following the discovery of sexual abuse, a second change has been the 'uncovering' of further 'hidden' abuse, in particular the abuse of children in residential care, abuse of children by their 'peers', and the vulnerability of certain groups of children, such as those with disabilities. The third change concerns the introduction of the Children Act 1989 and its implications for social workers involved in child protection. We shall be discussing these issues after you have read Unit 16.

You should now read Unit 16, and then return to this Guide.

Child sexual abuse

At first, the concern about sexual abuse centred around the vulnerability of children to abuse from strangers, but it rapidly became clear, as women's groups had long argued, that children were at risk of sexual abuse within the boundaries of the family. The discovery of widespread sexual abuse of young people has, if anything, brought social work (as the main form of intervention) even further into the public eye. Sexual abuse, even more than physical abuse, challenges our beliefs about family life and the promise of security to children within it. In particular, sexual abuse involves the abuse of power within families and threatens our assumption that the exercise of such power (structured along the lines of age and gender) will be constrained by duties of care, trust and responsibility.

Think back to Unit 2 for a moment. Can you see any connections between its discussion of the status of childhood and the arguments about children's rights which it presents and the issue of sexual abuse?
The recognition by social workers and paediatricians of widespread sexual abuse of children has led to a very contradictory set of public and political controversies. We might perhaps have expected a major outcry about those who take advantage of their adult power to sexually abuse children, or discussions about what leads such adults to become sexual abusers and arguments about how to prevent such abuse. Instead, the public debate has focused on social workers and their interventions in cases of suspected sexual abuse. In Cleveland, where social workers and and paediatricians identified substantial numbers of children as victims of suspected sexual abuse, the resulting controversy concerned the nature of the evidence on which abuse was identified. Even though no case rested solely on its findings, the social workers and paediatricians involved were attacked for relying on what was known as the 'anal clamping test' (Campbell, 1988). Many paediatricians saw the test as a valuable indicator of whether children had been anally abused. Others, including the Police Surgeon in Cleveland itself, were unwilling to treat the results of such tests as reliable evidence of abuse. Social workers were also attacked for taking children into care without due regard for parental rights. In Rochdale, the arguments around social workers' actions centered on the methods of interviewing young people to discover whether they had been abused, with critics claiming that the young people were put under excessive pressures to admit to being abused. Again, arguments were leveled at social workers that they had acted unreasonably in taking children away from their parents. In another, subsequent case, children taken into care by social workers in the Orkneys were returned to their families after claims that the social workers' evidence for sexual abuse (including involvement in 'Satanic rituals') were insufficient, and that they had failed to proceed within statutory and advisory guidelines for intervention.

What is striking is that in all these cases the public discussion has centered on those intervening and the consequences of intervention rather than on the suspected abuse. In the process, social workers (and some doctors) have found themselves accused of excessive zeal in removing children from suspected abuse. Indeed, in a paradoxical inversion of the language of child abuse, it is social work intervention which has been identified as the 'abuse' from which children are suffering.

Stop for a moment and think about the unit you have just studied. The concern in the cases of physical abuse discussed in Unit 16 involved criticisms of social workers for failing to intervene where children were being harmed. In sexual abuse, social workers have been attacked for the opposite reason – excessive intervention. What might account for the difference?

There are a number of possibilities. First, it might simply be that social workers were wrong in different ways – they made different sorts of mistakes in the different cases. Secondly, it may be that problems of proof are different in the areas of physical and sexual abuse. As investigations of rape have shown, physical evidence may be ambiguous, and the unsupported word of the complainant may not be seen as adequate proof. This is more significant where the victim is a child, especially one who is subject to conflicting pressures between disclosures of abuse and guilt about the consequences of such disclosure for the family. Thirdly, it may reflect declining public and political confidence in social work as a form of intervention. Thus, social workers may expect to face criticism no matter what course of action they take, given public scepticism about their lack of effectiveness. This is likely to be particularly significant in a field where social workers are making judgements on the balance between children's rights and parental rights. Fourthly, it may be that sexual abuse challenges so many of our assumptions about the family that public denial is necessary to sustain those beliefs. To put it crudely, unless it is obvious that abusers are evidently 'abnormal' (beasts, psychopaths, monsters etc.), it may be difficult to square accusations of abuse with expectations about normal family life.
Thus last point would certainly go some way towards explaining the intensity of the public condemnation of social workers and others who have intervened. Their actions are being judged not merely in relation to specific cases, but in terms of their implications for our ability to trust normal families, parents – and fathers, in particular – to behave according to expectations. Whichever of these reasons may explain the condemnation, it is clear that social workers working in the field of child protection face a highly contradictory set of professional, legal, political and social expectations concerning intervention into cases of suspected abuse.

We have included in the second edition of the Course Reader an article by Mary MacLeod and Esther Saraga concerning the sexual abuse of children. Like Unit 16, it concerns the assumptions which shape intervention into sexual abuse. It explores dominant theories and approaches, and it presents a critique of them, both as ways of understanding sexual abuse and as guides to intervention. It echoes some of the issues which you encountered in Unit 16. What is different is the focus on sexual abuse and its implications about age, gender and power within the family.

You should now read the article by MacLeod and Saraga, 'Child sexual abuse: challenging the orthodoxy'. Chapter 7 in the Course Reader. While you are reading it, it would be worthwhile making notes in response to the following questions:

1. What are the dominant views of child sexual abuse?
2. What criticisms do MacLeod and Saraga make of them?
3. What sort of alternative are they presenting?

MacLeod and Saraga identify three dominant views of child abuse: libertarian, psychoanalytic and family dysfunction approaches. They observe that the first two play down or ignore the nature of power in child–adult relationships and the links between power and gender. In relation to family dysfunction approaches – which they suggest dominate official and professional thinking on child abuse – they present more extensive criticisms.

The family dysfunction view assumes that families are stable systems unless something occurs to block the fulfilment of family members’ needs within the family system. MacLeod and Saraga point to the way in which family dysfunction approaches identify the mother’s behaviour as the active cause of family dysfunction. They also point to the idea that it is women’s responsibility to control male sexuality. In both these ways, family dysfunction approaches displace attention from male sexual abuse and its links with masculinity and power, and instead focus on mothers either as the cause of dysfunction or as ‘colluding’ with abusers.

For MacLeod and Saraga, intervention into child abuse has to begin from two clear understandings. First, that it is an abuse of power relationships, predominantly perpetuated by men. Secondly, that children cannot consent to being abused in any meaningful sense of the word. They argue that work with the abused, abusers and other family members must start from such clear commitments in order to support properly those who have been abused and to challenge abusers about the nature of their abuse.

Their article underlines how difficult and complex work in child sexual abuse is, but they are insistent that the dominant views of sexual abuse add to, rather than reduce, these difficulties by making the relationship between masculinity, power and abuse disappear from the way in which the problem is defined.

**Other forms of 'hidden' abuse**

The greater public recognition of child sexual abuse was followed by an uncovering of many other forms of abuse that had remained 'hidden' from public attention. The section in this Guide for Unit 15 (Section 3.3) described the way in which particular scandals
had highlighted the extent of abuse in residential establishments for children. A special telephone helpline set up by Childline revealed that abuse was also widespread in a different kind of institution – boarding-schools. Similarly, a ‘bullying’ helpline revealed the extent of bullying that children receive at the hands of other children, in both boarding and day schools, leading tragically, in extreme cases that hit the headlines, to children committing suicide.

Unit 16 and the Reader chapter consider different explanations for abuse in the family. It will be useful for you to reflect on how relevant the different perspectives discussed there are to understanding abuse in these institutional settings. To what extent should abuse in institutions be understood in terms of cruel or perverted individuals among staff, or in terms of the social context of the institution in which they work?

If we consider the perspectives that Parton discusses in Unit 16, then abuse in children’s homes would be understood according to the disease model in terms of the individual pathology of the staff, though it is difficult to apply the check-lists of ‘high-risk’ families to this context. Alternatively, if the social context of abuse is considered, then the application of cruel punishments to children – as in the ‘pindown’ regime – would be understood, perhaps, as an authoritarian response to the conditions in which staff were working: low pay, long hours and being expected to contain the ‘unplaceable’ children.

Considering the sexual abuse of children in residential care, then, it is difficult to see how the family dysfunction model would be applied. Indeed feminists have used the evidence of widespread abuse in non-family settings, predominantly committed by men, as support for their perspective. Alternatively, it has been suggested, in line with a model of individual pathology, that abusers seek work with children in settings such as residential care in which the children are particularly vulnerable, and unlikely to have their accusations believed. (This has contributed to the calls in the Warner report for much tighter selection and vetting procedures for such employees.)

Another area that has attracted concern, as well as controversy, has been the issue of abuse by women. You will have seen from the Reader article that all the research shows that the vast majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by men. Abuse by women has been presented both in the media and in professional journals as the ‘last taboo’, as something which we find so difficult to accept that survivors of such abuse are even less likely to be listened to and believed than those abused by men. Many people do find it hard to believe that women can sexually abuse children, since such actions seem to go against our understanding of the nature of women’s sexuality. On the other hand, it has been argued that such abuse, particularly by a mother, is even more serious and damming than abuse by a man, because it is an even greater betrayal of trust.

Despite the publicity on this issue, no-one has challenged the overall finding that the vast majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by men. A large retrospective study interviewing women in colleges of further education in the UK (Kelly et al., 1991) found that 5 per cent of adult perpetrators were female. It is also important to recognize that this current controversy concerns sexual abuse. Unit 16 does not discuss the issue of the gender of the abuser, but research on physical abuse and neglect shows that women and men are both perpetrators, and it is also the case that women may emotionally abuse their children. So, the debate is not about whether women are capable of being abusive or not, but about the differential involvement by men and women in different forms of abuse. In terms of understanding sexual abuse, this gender difference is so great that it needs to be accounted for, and has to be a central focus of any explanation.

Even this issue may not be the ‘last taboo’, since the growing awareness of child abuse has led to an outpouring of research in this area. As a result, there are likely to be more ‘discoveries’ of hidden abuse. Recent work has identified the particular vulnerability to abuse of children with disabilities. NSPCC research involving disabled adults has revealed how widespread physical and sexual abuse is in their lives. The research suggested that social workers find it particularly difficult to believe that disabled children are abused, and that a range of factors contribute to such abuse remaining hidden. These include difficulties in communicating, being institutionalized, having multiple carers, frequent spells in hospital, and being very isolated. In many cases their abuser may be their main or only carer.
Child abuse and child protection: the Children Act 1989

The Cleveland Inquiry (referred to earlier) had considerable influence on the way the Children Act developed in its passage through Parliament, both in the way that child protection was a recurrent concern, and in the particular provisions on child protection built into the Act. The events in Cleveland had raised concern about the discretionary powers of social workers which were seen to be exercised in a coercive way, undermining the rights of parents.

As we have seen in relation to Unit 15, the Act provides a new framework for the care and protection of children. (You may find it useful to look back at the aims and principles of the Children Act set out in Figure 11.) It has introduced significant changes in the legal ways children at risk of abuse are protected by local authorities and the courts. The ‘Place of Safety Order’ (emergency action taken to remove children at risk, described in Section 5 of Unit 16) had become discredited, particularly as a result of the Cleveland Crisis. It has been replaced by an ‘Emergency Protection Order’ which can be challenged by both children and their parents, and which gives the courts much greater control over the way in which the order is carried out. Moreover the court, in making an order, must be satisfied that this will be better for the child than making no order at all. This new emergency order also involves social workers in a new and difficult judgement. In the past, for a Place of Safety Order, they had to assess whether a child was at risk of abuse in the past or present. The new order adds in the requirement to predict whether the child is likely to be at risk in the future. The Act distinguishes between emergency orders of this kind which permit investigation or assessment of suspected harm or abuse, and which are strictly time-limited, from orders discussed in relation to Unit 15, which transfer ‘parental responsibility’ to local authorities or other bodies.

Many practitioners are concerned that the combination of the philosophy of the Children Act with scarce resources is putting pressure on families to stay together, or to be rehabilitated following the removal of a child. They fear that the idea of ‘partnership’ is being interpreted to mean that all families can cope. Feminists, in particular, have criticized the Children Act for referring throughout to ‘parents’, failing to recognize the different relationship that mothers and fathers have to children. However, from a feminist perspective, a positive implication of the pressures to keep children in their families is the recognition by social workers of the need to work more with children’s non-abusing mothers in order to try to enable children to stay at home. On the other hand, even though the Children Act makes it possible for local authorities to assist suspected abusers to move out of the family home by helping them to find accommodation – and even, if necessary, providing financial assistance – they have not found a way under the Act to protect children in their own home by enforcing the exclusion of the abuser. (You may wish to relate these issues to the discussion on ‘protection work’ in the Reader article, pp. 126–8.)

Government guidelines on child protection recognize the difficulties for social workers assessing ‘risk’ to children. They are expected to act quickly and decisively in order to minimize harm, but they are also expected to consider the potential long-term damage that may be caused by precipitate action. More generally the task of social work in the field of child abuse (whether physical or sexual) will continue to be framed by conflicting social expectations. In line with the principles of the Children Act, they are expected to promote the welfare of children by protecting them from the risk of harm, and at the same time as far as possible promote the upbringing of children by their family, which is expected to provide a safe and secure environment essential to the child’s development. In such circumstances, intervention is always vulnerable to criticism for being too much, too soon – or too little, too late.

3.5 Unit 17: Images of Domesticity: The Work of Family Centres

Unit 17 discusses the work of family centres, examining the ideas that inform their practice and the range of types of work that family centres do. They are a relatively new form of social provision. Yet they have become a very significant form of provision, being included in the Children Act 1989 as one of the preventative services for ‘children in need’ that local authorities are required to provide. Under the Act, local authorities also have to publish information about both the services they provide, and about those
available from other sources such as voluntary organizations (who run about half the family centres in the country). So, at the time of writing, interest in family centres is high.

The unit examines the ideas which inform the work of the family centres, and the range of types of work which family centres do. When you are reading the unit (and watching the associated television programme), you should be looking out for the following:

1. What ideas lie behind the work of family centres?
2. What views of the family are involved in the work of family centres?
3. Why are there diverse types of family centre?

You should now read Unit 17 and watch the associated television programme. Then return to this Guide.

Unit 17 discusses different models of family centres, although they all have common aims of strengthening the family and preventing children from coming into care. The philosophy of family centres fits the view of the Children Act that children are best cared for within families, and that local authority services should help to support families in this task, and try to prevent children coming into care.

Towards the end of the 1980s a small amount of research on family centres began to appear. A national survey found that there were 485 family centres run by a wide range of organizations – large and small voluntary ones, small self-help community groups, local authority social services or education departments, health authorities and various partnerships of these. This survey also showed an enormous variation in the approach of these family centres, but at the same time there was a general trend for their work to be dominated by intensive work with the clients around child protection (the therapeutic/social work model described in Unit 17).

Research has also demonstrated that many staff in family centres have had to change their role quite considerably. Having been trained for such jobs as nursery workers, they are now carrying out a range of tasks, often connected with child protection, which would previously have been the responsibility of field social workers. Staff described tensions created by the assumption that they could work with parents and children together, and meet the needs of both groups. In practice many staff focused on the children, reflecting their initial training, although others preferred to work with parents, work which is often seen as having higher status. In either case, finding the right balance between parents and children was difficult.

Unit 17 also describes the way in which family centres reinforce particular views of the family and of women’s roles. This has particular implications for black families who may have already received insensitive or racist treatment from social services or other welfare agencies. The research on family centres suggests that staff paid little attention to issues of ‘race’ and cultural difference, and that they lacked confidence to do so. More broadly, the focus of most family centres on intensive work and on promoting ‘good parenting’ means that the maternal context of the lives of families is ignored. It seems as though the most that family centres can do in relation to poverty is to offer very short-term help, for example by providing meals, organizing jumble sales and arranging a few outings at a low cost.

The tendency to focus on families in which abuse has already occurred confirms the fear that, in a time of restricted resources, ‘children in need’ would be defined very narrowly. The priority of local authorities is to divert children from care rather than improve the quality of general supportive day or residential services for children, and the development of family centres has coincided with a loss of day care places, particularly for working mothers. By concentrating their resources on a few ‘targeted’ clients, family centres are likely to lose their potential for providing genuine support to families in the community.

Cannan (1993) suggests that debates on child care and equal opportunities for women have shifted so far that the provision of universal child care services is no longer a credible
objective, and that the more community-based models of family centres are under threat in the UK. She believes that the challenge to family centres in the 1990s will be to see how creative they can be in a social context of minimal social provision.

**There is no unit 18.**

### 3.6 Unit 19: Issues in Disability: Integrated Living

From the social security reforms of the late 1980s to the implementation of the community care legislation in the early 1990s, issues of disability have been at the centre of controversy in the field of welfare. With its focus on one pioneering project initiated by disabled people in the early 1980s, the Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living, Unit 19 brings the perspective of service users, rather than that of providers, to the forefront. In doing so, it tackles key issues such as the appropriate form of benefits and services for disabled people and the rights of disabled people themselves to define the terms on which their welfare requirements should be met. Unit 19 anticipates some of the debates which have centred around issues of disability during recent social security and community care reforms.

*Now read Unit 19 and then return to this Guide.*

It is worth highlighting how shifts in government policy and the growing challenge of the disability movement have influenced the public discussion of disability since Unit 19 was written. In the course of the wider review of social security launched in the mid-1980s, the government undertook a series of surveys of the extent of disability in Britain. These revealed that there were 6.2 million disabled adults – 14 per cent of the population – more than one-third of whom were living below the official poverty-line. Some three per cent of children (360,000) were also disabled (OPCS, 1988/89).

In 1990 the government produced a White Paper on disability benefits, entitled *The Way Ahead* (DSS, 1990). The White Paper’s proposals for the merger of the attendance and mobility allowances into a new disability living allowance, the creation of a new disability working allowance to boost the income of disabled people in low-paid work and a number of other benefit changes were implemented in April 1992.

These measures were criticized by disability activists for failing to close the ‘income gap’ between disabled and non-disabled people and for failing to provide a simpler and more coherent system of benefits (Disability Alliance, 1991). Furthermore, disabled people have been adversely affected by the wider trend to reduce entitlements and levels of both contributory and means-tested benefits. One survey of the changes in social security benefits affecting disabled people concluded that “the rhetoric of ‘protecting’ the vulnerable and ‘targeting’ help to those ‘most in need’ has in fact offered precious little protection against the impact of wider trends in social security policy” (Glendinning, 1992, p. 97). Focusing on the core principles of the social security reforms, she argues that:

> The social security changes of the 1980s appear not to have targeted benefits more accurately on those with either the severest disabilities or the highest costs, nor introduced a substantial degree of simplification, nor increased the coherence of benefits for disabled people, and only become marginally more comprehensive, through the piecemeal extensions of the attendance and disability living allowances (Glendinning, 1992, p. 97, emphasis in original).

The NHS and Community Care Act 1990, which was finally implemented in April 1993, inaugurated a significant shift in the responsibility for the welfare of disabled people from the health and social security authorities to local authority social services. Furthermore, this shift took place at a time when local councils were being pressed to move away from their traditional role as ‘providers’ of services to play an ‘enabling’ role in developing private, voluntary and informal sources of care in the community.
Although the changes in community care are discussed at greater length in Block 4, it is worth examining some of the implications for people with disabilities at this point.

Although community care aims to offer a more coherent service for disabled people, it does not include any mechanism for the involvement of disabled people in drawing up and implementing community care plans. Activists have complained that the role of the social services department in assessing need is simply another obstacle to be overcome in the struggle for the resources necessary for an independent life. Similarly the role of social workers as ‘care managers’ is resented as yet another layer of bureaucratic professional control over disabled people (Oliver, 1991). In the past, the rights of disabled people to particular benefits or services were clearly defined and could be asserted through appeals procedures. Under the new arrangements there are no formal or independent means of questioning assessments – or the service and resource allocations which follow from them.

From the perspective of organizations of disabled people, the key feature of the community care programme is the shift in the balance of power from disabled people to welfare professionals. Care managers assess the ‘needs’ of, and purchase ‘packages of care’ for, service users. This change has been promoted as providing greater user ‘choice’ and making services more responsive to individual needs. For disability activists, this is not the same as people with disabilities being given the resources to put together their own ‘packages of care’. The expansion of care managers’ discretionary powers appears to have taken place at the expense of the rights of disabled people. It is therefore not surprising to find that these issues have been at the centre of the challenge from the disabled people’s movements in recent years.

Strongly influenced by the North American experience, the disabled people’s movement in Britain has increasingly challenged the organization of welfare services by professionals on terms that create or increase dependency in favour of a conception of welfare based on rights and active citizenship. In June 1991 some thirteen organizations ‘of and for’ disabled people collaborated in the launch of the Disability Manifesto. This document promotes demands for anti-discriminatory legislation in employment and seeks to impose statutory responsibilities on local authorities and other public agencies to make services and amenities available and accessible to disabled people as a right. The Disability Alliance has attempted to coordinate campaigning activity around issues of disability, the European Network on Independent Living has sought to do the same throughout the European Union.

We demand social welfare systems which include personal assistance services that are consumer controlled, and which allow various models of independent living for disabled people, regardless of their disability and income. We demand social welfare legislation which recognizes these services as basic civil rights. (Statement of European Network on Independent Living, quoted in Oliver and Zarb, 1993, p. 32)

Such developments have raised the political visibility of disabled people in recent years. In 1994 considerable controversy surrounded government efforts to stop the progress of a private member’s bill which aimed to introduce a legal framework for preventing discrimination against disabled people. In 1995 the government introduced its own draft bill, seen by critics as considerably less comprehensive in its scope and scale. At the same time, a further private member’s bill was also launched in Parliament which aimed at more comprehensive definitions of disability and of the rights of disabled people. At the time of writing (April 1995) the public and political arguments are continuing and we do not know what the legislative outcomes will be. However, it is clear that the disabled people’s movements have moved the issue of disability onto the agenda of public debate and political controversy.

**The Independent Living Fund**

The controversy over the Independent Living Fund provides a revealing illustration of the clash of principle between the government and the disabled people’s movement. The ILF was set up by the government in 1988 in response to pressure from disability organizations about the impact of social security changes on disabled people. It was established with a small budget of £5 million over a five-year period with the aim of providing a minimal monthly benefit to a small number of disabled people who required...
extra funds for personal assistance. The government expected around 350 applicants. By the time the scheme closed to applicants in November 1992, it was paying benefits to 22,000 people out of an annual budget of £797 million.

The ILF proved popular with disabled people because it provided exactly what many wanted: direct payments instead of receiving services organized and controlled by professionals, disabled people now received the cash with which they could purchase the assistance and the services they wanted. The disability movement played an important role in spreading awareness of the ILF and in ensuring the dramatic take-up of its grants. A number of independent living initiatives and personal assistance schemes took off with the impetus provided by the ILF to individual disabled people to design their own care packages (Oliver and Zarb, 1992; Morris, 1993).

The success of the ILF posed a number of problems for the authorities. First, it led to the expansion of social security spending at a time when the government's overriding concern was to curb it. Second, it marked a breach in the post-war tradition, codified in law, that local authorities should provide services rather than pay benefits. Third, it meant handing over control over personal welfare services for the disabled from social workers to disabled people themselves.

The community care reforms were introduced with a strong emphasis on the themes of empowerment, consumer sovereignty and needs-led services in the promotion of the community care reforms. By contrast, there was little official backing for the potential for independence and autonomy for disabled people offered by the ILF. In the face of intense campaigning by disabled organizations, the ILF was abolished with the implementation of the community care programme in April 1993. This is how Jenny Morris summed up the ILF controversy.

The Independent Living Fund showed that it was possible to operate a system where standard eligibility criteria triggered the right to a benefit but the level of payment was varied according to individual circumstance. The increase in demand on its budget, however, illustrated the most important barrier to incorporating such a system into the community care reforms - namely the cost implications of what Sir Roy Griffiths called a 'finite community care programme'.

There is no room for such a fund as the ILF, or for direct payments from social services departments, in the way that the community care reforms are being implemented. By closing down the Fund and insisting that potential applicants will instead have their personal assistance needs met by local authority services the government has reaffirmed the dominance of professional choice over the ability of disabled people to choose how their needs should be met (Morris, 1993, p. 41).

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The Independent Living Fund controversy relates to the conflict between the Derbyshire Centre for Integrated Living and the local county council. Both highlight the tension between users and providers over the control of welfare services.

Before moving on, you might think about the two questions below:

1. Which of the following is the best guarantee of the welfare of disabled people?
   - Give reasons for your choice
     - direct payments, enabling personal choice
     - anti-discriminatory legislation
     - enlightened politicians and professionals
     - political organization and mobilization.

2. "The ideology of caring which is at the heart of current community care policies can only result in institutionalization in the community unless politicians and professionals understand and identify with the philosophy and aims of the independent living movement" (Morris, 1993, p. 45).

Why has a reform that has widespread political and professional support failed to win the support of disabled people's movements?
3.7 Unit 20: Social Work in the Context of Decline

Unit 20 has two main functions. The first is to examine the impact on social work of the deepening recession in the British economy. In our comments on Unit 14 in Section 3.2 of this Guide we noted the pressures on social services departments resulting from rising unemployment and poverty at the same time as constraints on public expenditure were squeezing resources available for social work. Unit 20 focuses on these problems in the 1980s, when local authority social services were relatively protected from the full force of the austerity measures affecting other sectors of the welfare state. In the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the personal social services experienced the combined impact of the government's public spending restrictions and the rate-capping of local authorities together with the legislative reforms of the core areas of social work.

The second function of Unit 20 is to introduce the debate about the future of social work that gathered momentum through the 1980s. If, as Unit 20 points out, the early 1970s was the 'golden age' of social work, by the end of the 1980s there were some who doubted whether social work had any future at all. In the course of reading Unit 20, you will be referred to three chapters in the Course Reader which offer contrasting perspectives on trends in social work and views on the likely course of future developments. When reading the unit and these articles, you should bear in mind that these were written in the mid-1980s before the changes associated with the Children Act 1989 and the NHS and Community Care Act 1990.

Now read Unit 20 and its associated Reader chapters. Your work on this unit also involves the TV programme 'Social Work in the Inner City' and Audio-cassette 5, Side A. Then return to this Guide.

The intensification of both the 'context of decline' and the 'crisis of social work' over the past five years makes many of the issues raised in Unit 20 even more relevant today. Let's look at some of the recent developments more closely.

The impact of recession

In short, social security cutbacks, a housing shortage not readily corrected in the near future, and a transformed employment market of which the same must be said, come together to present millions of families with desperate difficulties.

The system that the economic environment creates for low income people is vicious and not subtle. It not only creates poor people, it pauperizes them, seeking out and stripping them of their last resources, forcing youths out of home who might otherwise have helped, bringing together reluctant family members into one crowded dwelling. Whatever other problems this may create for society, it will create clients and claimants in large numbers for the social services. These departments will be rained on (Schorr, 1992, p. 18).

Alvin Schorr, an American advisor to the committee that produced the 1988 Seebohm Report, returned to Britain in 1991 to conduct a study of social services. The above statement summarizes his assessment of the impact of Britain's economic decline on the demand for social work.

The scale of the problems of poverty can be briefly summarized. Using a definition of poverty as an income less than half the average (after deducting housing costs), the Child Poverty Action Group estimated that in 1985/86 there were between 11 and 12 million people living in poverty in Britain; one in five of the population (Oppenheim, 1993). This figure had more than doubled in a decade. By the same criteria the number of children living in poverty had increased from 1.5 million in 1979 to 2.7 million ten years later. Over the same period the real income of the poorest tenth of the population had fallen by 6 per cent, while average income had increased by 3 per cent and the income of the top ten per cent went up by 46 per cent.
Unemployment trebled between 1979 and 1992. At the close of 1992 the official total stood at 2.9 million people. At that point, using calculations which addressed the effects of government changes in the way unemployment is recorded, the Unemployment Unit calculated that the real out-of-work total was 4.1 million people. Early in 1993 the official total passed three million and the number of long-term unemployed (out of work for 12 months or more) approached one million people.

Changing patterns of employment have also contributed to the growth of poverty and insecurity. While regular, secure and well-paid jobs in manufacturing – and more recently, services too – have disappeared, there has been some expansion in part-time, temporary and casual work. As a result, more people are working in poor conditions for low pay with few rights or safeguards. In 1991 more than 10 million adult workers in Britain earned less than the Council of Europe’s ‘decenty threshold’ (*The Guardian*, 14 January 1992).

Social security, which provides more than two-thirds of the income of the poorest fifth of the population, has been subjected to numerous changes which have adversely affected the poor. Peter Townsend calculated that if the 1979 regulations still applied in 1989, an extra £7–8 billion would have been spent on benefits (quoted in Schorr, 1992, p. 13). Looking at the same problem in another way, John Hills estimated that, if 1979 benefit levels had been maintained, in 1988 the incomes of those receiving benefits would have been 164 per cent higher (Hills, 1988, p. 13).

According to the Child Poverty Action Group, the social security system ‘discriminates against those who have been low paid, or unemployed, against those who have worked part-time and people who have come to this country from abroad’ (Oppenheim, 1993, p. 3). Furthermore, the major reforms introduced in 1988, ‘swallowed up rights and reduced benefits for some of the poorest in the country, weakening social security protection still further’.

‘Official’ homelessness – those accepted as homeless by local authorities – has nearly trebled in Britain since 1978. In 1991 the total was 420,000 adults and children (Burrows and Walencowicz, 1992). Shelter estimates that the unofficial total could be up to 1.7 million (including 80,000 sleeping rough, 50,000 unauthorized tenants or squatters, 77,000 single people in lodgings, 317,000 insecure private tenants, and 1.2 million people sharing with relatives, sleeping on friends’ floors etc.). The key factors in creating this situation are the sharp reduction in council house building, a switch of funds away from new building and the ‘right to buy’ policy for council tenants, all of which have reduced the role of public housing (Greve, 1991, p. 3).

As Schorr emphasized, the problem is not only that the poor have become poorer and more numerous, but that they are being increasingly ‘pauperized’. In the earlier stages of the recession, public opinion generally regarded the unemployed fairly sympathetically as the victims of deindustrialization or the economic cycle. By the late 1980s the climate had changed and the unemployed and the poor were increasingly blamed for their own predicament. Ideas of ‘welfare-scroungers’, ‘welfare dependency’ and a demoralized and anti-social ‘underclass’ became widespread in discussions of poverty. These relate to distinctions between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’ that you encountered in Unit 13.

The impact of these new trends is inevitably greatest on those who are already marginalized and vulnerable – women, minority ethnic groups, disabled people. The net result, as Unit 20 emphasizes, is to impose intolerable strains on individuals and families who may well turn to their local authority social services department for help. Let us, then, turn to see what sort of response they are likely to get.

**Farewell to Sebohm**

Too much has been laid on the personal social services, and they were already overburdened (Schorr, 1992, p. 3).

The future over the final implementation of the long-delayed community care legislation in April 1993 highlighted the contradictory pressures on social services. The wider issues raised by the community care reforms are now dealt with in Block 4. Our concern here is simply with the consequences for social work.
One main impetus for the community care reforms came from the government's concern to curb the rapidly expanding social security spending on private residential care for older people and others. The new legislation transferred these responsibilities to local authorities, which were expected to arrange such care on a lower budget and to increase the proportion of people in need being cared for in the community.

In her survey for the Public Policy Forum, Tessa Harding noted that, in 1990–91, 32 councils reduced their social services budgets, others experienced a standstill or reduced growth. In 1991–92 half of all councils announced reduced or standstill budgets (Harding, 1992, p. ii). A survey of spending plans for 1993 conducted by the Association of Directors of Social Services revealed that 87 per cent planned cuts in personal social services budgets (The Guardian, 11 January 1993). Harding's stark conclusion was that 'government policies to improve services and government policies to control local authority spending are in direct conflict' (1992, p. iii).

Not only were the personal social services being caught in a remorseless squeeze between rising demand and shrinking resources, but the whole framework of state social work inaugurated by Seaborn was being dismantled. The scope of the transformation of social work was partly disguised by the survival of the local authority social services department through all the recent changes. However, continuity of form concealed fundamental changes in the structure and practice of social work.

The aim of the changes is to develop a more a 'mixed economy' of welfare in which private, voluntary and informal care are to be enhanced alongside shrinking public sector provision. In this new mixed economy, the local authority social services department is no longer expected to be a major provider of services. Old peoples homes, nurseries and day centres are being hived off to the private sector or to voluntary organizations. Home-help and meals-on-wheels services are being privatized in some places. The social services department is now a centre of managerial initiative, planning and ultimate financial control. While it may continue to provide services, its main responsibility is shifting towards 'enabling' others to provide services through both contracting and partnerships with other public agencies (health), private-sector providers, the voluntary sector and informal carers.

Social workers are increasingly more concerned with 'case' or 'care management' than with performing the traditional professional role. 'Care managers' are required to assess needs, evaluate them against local eligibility criteria, and put together appropriate 'packages of care', where necessary purchasing services from provider agencies. The generic social worker envisaged by Seaborn as the key provider of a universalist and comprehensive service has been largely replaced by specialists in child protection on the one hand or care management on the other. In relation to children, shortage of resources means low priority for the features of the Children Act stressing prevention and family support. They have taken second place to the focus on child protection and the surveillance of families on the 'at risk' register. In community care, care management is likely to mean working with health authorities, GPs and voluntary groups to encourage families (or, to be more accurate, women) to take on an even greater role in caring for their old or disabled relatives at home.

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The following article by Novak and Sennet reports recent research on social work. It is based on interviews with social workers about the experiences and perceptions of changes in the organization and practice of social work in the 1990s. When reading the article you should try to make notes on the following questions:

1. Why are budgets so central to the contemporary experience of social work?
2. What are seen as the main effects of new legislation?
3. What do those interviewed see as the future of social work?
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**Distant voices**

So rapid has been the pace of change in personal social services, that the articles by Joan Cooper, Ann Davis and Patrick Minford, although written in 1986, now read like commentaries from a different age. In retrospect, all three seem to have been dramatically overtaken by events. Yet they retain a great value in indicating the diversity of views about the place of social work and give some flavour of the intensity of the conflict that has raged over the purpose and direction of social services. Each article can be read as a statement of the perspective of an influential body of opinion in social work in each of the past three decades.

Joan Cooper articulates the view of the dominant Fabian social policy consensus that inspired the Seabohm Report and the launch of the local authority social services departments. The fact that this chapter was written in the mid-1980s reflects the resilience of this tradition in the face of economic and political challenges. Would anyone now claim that 'social equity' and 'the provision of appropriate services to all citizens' are the goals of social work?

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**Now look back at Chapter 4 in the Reader, 'The future of social work: a pragmatic view' by Joan Cooper and answer the following questions.**

1. **Cooper insists that 'social work is a moral activity' What does she mean by this?**
2. **What was the context of Cooper's refusal to accept that social work was in crisis? Do more recent changes constitute a crisis in social work?**

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By contrast, Ann Davis speaks for the radical social work movement of the 1970s. Given the prominent role of left-wing Labour authorities in local government in the 1980s, the radical movement also retained considerable influence long after its flowering as an offshoot of the radical counterculture that flourished between 1968 and 1974. However, the demise of socialism as a source of inspiration and as an organizing force, as a result of both international and domestic factors in the late 1980s, has significantly weakened the influence of radicalism in social work.

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**Now look back at Chapter 6 in the Reader, 'Hazardous lives — social work in the 1980s: a view from the Left' by Ann Davis and answer the following questions.**

1. **Davis argues that a 'fundamental change in the social order is required' to eradicate the disadvantage experienced by social work clients. What does she mean by this? How could it be achieved?**
2. **Davis challenges the right's individualistic approach with calls for some collective mechanism for ensuring user participation and control. How is this different from the changes that have taken place?**

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Patrick Minford expresses the commitment to the market and to privatization that was the spirit of the Thatcher decade. Yet, just as economic liberalism of the New Right has not really provided the solution to the problems of British capitalism, so Minford's proposals for welfare vouchers and a negative income tax have not been seen as practicable in the sphere of social services. It is true, however, that Minford's aspirations for the welfare state to be reduced to a 'safety-net' and for the market to play a greater role have been fulfilled to a greater extent than any of the prescriptions of Cooper or Davis.
Now look back at Chapter 5 in the Reader, 'The role of the social services: a view from the New Right' by Patrick Minford and then answer the following questions:

1. Does the position articulated by Minford provide a coherent welfare policy?
2. How do his proposals fit with the changes in the role of social work?

Considering these three articles, what is striking is the breakdown of the old settlements and procedures in social work and the construction — by no means uncontested — of new directions for social work and social service provision. This, in turn, is part of a wider predicament for social services and welfare that reflects the breakdown of post-war consensus and the complicated process of constructing a new settlement in social welfare. We return to these crucial issues in Block 4.

You should now read Unit 21 — the review of Block 3 — and the associated article by John Ditch in the Course Reader. Chapter 2, 'The undeserving poor: unemployed people, then and now'.

References

DISABILITY MANIFESTO (1991) An Agenda for the 1990s, London, Disability Manifesto Group


Block 4 marks another change in focus. It concentrates primarily on the ‘social welfare’ part of the course title, and looks at the politics of welfare and welfare policies. It might, at one time, have been described as the block about the ‘welfare state’ but changes in welfare politics over the last decade have meant that this phrase is no longer a simple and easy point of reference. Instead, we have to address both the development of the welfare state in the period after 1945 and the changes in welfare during the 1980s and 1990s which have called the welfare state into question. The political shift which followed the Conservative election victory of 1979 has resulted in a variety of specific policy changes in welfare, a changed attitude to the state’s role in providing welfare and a range of arguments about whether Britain still has a ‘welfare state’

4.1 Studying Block 4

Not surprisingly, then, Block 4 is the area of the course which has been most subject to the impact of wider social, economic and political changes. As a result, rather than using the Hitchhiker’s Guide to add extra information, we have chosen a different approach. Block 4 is now entirely new and involves a different pattern of work. The first two weeks of the block are based in this Guide, together with selected articles from the Course Reader. The remaining four weeks involve you using the materials identified as Block 4 Readings Part I and Part II.

These readings mean that you have to adopt a rather different approach to studying. Most of your work on Block 4 will be based on using articles in the Course Reader and the Block 4 Readings rather than the usual units. It is worth thinking about the differences between units and these readings to decide how best to study them. Here are some suggestions as to the differences.

1. Units tend to build in summaries and activities; articles tend to present a continuous argument.

2. Units tend to cross-refer to themes, issues and arguments elsewhere in the course; articles tend to be self-contained.

3. Units tend to make core course themes explicit; articles tend to require you to find the points of connection.

4. Units tend to compare different theories or perspectives (even if they may argue that some are more useful than others); articles tend to advance a particular theory or perspective.

You may have thought of other differences, but the important point about the list above is the way we have continually used the phrase ‘tend to’. The differences are about the aspects on which units and articles place more stress, rather than their being entirely different resources for studying. The other message that we would take from our list of differences is that, generally, articles tend to be harder work. Units are designed to make issues, themes and arguments explicit and provide you with ways of getting hold of them. Articles are more likely to require you to do the work of pulling out such things for yourself.

But just as the differences between units and articles are ones of emphasis, so the study skills you need to get the most out of articles are not qualitatively different from those you have been using so far in D211. By now, you have already been using the following skills.

1. Reading and analysing complex material.

2. Making summaries of complex material.

3. Identifying key themes, issues and arguments.

4. Comparing competing theories or perspectives.

5. Assessing different kinds of evidence.

6. Selecting relevant material to illustrate or exemplify key points.
These skills will stand you in good stead for the work on Block 4. What is required is not some new or different skill, but some thought about how best to apply them to the study of articles rather than units. In this Guide and the Readings, we have structured your work on specific articles with questions to keep in mind while you are reading them and suggestions about where to look for particular issues within the articles. What will be hard for you is to keep these in mind while you are reading the article itself. We offer the following suggestions as ways of focusing on what you need to get out of the article.

1. Make occasional checks back to the questions at the start of your work on the article. Can you still remember what they were? Has what you have read so far helped answer any of the questions?

2. Underline, highlight or put pointers by passages that you think are significant — and make a note in the margin about why.

3. Stop at intervals (e.g., at the end of sections) and make summaries about the central issues or arguments.

4. At the end, check whether you can answer the questions which introduced the article.

5. Also at the end, look back over your summary notes. Do you think you have got the central thread of the article? Is it the same as the author’s conclusion?

These are just some suggestions, rather than an exhaustive list of what to do. You may have ways of studying with which you are more comfortable or which work better for you and, if so, you should use them. What matters is that you adapt them to the slightly different task of extracting information, issues and arguments from articles. Because we know that working on these articles is likely to be more time-consuming, the overall amount of reading in Block 4 is less than it would be if it was presented in the form of conventional units.

4.2 The welfare state in post-war Britain

Any study of social welfare in Britain must focus on the intensive period of reform and innovation which surrounded the end of the Second World War. The institutional arrangements and policy directions established at that time set the broad shape of welfare through into the 1980s and provided the framework which we have come to refer to as the welfare state. At the same time, the relatively high degree of cross-party agreement on these basic institutional arrangements and policy directions established the foundations of what has been called the welfare consensus. Finally, the organization of welfare and the categories of people and need to which it was directed established the basic shape of what we might call the social relations of welfare. In this section, we shall be looking at each of these aspects of welfare in turn. They allow us to examine the main dimensions of social welfare in the thirty years following the Second World War. They also provide a reference point from which to examine the changes in welfare politics and policies in the 1980s and 1990s which are the focus of later sections of this block.

A welfare state?

Let us begin with a recognition that the welfare state was not invented out of nothing in the 1940s. A patchwork of local, national and voluntary systems of welfare existed prior to the Second World War. Old age pensions, unemployment benefit and public assistance for the uninsured poor existed, as did public education, housing and medical care. What marks the post-war period as different were the changes in scale and organization of publicly provided forms of welfare. In place of patchworks and partial coverage, the post-war welfare reforms aimed to create national systems with universal coverage for all citizens through public agencies.

The welfare state focused on a range of welfare needs: education, health, housing and social security. All of these, however, were to be underpinned by the state’s role in economic, rather than social, policy. A well-managed economy would provide two things. First, it would provide the national economic growth which would fund the costs
of welfare. Secondly, it would ensure full employment to provide personal economic security: employed people would not need to make claims on welfare benefits and they would build up the necessary National Insurance contributions to be eligible for benefits such as pensions. The different social policy reforms matched the ‘five giants’ which William Beveridge identified as having to be overcome on the ‘road to reconstruction’: Want (Social Security), Disease (Health Service), Ignorance (Education), Squalor (Housing and Town Planning); and Idleness (Employment) (Beveridge, 1942, p. 6). Employment, of course, was rather different from the other four solutions. The state took on a direct role in supplying benefits and services and in making them available as a right to citizens in the fields of health, education, housing and social security. Employment was never seen as a ‘right’ in this sense, as something which the state could or would guarantee. Rather, it was conditional on the performance of the national economy, and on the individual’s own efforts in seeking work.

The welfare legislation of 1944–48 produced a much expanded role for the state, both national and local. Responsibilities were divided between different ministries at national level and between central and local government (e.g. the administration of primary and secondary education, and the provision of public housing). We mention this because it highlights an important feature of the ‘welfare state’. It was never a single, monolithic entity. Rather it was made up of different departments, agencies and tiers of government, each of whom had responsibility for different aspects of ‘welfare’. In that sense, the phrase ‘welfare state’ was as much a public and political symbol as it was an accurate description of the welfare provision in post-war Britain.

However complex the organizational structure, the idea of the ‘welfare state’ did capture something of the changed place and role of public provision. It did become national; in scope and the rights of all citizens to benefit from its provisions were established. The main dimensions of this expanded role for the state were as follows.

**Health**: the provision of a national system of integrated health care to which all citizens had access and which was free at the point of treatment. (The latter was, of course, increasingly eroded by charges for prescriptions and dental and optical services.)

**Education**: the reform and establishment of a secondary education system for all young people up to the age of eighteen (with a minimum school-leaving age). The system was based on a system of selection (the ‘eleven plus’) and filtered young people into one of three types of secondary school (grammar, technical and secondary modern).

**Housing**: a commitment to the building of public housing by local authorities combined with new powers over town planning and other aspects of land use

**Social Security**: a triple system of benefits intended to address different causes of poverty. The core system was the Insurance Benefits (unemployment, sickness and old age) which were ‘earned’ through a record of insurance contributions whilst in employment. Secondly, a system of Family Allowances, long campaigned for by feminists, intended to help with the costs of raising the nation’s children. Thirdly, a safety net of National Assistance (subsequently called Supplementary Benefit and then Income Support) directed at those in need who had no other means of support. Assistance was subject to a ‘means-test’ and was intended to be a residual system (as more people became covered by insured benefits).

Although these four fields of welfare brought about a significant expansion of state provision, there was never any intention that the state would be the sole provider of welfare. In education and health, private provision continued to be available to those able and willing to pay. In housing, public sector provision was intended to supplement rather than displace the privately owned and rented sectors of the housing market. In social security, the objectives were slightly different. Social security, with the insurance principle at its heart, was viewed as a nationalized system of insurance against misfortune and old age. It rested on the assumption that the primary source of the welfare of individuals and families was the wage earned by the ‘breadwinner’

Insurance benefits were the substitute for the temporary loss of earnings occasioned by sickness or unemployment. Pensions were a reward earned from the lifetime’s wage earning. These benefits and contributions were organized around a model of the family
which stressed a gendered division of labour within the family – a gendered family economy. In this model, the family’s material well-being was secured by the wage-earning capacity of the ‘head of the household’, the man who could earn the male ‘family wage’. Wives and children were economic dependants. Married women were not expected to be in paid employment (hence the lower insurance contribution for married women who were not seen to need to be insured in their own right). Married women’s primary role was expected to be in homemaking and child-rearing. Such work was to be recognized and supported through the payment of family allowances which also represented a public investment in the nation’s future generations.

Finally, National Assistance was available to preserve those who fell through both the labour market and the insurance system. Such cases were, in Beveridge’s plan, expected to be few and to decline as full (male) employment was accomplished by effective economic management.

The basic structures and principles established at the end of the Second World War provided the framework within which state welfare developed during the following thirty years. The pattern of development was predominantly one of growth, whether this is measured by the costs of public spending on welfare, the numbers of people employed in providing welfare services or the number of people receiving benefits and services from the state.

Table 4 shows the growth of welfare expenditure as a proportion of Gross National Product (GNP) between 1938 and 1976, and as a percentage of government spending.

Table 4  The growth of welfare expenditure

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Source: Adapted from Sleeman, 1979, p. 46

Table 5 shows the distribution of welfare spending between different elements of the welfare state between 1955 and 1976 (in relation to total public expenditure and GNP).

Table 6  Welfare expenditure on different services

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Source: Sleeman, 1979, p. 47
Looking at Tables 4 and 5:

1. Which services grew most?
2. In which periods?
3. What is significant about the 1976 figures?

The growth of welfare was driven by a number of different pressures. One pressure was demographic changes, shifts in the size of population groups affecting the demand for welfare. Thus, the post-war 'baby boom' affected demands for educational provision in the 1950s and 1960s, while an increasingly ageing population gave rise to new health and care needs (Unit 4). A second pressure was associated with the discovery of 'new needs' requiring new welfare responses. Some new needs resulted from scientific or professional discoveries, identifying either new problems or opportunities for treatment (e.g. new medical techniques or the 'discovery' of child abuse). Other new needs resulted from the efforts of social groups to have their needs accepted as 'legitimate' claims on welfare services (e.g. campaigns around disability). We might also note that some forms of welfare provision created further needs themselves (e.g. the costs of helping patients make the transition to 'living in the community' after long periods in residential institutions). Thirdly, the growth of welfare was shaped by economic assumptions and calculations made in the immediate post-war period. This particularly affected the development of the benefit system. The benefit rates established for insured benefits (health, sickness and pensions) were so low that many recipients needed to apply for National Assistance (later Supplementary Benefit) for 'top-up' payments to bring their income to the national minimum. In addition, the numbers of people not eligible for insured benefits increased, rather than declined. As a consequence, National Assistance/Supplementary Benefit, which had been intended to play a residual and declining role in the benefits system, expanded to become a central feature.

Finally, we must note that political initiatives played a significant role in the growth of welfare - establishing new directions, priorities and services. Labour governments of the 1960s viewed investment in welfare as an integral part of a programme to 'modernize' British society. Welfare departments of state were reorganized, the benefit system reformed and new funding systems for the NHS were introduced. There was a major investment in expanding higher education (including The Open University) and plans were laid for the creation of social services/social work departments. These became described as the 'Fifth Social Service' following education, health, housing and social security.

This growth of welfare, although it was often precarious and subject to the fluctuating fortunes of the national economy, was underpinned by a degree of social and political consensus on the legitimacy of the state's role in providing and promoting social welfare. Thus is the focus of the following section.

The welfare consensus

The Labour victory in the 1945 general election laid the foundations for a governmental 'commitment to welfare' as a central feature of post-war politics. It symbolized a political watershed, marking the move to a 'managed economy' and a 'welfare state' as the dominant trends in British society. It was underwritten by a popular sense of not 'going back to the 1930s': a wish to move away from a deeply class-divided society, a free market economy with high unemployment, and deep poverty. After 1945 all of the three major political parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal) accepted the combination of economic management and state welfare as the framework of government activity.

It is important to recognize that this welfare consensus did not mean the absence of party differences or disagreements. Thus, Labour and Conservative governments disagreed about the place of nationalization of selected industries within the managed economy. They differed over the introduction of charges for health services (e.g. prescriptions and eye-tests). They differed over what services to develop, what new
needs to recognize and so on. What the idea of the welfare consensus highlights is that such disagreements were framed by a wider understanding of the state’s role in providing welfare. The party political consensus was itself sustained by a widespread public consensus that the state had a legitimate role to play in providing and developing social welfare. This included a recognition that state welfare imposed costs (through increased taxation) as well as providing benefits and services.

It is also important to note that the existence of this welfare consensus did not mean the absence of contrary arguments. What it did mean was that such arguments achieved little public or political visibility and legitimacy. A range of arguments about the undesirability of the welfare settlement persisted. Socialists pointed to the persistence of material inequalities despite the welfare state and argued that the state needed to be more directly redistributive, that it should promote greater equality.

From the late 1960s in particular, feminists highlighted the hidden gender costs and inequities of welfare. They pointed to the ways in which the provision of welfare rested on the invisible (and unpaid) caring role of women in families and to the inequalities in benefits between men and women. In different ways, groups of service-users (and potential service-users) campaigned around both particular benefits and services and the ways in which state welfare (and its professionalized systems of service delivery) promoted dependence and powerlessness among recipients.

Finally, and most significantly for subsequent political developments, a strand of anti-welfare state thought was kept alive through institutions like the Institute of Economic Affairs. There, the growth of the state was viewed as an interference with the natural workings of the market and as an intrusion on the basic freedoms of the individual. Such groups constantly challenged the orthodoxy of state welfare and the management of the economy and called for the state to be withdrawn to a more minimal role, trusting instead to the decisions of individuals coordinated through the market place to produce economic and social progress.

This range of arguments remained outside the consensus until the mid-1970s. The consensus was able to persist as the organizing framework for the politics of welfare so long as the underlying social and economic conditions sustained the implicit ‘settlement’ of different social interests. In particular, the welfare consensus rested on two economic conditions: continued national economic growth and the maintenance of full (male) employment. Although these conditions were always relatively fragile, they were sufficient to hold the welfare consensus together. State welfare could be sustained while they were being achieved.

By the mid-1970s, confidence in the possibility of continued achievement had begun to crumble. An economic slump, combined with rapidly rising inflation, meant rising unemployment (and rising welfare costs as a result) but also a loss of public and political confidence in the assumption that growth could be sustained. In the process, the costs of welfare became more visible: both nationally, in terms of financing public spending, and personally, in terms of the costs of taxation. At this point, the welfare consensus became exposed and vulnerable to dissenting voices as the economic and social underpinnings were eroded. What followed is the subject of Section 4.3. Before that, however, we need to step back and examine one further dimension of the welfare state: the social relations of welfare.

**The social relations of welfare**

So far we have concentrated on the institutions and politics of welfare in post-war Britain. But the welfare state was not separate from the wider patterns of social relations in Britain. The language of social policy sometimes makes it seem as though welfare is indeed separate. The categories of ‘universal citizenship’ or of particular classifications of ‘needs’ do not seem to fit very closely with wider social patterns of class, ‘race’ or gender, for example. But the welfare state was a product of a society characterized by such patterns of class, ‘race’ and gender inequalities. In turn, the activities of the welfare state had an impact on those patterns. This section is focused on the question of how to understand the relationship between the welfare state and these wider social patterns.
These issues are the focus of a chapter by Fiona Williams in the Course Reader: Chapter 18, ‘The welfare state as part of a racially structured and patriarchal capitalism’. The chapter explores the relationship between welfare and class, ‘race’ and gender.

The introduction to the chapter establishes the main concerns. The chapter then proceeds to examine each of these issues in turn and presents both evidence and arguments about aspects of the relationship between welfare services, the staffing of welfare agencies and wider social relations. You may find it helpful to use the grid below to make a note of the main themes and the main points which the chapter makes about each theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Main points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</table>

Both the arguments which the chapter presents about the social relations of welfare and its conclusions about the politics of welfare are written from ‘outside’ of the welfare consensus. They address significant issues about both the past and the future of welfare in Britain. In the following section, we shall be examining the break-up of the welfare consensus in more detail.
4.3 The end of the consensus

Although there were controversies about levels and forms of welfare spending even in the high period of Britain’s post-war welfare state, its main principles remained relatively unchallenged until the mid-1970s. At that point, a combination of economic and political failure began to call those principles into question. The ‘Keynesian’ pillar of the Keynesian welfare state (the managed economy) had failed to guarantee economic success and what might be called the ‘Beveridgean’ pillar of welfare provision had failed to reduce social inequalities or to eradicate poverty. The costs of welfare seemed to be more than the enfeebled British economy could bear.

New arguments began to emerge which (particularly from what came to be called the ‘New Right’) challenged the assumptions of the past, and these were taken up as a key element of the political programme of the Conservative party which was elected to government under Mrs Thatcher in 1979. It seemed as if a new consensus was being constructed, but this time with a stress being placed on individual self-reliance and the ‘rolling back’ of the state, rather than the state provision of welfare services.

You should now turn to Nevil Johnson’s chapter in the Reader, Chapter 12, ‘The break-up of consensus: competitive politics in a declining economy’. This chapter explores the processes of change from a perspective which was sympathetic to the arguments of the ‘New Right’ and of the Thatcher government, although it stresses political rather than economic aspects. In reading this chapter you need to have three key questions in mind. If possible, try to jot down brief answers to them below.

1. What were the main features of the political arrangements that underpinned the British welfare state from 1945 to the mid-1970s?

2. What are the main explanations for the break-up of consensus?

3. What are the main features of the alternative system which Johnson suggests may be emerging?
Johnson argues that a political crisis in the 1970s was generated by coming together of relative economic decline and a popular expectation of continuing material improvement. He is particularly critical of what he calls the 'providential' view of government — that is, the view that the government can be relied on to provide economic growth and material well-being, alongside an extensive framework of social services. In this interpretation, the post-1945 welfare state sponsored a move away from self-help and voluntary activity, towards a reliance on the state for support. The political process encouraged politicians and government to make promises which then they could not deliver. In turn, argues Johnson, this began to weaken the authority of political institutions.

Johnson is especially critical of the role of the trade unions which, he suggests, used their power to win concessions but paid no attention to their impact on the economy. He argues that the unions represented major obstacles to the introduction of the political changes which had become necessary by the end of the 1970s. For Johnson, the Thatcher governments made such changes possible for the first time. He stresses Margaret Thatcher's populism, her ability to appeal to 'ordinary people' over the heads of political elites. The key elements he identifies in the new world of the 1980s were: a shift to support for the market, a move away from a view of government as 'universal provider'; and a move towards traditional institutions outside the state (including the family and voluntary organisations). The limits of the state are stressed. But he also concludes that many of the features of the welfare state survive, and that the changes introduced in the 1980s were cautious, rather than revolutionary.

Not all commentators were so sympathetic to the changes being introduced, or to the programmes of the Thatcher (and more recently Major) governments.

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You should now turn to Andrew Gamble's chapter in the Reader: Chapter 15, 'The weakening of social democracy'.

Gamble is a severe critic of Thatcherism and the 'New Right', but in reading this chapter we suggest you focus particularly on the similarities and differences between the arguments of Johnson and Gamble. Use the box below to identify them as you read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Johnson</th>
<th>Gamble</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differences</strong></td>
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</table>

Gamble starts by setting out the main features of the old consensus before going on to survey the responses to challenges from within it. He stresses that similar pressures existed in other western countries, in the wake of readjustments within the world economic system in the course of the 1970s. Like Johnson, he notes that the authority of government was reduced because what it could achieve was also reduced. The position
of national governments within an international system, itself facing economic problems, significantly restricted their room for manoeuvre. This problem was perhaps particularly sharp in the UK, but it was not unique to the UK (as Johnson’s arguments tend to imply). Unlike Johnson, Gamble argues that the notion of over powerful trade unions is mistaken and suggests that the attack on trade unions was part of a more general attack on the post-war consensus. He argues that the old consensus began to fall apart both because it could no longer deliver in economic terms, and because it had lost its will to preserve the foundations of social order and public authority.

Although there are similarities between the explanations offered by Gamble and by Johnson in that each stresses underlying economic problems, the policy responses proposed are quite different. The Right argued for a shift towards the market and for a moral crusade. The Left sought instead to develop what came to be called an Alternative Economic Strategy. The failures of Labour governments in the late 1970s and their reluctance to implement the main features of the strategy, encouraged a campaign within the Labour party in the early 1980s which was intended to limit the freedom of its leaders to act outside agreed party policy. One consequence was the splitting of the party and the birth of the Social Democratic party. Throughout the 1980s Labour remained fragmented and unable to mount an effective challenge to the Thatcher governments. Its attention continued instead to be directed to resolving its own internal crisis. Towards the middle of the decade it was already becoming clear, as Gamble notes, that the party (under the leadership of Neil Kinnock) was beginning to move back to the centre in a search for electoral support, but to a centre whose boundaries had effectively been determined by the policies of the Thatcher governments.

With electoral victories in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992, there is no doubting the political success of the new Conservatism. But has it created the basis of a new consensus? Gamble is sceptical. He argues that matters are less straightforward than such a conclusion would suggest. In particular, he notes that levels of public expenditure on welfare were not cut significantly in the first half of the 1980s, and suggests that, despite all the rhetoric on both sides, in the NHS and education sectors major changes have been slow in coming. In retrospect, Gamble argues that the Thatcher decade looks more like a transitional phase than a new era. He suggests that the apparent power of Thatcherism was exaggerated by the extent of fragmentation on the Left. He sees the 1980s as a continuation of a longer tradition rather than a break with it, merely reinforcing an existing bias against intervention in industry and finance, compared with many other European countries.

4.4 What has changed?

The welfare state has undergone substantial changes during the 1980s, but the nature of these changes is not exactly what might have been expected from the political arguments about the need to change the state’s role. There has, for example, been intense pressure on welfare budgets. The political rhetoric of the 1980s was one which stressed opposition to ‘wasteful’ spending and the need to restrict state spending in order to allow the successful expansion of the private sector, which it was hoped would, in turn, lead to significant economic growth. In this sense, it seems appropriate to point to a move towards what has been called an ‘austerity’ welfare state, rather than one in which continued expansion in response to need or demand could be taken for granted.

But the experience of the period was rather more ambiguous than such a conclusion might suggest. Spending may not have increased to take account of new demands (e.g. from an increasingly ageing population), but it did increase in some areas, even while decreasing in others, so that real overall spending (i.e. after taking account of rising prices) was basically maintained and even rose between 1979 and the late ’80s (see Figure 17). Public spending on the welfare state (defined as expenditure on education, housing, personal social services, and social security) actually rose slightly as a proportion of national income (Gross Domestic Product) over the period from 1979 to 1986 (from 22.9 per cent to 23.2 per cent), and grew rather more as a proportion of government expenditure (from 52.6 per cent to 55.6 per cent) (Le Grand, 1990, p. 339). Although the share of welfare spending in the national income did fall slightly towards the end of the period, the main explanation of this seems to have been the rate at which the UK economy grew in the second half of the
1980s, rather than any successful reductions in spending. The same amount of spending represented a smaller share of a larger cake, so that the recession of the early 1990s also meant that this process of apparent decline was brought to a halt.

Look at the figures in Table 6. How has spending moved over time? Go down the categories one after another and note in the empty table below whether they have gone up or down in the periods specified.

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<tbody>
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<td>Transport</td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Law, order and protective services</td>
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<td>Education and science</td>
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<td>Arts and libraries</td>
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<td>Health and personal social services</td>
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<td>of which Health</td>
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<td>Social Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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It will be clear from this exercise both that the spending levels rose overall, and that there was significant variation across spending areas. Spending on housing fell sharply in real terms, spending on transport also fell in the first period, but then began to rise. It rose in all the other areas, although spending only rose by a modest amount on education, science, arts and libraries. It rose most sharply in the field of law, order and protective services. More detailed surveys of welfare spending give the same message, confirming the importance of examining aggregated figures rather more closely.
Table 6  Selected government spending by programme (in real terms, £ billion), 1979-80 to 1991-92

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry A</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry B</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Public Expenditure Analysis to 1991-92, Statistical Supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement (Cm 1920), 1892, Table 2.3, p 13
Figure 17 makes a similar point in a rather more graphic form. The welfare state seems to have been remarkably resilient, to the extent that one researcher felt able to conclude that.

Over the thirteen years from 1974 to 1987, welfare policy successfully weathered an economic hurricane in the mid-1970s and an ideological blizzard in the 1980s. The resources going to public welfare were maintained, while other indicators continued to show a steady improvement. Even more significantly, the welfare state acted with increasing effectiveness as a safety net over a period of economic crisis and restructuring (Le Grand, 1990, p. 350).

Nevertheless, the nature of the welfare state underlying the apparent stability identified by Le Grand also needs to be considered. Here the Conservative governments of the 1980s seem to have been rather more successful in achieving their stated aims and in changing the ground rules of welfare provision. There have been major changes. The notion of the "internal market" has been widely adopted in various forms, most notably in the National Health Service where some GPs have become budget-holders, hospitals are expected to buy in services from each other, and self-governing trusts are being encouraged to take the process of market relationships further. In education, the introduction of the local management of schools has devolved budgetary responsibilities to school governing bodies, with the implication that services previously supplied through local education departments should now be bought in. Throughout local government, the division between purchaser and provider has been increasingly institutionalized, so that interaction between colleagues and departments has been transformed into market-type relationships. The new welfare state seems to be dominated not so much by markets in any pure form, but by attempts to mimic "markets" in relationships which are nevertheless managed and regulated by the state (what Le Grand calls quas-markets).

It may be that the hierarchical model of the welfare state which was implicitly taken for granted by many of us (and in much of the political debate on welfare) was never a very helpful one. It was not the case that ministers at the centre could make decisions which would not be filtered clearly down through the system—in education, health, housing or even social security. Not only were there all sorts of areas for professional discretion within the system, but there were also often alternative focal points for political action (e.g., in the form of local government, trade union organization or even "consumer" organizations). Private sector arrangements (e.g., through work-based pensions, insurance and even the ability of owner-occupiers to sell their houses on retirement) were always important for some sections of the population and were often supported by highly sympathetic tax regimes (of which mortgage tax relief is the best known). Perhaps more importantly, many aspects of the welfare state were simply outside the direct control of the state, not only in voluntary organizations of one sort or another, but also, most significantly, in those areas of our lives frequently understood as "private". Within the home, women have consistently played a key role as carers, looking after parents, children and/or disabled members of their families. This is too often ignored in many discussions of the welfare state. In other words, even in welfare provision dominated by state activity, welfare outcomes have always been the product of a complex process of interaction between public, voluntary and private sector provision, built around a series of implicit assumptions about informal care in households and communities—usually provided by women. With these points in mind, it may be more appropriate to think of a "mixed economy" of welfare, rather than a more unified welfare state.

But if this is the case when we look back at the post-war period as a whole, it is still more relevant in considering the ways in which welfare—and the welfare state—was transformed through the period from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s. It is reflected in the structures and arrangements which are taken for granted in the first half of the 1990s. Reference has already been made to some of these, and particularly to the notions of partnership underlying legislation on children and families and on community care. But the significance of these changes is worth emphasizing again. The delivery of welfare is now increasingly organized through independent or semi-independent agencies (sometimes private, sometimes in the voluntary sector) and coordinated and regulated through the formal institutions of the state. It increasingly acknowledges (even if it does...
not always provide adequate resources to support) the role of carers in the home.
Where there are not already independent agencies, the structures of state delivery
systems are increasingly being restructured to imitate the forms of such agencies
(e.g. through the local management of schools).

These changes are not a matter of great controversy between the main political parties,
although the stress of the argument may vary. Some stress notions of ‘user’ or
‘consumer’ involvement where others stress the need to imitate market mechanisms.
But all parties accept that welfare will involve a new ‘mixed economy’ in which the
state’s role in direct provision will be much reduced. Perhaps the new consensus is
being built around these sorts of ideas.

If you are interested in following up any of these issues, you might like to look at
Norman Flynn’s book, *Public Sector Management* (1980) – see the references at the
end of the section. Despite its rather forbidding title, this is a fascinating discussion of
some of the ways in which the organization, management and culture of the British
welfare state have changed in recent years, and it raises important questions about
the likely directions of change in the future. Some of these issues are also addressed
in the 1994 collection edited by Clarke, Cochrane and McLaughlin also detailed in
the end-of-section references.

In considering the nature of the changes which characterized the 1980s, it is also
important to look back at the figures again. In some ways, the global figures
summarized in Table 6 and Figure 17 may actually obscure important shifts not only
between categories but – more importantly – between different parts of the population.
As the Hitchhiker’s Guide for Block 3 suggested, the real value of many welfare benefits
was reduced during the 1980s. Such changes imply sharper divisions developing
between those relying on public welfare for their income and those in full-time paid
employment. Reductions in levels of income tax favoured those in employment and
reductions in higher rates of tax favoured those on higher incomes. Although there were
sharp disagreements about questions of definition, there is little doubt that levels of
poverty increased in the 1980s, and changes in the benefit and taxation system helped
to reinforce this.

4.5 Central issues in the reconstruction of social welfare

When studying Block 4, it may be helpful to keep a number of central issues in mind
about the way social welfare has been changing and may change in the future. We
would suggest that there are four important clusters of such issues which you will find
consistently recurring as you study the Readings in Block 4.

A The costs of social welfare

Much political debate has centred around the issue of public spending on welfare: how
much is being spent; how much should be spent; how should the money be raised; on
what services and benefits should it be spent; and so on. Such questions have been at
the core of welfare reforms with successive governments committed to reducing ‘the
burden of public expenditure’ and introducing changes to promote greater ‘efficiency’
or to ‘target’ benefits on those most in need.

Such reforms have been contested. There are counter-arguments about whether these
are the right directions in which to move (for example, about whether there are more
important welfare objectives than the pursuit of efficiency). There are also questions
about whether the reforms actually achieve their stated objectives (for example,
whether the costs of introducing and running quasi-markets are greater than the
efficiency gains that they may produce).

These are both ‘technical’ questions (for example, about how ‘costs’ are measured) and
‘political’ questions, in terms of public choices about what sorts of social welfare should
be provided and how it should be funded.
B The organization of social welfare

Although much political debate in the 1980s and 1990s took place around the opposition between the state (or public services) and the market (or privatized services), it is clear that the reforms which have been introduced are more complex than this opposition between the state and the market implies. The creation of internal markets (or ‘quasimarkets’) within public services such as the NHS has created a system of health care which is neither the ‘old’ state model nor a thoroughly privatized alternative.

Similarly, the development of a more ‘mixed’ economy of service provision does not fit easily into the apparent choice between the state and the market. An expanded role for private or voluntary agencies (in community care, for example) nevertheless leaves public sector agencies with important responsibilities (in assessing needs, planning and purchasing care services). And despite the greater significance of either internal markets or service purchasing, it remains the case that welfare benefits and services remain predominantly funded by public resources even if they are not provided directly by public agencies.

As a consequence, you will come across a range of arguments in Block 4 (particularly in Part I) about why these new ways of organizing social welfare have been developed and what their consequences might be.

C Citizens or consumers? Rights to social welfare

While many of the reforms of social welfare have been justified by reference to ‘improving efficiency’ or ‘reducing costs’, they have also been justified as changes which will provide greater consumer choice and rights in relation to welfare services. State provision, it has been argued, concentrated power and control in the hands of the ‘providers’ rather than the ‘consumers’ of welfare services and benefits. This has been a central theme in the new right’s ‘anti-statistm’.

In reconstituting social welfare in Britain, successive Conservative governments have argued for the need to replace the old model of the ‘citizen’ (receiving what the state decides he or she is entitled to) with a more ‘consumer’ model of service provision in which the individual gets to exercise choice. These choices may involve new decisions about how to spend on welfare services (private pensions rather than state pensions), what sorts of services to choose (parental choice in relation to schools), or how individuals wish to be supported (care in the community or residential care, for example).

There has also been a strong emphasis on making public services treat their users as if they were ‘consumers’, with certain limited rights to information, attention and treatment being guaranteed through the Citizens’ Charter and its parallels in specific service areas (the Patients’ charter, the Parents’ charter, etc). This issue is also a recurrent one in Block 4 as well as wider public debates about social welfare.

The arguments around these issues centre on whether the ‘consumer’ model is the most appropriate one for the delivery of social welfare. Are there other ways of viewing the relationship between the public and social welfare which pay attention to other aspects of rights, power and decision-making that are not included in the consumer model? There are also arguments about whether the claimed advantages of the ‘consumer’ model of service organization are delivered – or even can be delivered – in practice.

D The consequences of social welfare

Again, a range of hotly debated issues has surrounded the changes in social welfare concerning their consequences. And again these relate both to questions about what the aims of social welfare should be, and to arguments about what the consequences of the changes have been or will be.

Some of these issues centre on what social objectives should define how services are organized. For example, should the reduction of waiting lists be an overriding objective for the NHS? Does achieving this objective distort priorities so that other objectives suffer? Does competition (between schools, for example) provide undesirable consequences,
such as new forms of selection to gain the ‘best’ pupils, as well as desirable ones, such as greater choice? Do the costs of organizing complex ‘quasi-markets’ outweigh the improvements they may bring?

A second cluster of arguments about consequences concerns who benefits from the reform of social welfare. Does a greater use of care in the community enable individuals to make choices about how and where to live, or does it transfer the burdens and costs of support from the state to the family? Does the expanded role of markets open the possibility of new forms of discrimination against those who are viewed as more ‘needy’, ‘costly’ or ‘troublesome’ to service?

A third and final cluster surrounds the impact of changes in the provision of state benefits for income support. Many of these changes were introduced as a response to the perceived creation of a ‘dependency culture’ by over-generous state benefits. There continue to be arguments over whether this is the real effect of state benefits and over whether a greater use of means-testing, ‘targeting’ and tougher eligibility conditions have the claimed consequences. So you will see, particularly in Part II of Block 4, arguments over the causes of poverty and the relationships between state income support and poverty which remain central to debates about the future of welfare.

In the remainder of this block we shall be taking the opportunity to look more closely at changes which have been taking place in key areas of what used to be called the welfare state – the areas of health, community care, income maintenance and poverty. You should now turn to the two books of Readings associated with Block 4. Guidance to these Readings is incorporated in the text. Once you have completed your work on these Readings, you should return to this Guide.

4.6 The future of welfare

The reconstruction of social welfare has been a central issue in British social and political life for the last fifteen years and there is little sign of any decline in either its centrality or the pace of change in social policy. As we have seen in the Block 4 Readings, many features of the Conservative welfare reforms remain contentious – arguments continue to surround the changes to the NHS, the workings of community care and the Child Support Agency, for example. We hope that your work on Block 4 provides you with a foundation for understanding these continuing controversies.

Wider debates about the sort of social welfare system Britain has are also continuing. The new right still presses for further reductions in direct welfare provision by the state to enable greater individual choice and responsibility. In 1994 the Commission on Social Justice, established by the Labour Party, reported its findings and suggestions for the future shape of social welfare. The full report, Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal, is a lengthy document, so we have reproduced its summary here as Figure 18.

As you read the summary, you should try to answer the following questions:

1. What sets of conditions does the Commission identify as creating ‘the need for change’?
2. What sort of ‘future’ does the Commission set out for Britain?
3. What is the role of social welfare in this future?
4. In what ways do these proposals differ from Conservative approaches to social welfare?
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The final part of this section on Block 4 offers a way of placing current debates in a wider context. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced a major study on the future of welfare, carried out by John Hills of the London School of Economics. The study identifies different sorts of choices that could be made about the future shape of social welfare. These choices overlap with the issues identified at the end of Section 4.5. There are two important features of this study. The first is its insistence that these are public and political choices. There is no inevitability about any of these issues, no absolute necessity to choose one direction rather than other. The second feature is the way the study sets out different types of choices, relating to the scale of welfare, the targeting of welfare, the funding of welfare and how it is organized. The discussion and chart reproduced below are taken from the conclusion to the study and provide a valuable framework for thinking about the future of social welfare. It is a framework that also allows evaluation and comparison of particular policy proposals, such that you could, if you wished, place either specific reforms or programmes such as the Commission on Social Justice recommendations within it.
You should now read the following extract from John Hills' The Future of Welfare. A Guide to the Debate, reproduced as Figure 19. This completes Block 4 of D211. You should then move on to the next section of the Hitchhiker’s Guide, dealing with Block 5.
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Source: Hills, 1993, pp. 78–84
References


In this final block of D211, you will be looking at one further debate about the relationship between social problems and social welfare. You will also be arriving at the final components of the course. Unit 30, TV16 and Audio-cassette 6, Side B, all of which provide different ways of reviewing the course as a whole.

The block no longer contains a Unit 28, so we can move straight on, via the Block Introduction, to the study of Unit 29.

**THERE IS NO UNIT 28**

### 5.1 Block Introduction and Unit 29: Britain: A Violent Society?

The question of whether Britain has experienced a period of moral crisis since the 1950s is the subject of a debate between Stephen Davies (Chapter 14 of the Course Reader) and Geoffrey Pearson (Unit 29) and is further examined in television programmes 15 and 16.

This debate adds to discussions about the nature of post-war Britain which were encountered earlier in the course, for example, in the discussion of the decline and revitalization of 'traditional morality' in Block 2. The issue of the moral condition of the nation is a significant sequel to Block 4 for several reasons. First, it revives subjects which, although very visible in terms of public opinion and political argument, tend to be either ignored or treated as of secondary consequence when the arguments focus upon economic and political conditions. As you will see, the arguments about moral order bring to the foreground questions about crime and violence, and about moral values and family and community life. They place these issues at the centre of debates about social problems and social welfare. Secondly, the issue of moral order brings back to the surface arguments which have played a significant role earlier in the course. In Blocks 2 and 3, in particular, we encountered arguments which explored the place of 'traditional values' and 'conventional morality' in shaping the definition of social problems — and the responses to them. We also looked at the consequences of both social change and social movements for these conceptions of conventional morality.

The debate is also important because it provides a specific example of how social scientists apply differing perspectives to the same social issue. This leads us into considering questions, for example, about how academic arguments are constructed, how competing perspectives utilize certain types of evidence in support of their hypotheses, and about what role the study of history can play in helping us to understand contemporary society. The focus on history allows for further reflection on issues encountered in Units 11. This unit highlighted the importance of differentiating between competing 'readings' of history. It was stressed that attention should be paid to the role of theory in constructing different 'readings'; how particular historical events and processes are selected and explained; and what values, beliefs and ideologies are embedded in different 'readings'. Thus, debate about the moral condition of Britain illustrates further some of the general issues about the social sciences raised in earlier parts of the course. When reading the material you should pay attention to the wider concerns of the block and:

- distinguish between the competing perspectives
- think about the utilization of evidence
- understand the importance of the issue of continuity and change; and
- differentiate between different 'readings' of history.

**A crisis of the moral order?**

Before considering the positions argued by Davies in the Course Reader and Pearson in Unit 29, we should remember the context within which this debate emerged. In 1979 a Conservative government was elected which viewed the creation of a new moral order...
as being central to the success or otherwise of its economic and social policies. One result of this was that issues of law and order were placed high on the political agenda throughout the 1980s. This unleashed a debate which had considerable implications for the future of social welfare. Both the Reader article and the unit are firmly located within this debate. Although they were both written in the mid-1980s, the issues and questions raised remain high on the political agenda, as we shall see when we come to assess what has happened subsequently.

In his article 'Towards the remoralization of society' in the Course Reader, Stephen Davies argues that, since 1945, a moral crisis has gradually gripped Britain. The most obvious manifestations of this moral crisis are the general increase in criminal and delinquent behaviour, the breakdown of the traditional family and a general decline in civility. Davies links more general concerns about the decline of traditional morality to evidence about increasing social problems, and other explanations for this condition of 'demoralization'. He concludes by setting forth a series of recommendations that would lead to a 'remoralization' of British society.

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You should now read the Block 8 Introduction and Davies' article in the Course Reader, 'Towards the remoralization of society'. When studying this chapter you should concentrate on the following questions:

1. What conception of human nature informs Davies' argument?
2. Why is the moral order so central to his view of British society?
3. How does Davies explain the nature of moral crisis?
4. What evidence does he assemble in defence of his position?
5. How does he propose that British society could be remoralized?

When you have read Davies' article, return to this Guide.

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In Unit 29 Geoffrey Pearson takes issue with arguments, such as those presented by Davies, which see Britain as becoming an increasingly violent and morally disordered society. In order to rebut claims that there was a 'golden age' of tranquility and order, he first of all explores crime and disorder in Victorian and Edwardian society, arguing that the past was more violent and lawless than the present. In his analysis of the inter-war period he challenges those who would deny the links between crime, disorder and economic factors. Pearson also examines the evidence of crime and violence in contemporary Britain by subjecting national crime statistics to detailed questioning.

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You should now read Unit 29, paying particular attention to:

(a) how he analyses the claim that Britain is in a moral crisis
(b) what evidence he uses to question the claim that Britain has become a more crime-prone and violent society
(c) how he examines the problems of using official statistics
(d) what evidence he presents about fear of crime and the risk of being a victim of crime, and
(e) what implications flow from his analysis.

You should also watch TV15 in which Davies and Pearson explain their arguments and explore the sorts of evidence which support them. Then return to this Guide.
Now that you have read the Reader article and Unit 29 and watched TV15 you should be in a position to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each point of view. It is worth remembering that some of the issues about evidence and argument in this debate are also considered in TV16. The next section provides an update on some of the issues at the centre of this debate. When reading this you should try to assess whose argument – if any – is validated by recent developments.

**A continuing crisis of the moral order?**
The debate about whether Britain is becoming a more lawless and disordered society has continued into the 1990s. For those concerned about the moral state of the nation there is plenty of ‘evidence’ to confirm their worst fears. ‘Slow rioting’ – a process of low-intensity conflict and disorder – seems to have become an established feature of life in many neighbourhoods, with periodic clashes occurring between the police and young males over contested public space. One focus of this phenomenon has been the ‘joyriding’ disturbances in Tyneside and Oxford. In addition, there has been considerable reflection on the spiralling crime rates which have characterized the first years of the 1990s.

The immediate cause of the discussion was the release of crime statistics for 1990 which indicated the sharpest increase in recorded crime since national records began in 1857. The official statistics showed an overall increase of 17 per cent, ending a period of relative stability after 1986.

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Figure 20
Recorded crime statistics 1980–81


This ‘epidemic’ of crime continued unabated into 1991 when 5.3 million crimes (excluding criminal damages under £20) were recorded by the police. This compared with 4.4 million in 1990 and, more strikingly, 1.6 million in 1970. Worse news was to come in March 1993 when Interpol released figures indicating that the British crime figures were, officially, the highest in the European Community. This was followed by the findings of the latest British Crime Survey, which, in order to obtain information on the hidden crime figure, interviewed more than 10,000 people over the age of sixteen about their experience of crime. According to the survey, 15 million crimes were committed in England and Wales in 1991 – a staggering three times the official total (Home Office, 1992).
In the ongoing debate about the causes of this dramatic increase in crime, many familiar explanations surfaced. Greed, evil, lack of parental supervision, decline in respect for other people’s property and a lowering of the ‘shame threshold’ have all figured in popular explanations. However, government spokespersons resorted to much more cautious and ‘realistic’ interpretations. The public has been told that it should be careful in its reading of crime statistics since they are not ‘facts’ but organizational and social constructions. Thus, increases could be the result of changes in reporting and police recording practices as well as of changes in sentencing patterns in the courts.

At this point remind yourself of Pearson’s critique of official statistics

The public has also been cautioned against panicking about these statistics. It has been reiterated, for example, that fear of crime is disproportionate to the actual risk and that violent crime represents only a small proportion of all officially recorded crime — approximately 94 percent of all recorded crimes are against property. Even in the British Crime Survey, violent crime accounted for only 5 percent of the total. Thus there has been a sustained campaign to stress to the British public that their fears about becoming a victim of violent crime are manifestly irrational and stoked up by a sensationalist and irresponsible media. As the Home Office Working Group on the Fear of Crime declared:

The effect of crime reporting by the media is almost inevitably to increase fear. This becomes unacceptable when, as so often, crime is reported in an unbalanced way, with a strong emphasis on violent and unusual crimes, and on particular types of victim (notably young women and old people). The public receives only a distorted impression. (Home Office Standing Conference on Crime Prevention, 1989, p 2)

The government also deployed an interesting set of arguments to explain the cause of the dramatic increase in property crime. First, it is argued that as a result of the creation of an affluent property-owning democracy in the ‘boom’ years of the 1980s, there is ‘naturally’ more to steal. The argument would have us believe that high crime rates against property are a sign of an affluent and healthy society. The message would seem to be that a crime-free society is a poor society.

Home Office ministers have stressed that the ‘opportunistic’ crime wave against property can be halted through practical crime prevention measures. Thus, it has been claimed that at least half a million offences could have been prevented by simple precautions such as remembering to lock house and car windows. Car manufacturers have been urged to pay more attention to security features and government initiatives, most notably Safer Cities and Crime Concern, have sought to make communities more security conscious by co-ordinating public-private-voluntary measures to ‘design out’ crime. Active community participation, in the form of Neighbourhood Watch and the Special Constabulary, continues to be encouraged in order to make ‘the war against crime’ more effective.

The government’s opponents, while agreeing with the need for a national crime prevention programme and addressing the fear of violent crime, accused the Conservatives of trying to downplay the fact that they had presided over record crime increases and were intent on shifting primary responsibility for the increases onto a supposedly irrational public and irresponsible victims of crime. Successive Labour party statements also urged government ministers to recognize the connections between rising deprivation and crime. As the 1980 Labour White Paper on Criminal Justice stated,

[Conservative] economic and social policies have created the conditions which undermine community safety. Government policies have led to impoverished and decaying inner city areas, unemployment, financially destitute and alienated young people, homelessness and a massive divide between the haves and have-nots – poverty in the midst of affluence. (Labour party, 1990, p 5)
In terms of trying to adjudicate between the different types of explanation forwarded to account for the rising crime rate we can turn to the findings of an important Home Office research study (Field, 1990) into the connections between unemployment and crime. It shows that crime closely follows macro-economic cycles and demonstrated 'the profound importance of economic factors in the determination of crime' (p. 54) During periods of economic stagnation, the number of thefts and burglaries tends to grow, while during periods when people have money to spend, the property crime rate increases less rapidly or falls. However, the effect on violent or sexual crime is the opposite: 'Personal crime appears to increase more rapidly during periods of rapidly increasing consumption ... during periods of slow consumption growth, personal crime tends to grow more slowly than usual' (p. 5) The study focuses on the 1980s in order to illustrate the links.

The most striking feature of these trends has been the way in which during the first years of the decade in 1980 and 1981 recorded property crime of most types grew very rapidly, while personal crime grew very little. There followed a gradual reverse in this pattern such that personal crime grew rapidly in 1987 and 1988, while property crime grew very little during the same time period (Field, 1990, p 5).

This report suggests that a buoyant economy provides greater opportunities for purchasing goods and, therefore, reduces the temptation to steal. However, the increase in crime against the person during a buoyant economy could be explained by the fact that people spend more of their time outside the home and are, therefore, more vulnerable to attack. It also suggests that potential offenders are more likely to be concentrated in social groups whose position in the labour market is weaker, and who are less cushioned, therefore, from the effects of economic change. Although the report is cautious in its comments about the possible causal links between unemployment and crime, these findings have had a considerable impact on debates about the causes of crime. It was reported, for example, that in the aftermath of this report senior civil servants were trying to assess the likely impact on the crime rate and public order of the government’s planned cost-cutting in social security benefits and reduction in social services in inner-city areas (The Independent, 13 October 1992). Some of these issues are explored in the article by Will Hutton, reprinted as Figure 21.
What was striking in the run-up to the 1992 election was the attempt to conduct the debate about the meaning of the crime statistics, the causes of crime and the most effective policies for tackling the problem in a measured and low key manner. Although the Conservatives voiced their traditional opposition to those who would make simplistic
causal connections between poverty and crime—a slur on the honest poor and law-abiding unemployed—they did not employ law and order rhetoric or bow to the ever-present demands of the ‘hang ‘em and flog ‘em’ lobby. Hence, there were signs of the emergence of a political consensus on core law and order strategies and commentators began to argue that the Conservative party had come of age on such matters. This was reflected in the way that many parts of the Conservative’s 1991 Criminal Justice Act, especially those provisions aimed at reducing the size of the prison population, received cross-party support. Significantly, law and order and the rising crime rate did not figure prominently during the election campaign and commentators began to argue that as a consequence of this ‘new realism’ it would be much more difficult to mobilize a moral panic about crime and disorder.

However, in February 1993 this changed dramatically when two ten-year-old boys were charged with the abduction and murder of two-year-old James Bulger. Suddenly Britain was plunged into a debate that moved rapidly from asking how and why such a crime should happen to an intense examination by politicians, church leaders, academics (including Geoffrey Pearson) and television pundits of the moral state of the nation. This in turn led to a more focused discussion about what to do with those held responsible for this state of affairs—juvenile offenders.

**The heart of darkness: moral crisis or moral panic?**
The discussion surrounding the James Bulger murder indicates how the Davies–Pearson debate has continuing relevance in the 1990s because, in many respects it was conducted within the framework of their debate. The media was saturated with editorials, discussion pieces and comments from panels of authoritative figures. And it is possible to identify two very different positions roughly corresponding to the debate which are central to Unit 29.

The dominant position was constructed around images of the violent society, with headlines such as ‘The brutality of Britain’, ‘Nation’s morale approaching a crisis’, ‘The presence of evil’, ‘Nation searches its soul’ and ‘Crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation’s moral fabric’. A consensus quickly emerged that this inexplicable murder was symptomatic of a moral achesness which had gripped British society and there was widespread support for Kenneth Baker’s comment that, with such a death, ‘You are beyond the edge of evil, you are in the heart of darkness’. The blame was laid at the door of the collapse of traditional values, loss of community, loss of morality; a perilous undermining of traditional institutions and social relationships, abusive and inadequate parenting; moral and cultural impoverishment; an ineffective criminal justice system and the emergence of a dangerous underclass. History was also revisited to find the roots of this demoralization process.

Christine Davies, Professor of Sociology at Reading University, argued, in a manner similar to Stephen Davies, that in the late nineteenth century a process of moral reform had ‘transformed Britain from a violent, dishonest and addicted society into a law-abiding, respectable and essentially moral realm’. However, in the post-war period this orderly moral community began to collapse under increasing crime rates, rising illegitimacy rates, alcohol and drug abuse. He argued that the source of the problem was the fashionable 1960s’ view that these were not moral problems but social problems caused by bad housing, poverty or unemployment.

Where their ancestors saw the just as being those who gave others their due according to their moral deserts and who chose civility over brutality, the members of today’s middle-class minority have instead elevated the nebulous concept of social justice.
Social justice is the stuff of which self-righteous and inconsiderate gesture politics is made, and provides little guidance to the ordinary person on how to lead a moral existence. 'Social Justice' had the kind of tenuous link with justice that social worker has with worker. To rob a word of its meaning, all that is needed is to add 'social' to it. These progressives have created a culture, not merely of moral confusion, but of moral excuses. (Sunday Times, 21 February, 1993)

There were attempts to present a different perspective on the seriousness of violence in British society and the murder of children. Certain commentators, criminologists and newspapers pointed out that Britain was in the midst of a periodic moral panic rather than a moral crisis, as in the article by Martin Kettle, reprinted as Figure 22.
It was also pointed out that the fears about the nation’s children were irrational. Evidence was produced to show that Britain has one of the lowest murder rates in the world: 1.3 per 100,000 as compared with 10 per 100,000 in the US. The number of children murdered every year is very low. In 1991, 74 under-fives were murdered, with the number having remained static for a decade. The motiveless murder of children is extremely rare: in 1991 there were no children aged under five killed by strangers. Children are much more likely to be killed and/or abused by their parents and relatives. However, in an atmosphere that demanded that British society should ‘condemn a little more and understand a little less’, such arguments and statistical evidence failed to stem public anxieties. As an editorial in the *Independent on Sunday* argued,

> The sense of decline, the belief that our society is crumbling, grows stronger each time we are forced to ask ‘what are we going to?’ Toreth, Heyssel, Hungerford and now Booth – no amount of social history can convince us that these events have precedents. Football supporters have noted before, but not to the extent of committing mass slaughter. Children had been murdered before but toddlers had not been abducted in broad daylight from a busy shopping centre and marched to their deaths through crowded streets. The Bulger case has become a powerful symbol of our collective helplessness, of a malaise that goes beyond a single case, beyond even the crime figures. (*The Independent on Sunday, 28 February 1993*)

Given the context, it is not surprising that the government came under pressure to act on the unacceptable crime wave. The Labour party tried to occupy the moral high ground on law and order by declaring itself to be ‘tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime’ and arguing, in a manner similar to Stephen Davies, that individuals had to have clear rules concerning what was right and what was wrong and stressed the need to return to community, family and spiritual values.

> A solution to this disintegration doesn’t simply lie in legislation. It must come from the rediscovery of a sense of direction as a country and most of all from not being afraid to start talking once again about the values and principles we believe in and what they mean for us, not just as individuals but as a country. We cannot exist in a moral vacuum. If we do not learn and then teach the value of what is right and what is wrong, then the result is simply moral chaos which engulfs us all. (*Blair, quoted in The Independent, 20 February 1993*)

Tony Blair’s statements in effect heralded the consolidation of the shift to a post-Thatcher consensus on ‘law and order’ and the media now congratulated the Labour party’s coming of age on this politically vexatious issue.
However, the government did not focus on the wider moral and social questions raised by James Bulger’s death. John Major’s crusade against crime fastened onto that traditional object of opprobrium – the juvenile delinquent – the evil mirror-image of the innocent child. In order to do so, politicians and significant sections of the media had to ignore Home Office statistics which showed that there had not been an explosion in juvenile crime. Teenage crime reached an official peak in 1985 when the number of known offenders aged under eighteen reached 284,000. This subsequently fell to 185,000 by 1991. Critics argued that the statistics were misleading because the number of under-eighteens, as a proportion of population, had fallen by nearly 20 per cent during the 1980s, much juvenile crime goes unrecorded and that there had been a significant increase in the use of unrecorded informal warnings by the police. Senior police officers argued that if all these factors were taken into account the ‘true’ rate of juvenile offending was 54 per cent higher in 1990 than in 1980. Debate was also renewed about the small ‘hardcore’ of persistent young offenders and ‘bail bandits’ who were held to be responsible for the vast majority of petty offences and who were beyond the reach of the law because of the changes brought about by the Criminal Justice Act. 1991 The official statistics, which indicate that there are only 106 persistent offenders in England and Wales, were again attacked for misrepresenting the true nature of the problem. West Yorkshire Police, for example, argued that, according to Home Office statistics, they only had ten persistent offenders, but force statistics indicated that there were in fact at least sixty such offenders. The newspapers were able to construct ‘rogues’ galleries’ of incorrigible urchins from all over Britain who were supposedly responsible for hundreds of crimes. A disgruntled judiciary took the opportunity to condemn Section 29 of the Criminal Justice Act which, it was claimed, prevented courts from taking previous convictions or more than two offences into account when deciding what sentence should be passed. It was argued that as a consequence the government’s ‘punishment in the community’ policies were resulting in ‘punishment of the community’ by these young thugs.

The practical outcome of the renewed debate about the need to tough on crime was a package of measures to deal with young offenders. Legislation will be introduced to provide courts with the powers to impose a secure training order, for up to two years, on 12–15 year olds convicted of three imprisonable offences. They will be housed in five new secure training units which will put a premium on discipline and re-education. The police will be issued with guidelines concerning the overuse of cautions. Education authorities will be given a statutory duty to combat truancy by providing special educational provision and new guidelines are being drawn up to tighten up control of children in residential accommodation run by local authority social service departments.

**Conclusion**

The issues established in the Pearson–Davies debate have not gone away. If anything, contemporary arguments about crime and ‘the state of Britain’ have made them even more visible. At the same time, the problems of evidence and argument remain difficult ones: What sorts of evidence are available? What does such evidence tell us? How can we distinguish between a ‘moral crisis’ and a ‘moral panic’?

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You might find it helpful to summarise these issues in relation to both the Pearson–Davies debate and the contemporary concern about crime in the following grid.

You might also think about your own reactions to these arguments. What is your assessment of the debate? What evidence would you use to support it? What about contradictory evidence? What do you think should happen as a consequence? Why?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral crisis</th>
<th>Moral panic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The debate about moral order and moral crisis is a continuing one. The arguments are usually organized around the question of whether ‘traditional morality’ is in decline or in crisis. Yet there are other arguments that do not accept that traditional morality is the only basis for moral order and suggest that different moralities might form the basis of a common national culture. Our final extract in this section is an article (from *The Guardian*) by John Gray. In it, he is critical of conservative claims about traditional morality and the need to ‘revitalize’ it. Instead, he argues that it is possible to see the basis of a new ‘common culture’.

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*Read the article by John Gray reproduced as Figure 23.*

1. *What are his criticisms of conservative claims about ‘traditional morality’?*
2. *What does he see as the elements of a new ‘common culture’?*
3. *What evidence might there be to support his views?*
5.2 Unit 30: Course Review

Unit 30 provides a way of looking back on your work on the course as a whole. It is intended to draw out some of the key themes and issues arising in a social science approach to the study of social problems and social welfare. The unit is associated with TV16, 'Social problems and social welfare', which takes the debate between Stephen Davies and Geoffrey Pearson further to raise more general questions about the role of the social sciences. It is also linked to the final audio-cassette (Audio-cassette 6, Side B) which also presents a review of the course.

Before you read Unit 30, however, you should read the final chapter from the Course Reader: 'The contribution of social science' by Jennifer Platt. Her chapter identifies and responds to a range of criticisms which are levelled at social sciences. She discusses the contribution which it has made to contemporary attitudes and ways of thinking. In particular, she challenges the claim that social science is often no more than the reflection of preconceived prejudices.

You should now read the chapter by Platt in the Course Reader. While reading, you might find it helpful to focus on the following questions:
1. What are the main arguments which Platt identifies as being directed at social science?
2. What are the main points of her response to these attacks?
3. Can social science free itself from political partisanship or simple bias?
4. What role can social science play in relation to public opinion?
5. Is social science necessary?

Now that you have read Platt's chapter, you can move on to the very last unit of D211. This also marks the end of The Hitchhiker's Guide to D211.

You should now read Unit 30, watch the associated television programme (TV16) and listen to Audio-cassette 6, Side B. All of these should prove helpful in your preparation of the final TMA as well as your revision for the D211 examination.
References


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Figures

Tables