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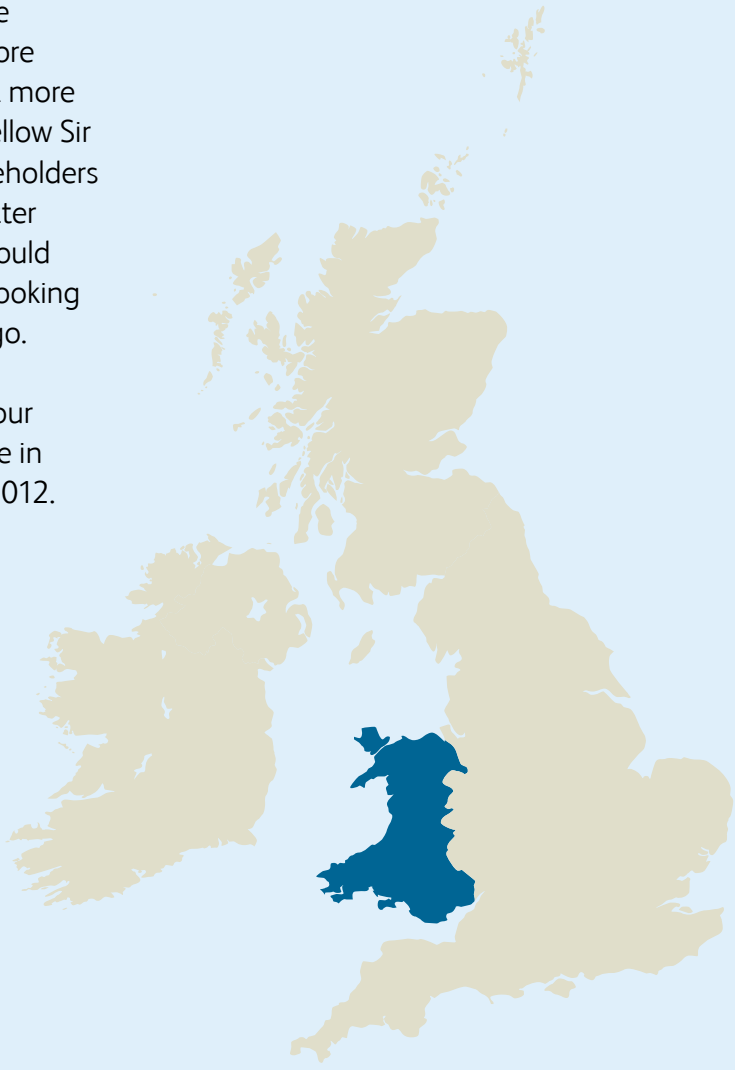
The Enabling State in Wales

Key issues raised at our Cardiff *Enabling State* roundtable on 4 December 2012 at Cardiff City Hall

The UK and the Republic of Ireland have experienced huge improvements in wellbeing in the last 100 years, however a number of complex social problems persist. Could a new relationship between the state and individuals hold the key to solving these difficult social problems?

The Carnegie UK Trust believes we are at the beginning of a fundamental shift toward more empowered citizens and communities and a more enabling state. With the help of Carnegie Fellow Sir John Elvidge we are engaging with key stakeholders across the UK and Republic of Ireland to better understand this movement and what this would mean for public service delivery. We will be looking for opportunities for shared learning as we go.



This report summarises the issues raised at our round table discussion on the Enabling State in Cardiff at Cardiff City Hall on 4 December 2012. Roundtable discussions were also held in Belfast, Dublin, Newcastle, Dunfermline and London during December 2012 – February 2013.

We hope you find the report of interest and we would be pleased to hear your views. Please contact Jenny Brotchie, Policy Officer at jenny@carnegieuk.org or on 01383 749757. You can find our discussion paper here.

1. The Welsh context

Discussions about a greater role for communities in delivering public services have ebbed and flowed over many decades in Wales.

In the early 1990's there was much discussion about moving local authorities away from their traditional role primarily as producers to a role with a greater emphasis on enabling or empowering. The concept of the 'enabling local authority' took on negative associations in Wales however when UK Government Ministers of the time appropriated the term to talk about the radical privatisation of public services. Nevertheless local authorities in Wales began to pioneer the local authority's role as a community leader. Much was made at that time of the proposition in the 7th century bardic tales of the Mabinogion: 'A fo ben bid bont, He who would be a leader, let him be a bridge'. Community leadership was defined as providing the bridges that allowed the interaction of citizens and communities in fulfilling social purposes.

In the first decade of devolution after 1999 the Welsh Government began to set out its own distinctive programme for public service reform. Key documents included the 2004: 'Making the Connections' and 'Beyond Boundaries: citizen centred local services for Wales'. Stress was put on the role of the citizen in defining the content of public services and the responsibility of providers to collaborate in developing responses to citizens. In contrast to reform agendas elsewhere in the UK the language was of 'citizen' rather than 'consumer', 'collaboration' rather than 'competition', 'network' rather than 'market'.

There has been some concern more recently that when issues of public service delivery become contentious the Welsh Government can revert to hierarchical structures and top-down rather than bottom-up solutions. At the same time however, there is evidence of a genuine, growing interest in more diverse approaches such as social enterprises and wider innovation both within and outside the Welsh Government

How can this shift be nurtured so that the reponse to the fiscal crisis is to enable and encourage innovation rather than to shift toward more top down styles of government in Wales?

Paul Griffiths, Carnegie Advisor in Wales

Discussion in Cardiff

Roundtable members in Wales

2. Key Themes

The discussions at the Cardiff roundtable centred around three key themes:

- A common vision for government and new forms of political accountability
- The boundaries of the state
- The dilemma of equality and consistency

The issues covered within these themes are expanded upon in Sections 2.1 – 2.3.

2.1 A common vision for government and new forms of political accountability

It was felt unlikely that new models of public service delivery could offer any improvements to our collective wellbeing unless change is driven by a common vision rather than financial pressures alone. Settling on a common goal, which may be growing collective wellbeing, should be the first step in public service reform.

It was recognised however that while a common goal may help set the conditions for effective joined up government, truly joined up, innovative government means fundamental changes in relationships within government and between the state and citizens.

Current assumptions about political accountability can inhibit change and innovation within Welsh public services. When it is assumed, for example, that a minister is accountable for all public service delivery the space to innovate often gets constrained by the pressure upon the minister to control. Creating new relationships between citizen and state requires changes in both the culture and the processes of political accountability.

A reward system constructed around attempts at innovation rather than punishing failure may be the answer.

2.2. The boundaries of the state

Wales has often been perceived as 'statist' in its approach to public services with a tendency to centralise rather than devolve services and control. This perception was reinforced for some by the decision in 2005 to absorb three major quangos into the Welsh Government: The Welsh Development Agency, ELWa (the agency for the funding of post 16 education and the tourist board) and the Wales Tourist Board. The decision not to marketise schools and hospitals through academies and foundations further confirmed the statist approach of the Welsh Government for many.

Supporters of these decisions however, claim that the absorption of the quangos was simply a re-arrangement of the centre of Welsh Government, rather than a step towards further centralisation and that in the case of schools and hospitals, decentralised networks were being facilitated rather than markets. The creation in 2001 of Dwr Cymru (Welsh Water) as a not-for profit social enterprise, distinguishable from both a shareholder company and a public corporation is often held up as a good example of where the Welsh Government has opted for a distinctly non-centralised approach.

Local government in Wales has had an uncertain role in recent years. At times the Welsh Government has sought a partnership with local government in which outcomes are agreed and space is left for local delivery and local innovation. At other times Welsh Government adopts a competitive or hierarchical relationship with local government which it then seeks to diminish or control.

Discussions about big government touch on where the boundaries lie between personal lives and state run services. Some participants felt quite strongly that the state had no role in our personal relationships. Others argued that given the significant impact on wellbeing of issues such as anxiety and loneliness, the state had a role here particularly if a preventative approach to public service delivery is to be

delivered. Indeed the state already touches on these more personal aspects of our lives by funding services such as Relate.

2.3. The dilemma of equality and consistency

There is significant inequality in citizen voice and capacity in Wales. In some areas individuals and communities are very capable of taking on a more active role in shaping and delivering public services, in other areas however communities require additional support.

The development of sporting activity for example, relies to a very large extent on the widespread contribution of volunteers in communities. There is a tendency however for such volunteering to be concentrated in more affluent communities. To bridge these gaps in community capacity and confidence an enabling state would have to be deliberate in using state resources to equalise and redistribute capacity.

This will mean that on occasions programmes may have to be selective rather than universal. This move away from a consistent approach and process in turn raises concerns about equality and challenges in ensuring quality delivery.

There is certainly healthy debate and interest in Wales about community driven approaches and a historic language of community leadership to draw upon.

3. What would an Enabling State look like in Wales?

Over the past few decades in Wales there have been many notable episodes in the developing theory and practice in the inter-relationship of the state and citizens, such as:

- Developing the community leadership role of local authorities
- Developing a model of community ownership in social housing
- Developing a localist approach to community regeneration
- Introducing a social enterprise model for the provision of water
- Developing a collaborative or networked approach to public service delivery
- Creating networks of practitioners to innovate around co-ownership
- Debating a 'total place' approach to public service resourcing

Positive as these experiences have been, there remain concerns, inevitably, about countervailing tendencies in the development of public services in Wales

This continued tension makes Wales receptive to the debate on the 'Enabling State' and now may be a good time to fundamentally review which public services the state should be delivering in the 21st century Wales. There was agreement amongst participants that there may be many public services which are no longer appropriate or necessary and equally others areas of our lives where the state should perhaps have a greater role. Gaps in the market often mark gaps in social provision and may be helpful in this analysis. The rise in pay day lenders was cited as an example.

There was a feeling amongst participants that the terms 'rights and responsibilities' had been seized by the right and risked shutting down conversations about individual and community responsibilities in Wales. But general agreement that nonetheless this was an important conversation to be had. There was a strong feeling that reasonable expectations about

individual responsibilities had to be fair and recognise diverse social, economic and cultural contexts. The assumption that it is reasonable to expect everyone to be able to maintain a healthy weight or diet was not considered fair or realistic and could lead to a culture of 'finger pointing' or blame. It was suggested that talking about individual and community 'contributions' might be a more positive and productive framework within which to have the conversation in Wales.

Sir John Elvidge sums up the discussion

The success in raising rates of recycling was identified as a good example of the 'Enabling State' in action in Wales. Here central and local government negotiated agreements on the outcomes to be achieved. Local authorities engaged citizens in the aims of recycling, supporting a wide sense of shared responsibility between citizens and state, and provided the technologies that allowed citizens to segregate their own waste. Other examples of good practice include co-produced care programmes in Swansea.

4. Next Steps

Our engagement with stakeholders in each jurisdiction is now complete. We are now carrying out an extensive literature review and seeking out practical examples of an enabling state in action. Our findings will inform our final enabling state project outputs which we expect to publish in summer 2013.

You can keep up to date with our progress by visiting our enabling state project page and by following @CarnegieUKTrust, #enablingstate on Twitter.

To sign up to our Enabling State newsletter please get in touch with Jenny Brotchie, Policy Officer at jenny@carnegieuk.org.

Cardiff Roundtable Attendees

Megan Mathias, Kafka Brigade
Michael Trickey, Welsh Public Services 2025
Laura McAllister, Sports Wales
Victoria Winckler, Bevan Foundation
Ruth Dineen, Co-production Training UK
Sue Essex, Former Minister for Finance and Public Services
Nick Bennett, Community Housing Cymru
Angharad Richards, Commission on Devolution in Wales
Martyn Evans, Carnegie UK Trust
Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust
Sir John Elvidge, Carnegie Fellow
Paul Griffiths, Carnegie Advisor in Wales
Jenny Brotchie, Carnegie UK Trust

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913 and we are delighted to be celebrating our centenary in 2013. Please see our website for further information on our centenary plans.

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