








Engaging students with social policy

For many students taking a module in social policy is something of an unknown quantity. Those who have selected pathways in social work and social policy may already have an interest and curiosity in the discipline. However, students who have selected pathways in psychology, economics, history, english, politics, nursing, or criminology may have a vague notion of what social policy is. One of the main challenges facing any lecturer in social policy is therefore 'to bring social policy to life to a range of people whose interest level may be markedly different' (Zoe Irving, University of Sheffield). This short guide includes comments and recommendations shared via the social policy JISCmail list and in interviews with social policy colleagues.

Top tips

-  Try to structure the curriculum so that students can see the relevance of social policy in their particular area of practice
-  Make social policy relevant by illustrating current policy debates in the media
-  Make social policy relevant by using policy which directly affects students (e.g. higher education policy and income support) to illustrate points
-  Underline the fact that social policy is about human wellbeing (positive things) not just about social problems and burdens (negative things) †
-  Emphasise that social policy is MASSIVE. A lot of money is spent on social policy issues. It is inherent in every aspect of our lives. In terms of context it is global †
-  Emphasise that social policy is both creative (because it is concerned with policy making or 'invention') and genuinely inter- and multidisciplinary (because it borrows from across the social sciences) †
-  Articulate the ways in which social policy is a subject that goes to the heart of what matters: how do we as human beings care for and about each other? †

One of a series of short learning and teaching guides designed by SWAP to support learning and teaching in social policy and social work. Each guide includes some top tips, more detailed information on their application in practice and a list of further resources.



Making social policy relevant

- 'Try to make social policy as relevant as possible' (Hugh Bochel, University of Lincoln)
- 'It starts from the students and what they have gone through themselves' (Vanessa Cookson, former student, University of Nottingham)
- 'Show students how their experience of social policy in the real world is relevant to their understanding of social policy in an academic setting' (Kirstein Rummery, University of Stirling)



The above quotations are taken from a series of video resources on ways to engage students with social policy.

www.swap.ac.uk/resources/digitalresources/video.html#engage

“Most people have a great deal of experience of social policy... having been through education, [or] have relatives who have used the NHS”

(Zoe Irving, University of Sheffield)

Policy awareness raising

Lecture exercise

Introduce a weekly 'hot policy topic' at the beginning of each lecture (5-10 minutes), which is relevant to the students' lives or practice. Focus each 'hot policy topic' session on a recent publicly controversial social policy issue that has the capacity to divide opinion or may be hard to resolve. These issues can be followed up in groups.

(Paul Henman, University of Queensland)

Using case studies

Use universal case studies to show how the welfare state impacts directly on students. For example cervical cancer screening can be used to discuss gender in the welfare state, how GPs get paid, citizenship rights and duties (is it your fault if you die of cancer and didn't go to the screening and should the NHS therefore not treat you?), healthcare organisation, employment and professional hierarchies in the welfare state, welfare and state-citizen relationships, resources, demand management, neo-liberalism.....

(Kirstein Rummery, University of Stirling)

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Keeping social policy live

- Use short video extracts from news items, documentaries or soaps to encourage student interest in current issues. (Pauline Prior, University of Ulster).
- Use history to show how social policies have shaped the nature of the whole contemporary world. (David Byrne, University of Durham)
- Point out websites where issues are debated or lobbied e.g. professional organisations, trade unions, political parties. (Pauline Prior, University of Ulster).
- Groupwork teaches students to listen to other disciplines and other views. (Kirsten Rummery, University of Stirling)
- Invite students to think about topics as problems which need solving. This helps them to work their way round an issue in addition to debating and can work well in groups. (Nick Ellison, University of Leeds)

“hold and develop interest by providing learning activities that engage students and require them to find out more”

(Anne Hollows, Sheffield Hallam University)

Policy decision making

Group exercises

Split the students into two groups and outline a scenario such as: 'A town faces an influx of ex-patients from a long stay psychiatric hospital.' Ask one group to advise the pro-patient lobby and the other the anti-patient lobby.

(Anne Hollows, Sheffield Hallam University)

Divide the group into those majoring in social policy and those majoring in social work. Provide each group with the same brief such as 'distribute an arbitrary amount of money (say £10,000) amongst different individuals with different needs'. For example, a disabled woman who needs adaptations to her house following a smoking related illness and who refuses to give up smoking and a teenager from a troubled background who needs money to do a training course. Ensure there are more individuals than funds. I thoroughly enjoyed this task

(Al Duffell, student at University of York)



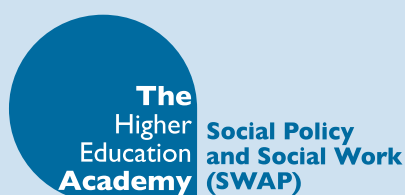
Further resources

Web resources

- **What is social policy?** Five interviews recorded at the Social Policy Association Annual Conference 2007. www.swap.ac.uk/resources/digitalresources/video.html
- **Engaging social policy students.** Videos of prominent academics talking about the ways in which they use lectures and groupwork to engage social policy students. www.swap.ac.uk/resources/digitalresources/video.html
- **SWAP case studies.** Examples of interdisciplinary learning and teaching. Such as 'the politics of education policy in the UK'. www.swap.ac.uk/resources/pubs/casestudies/casestudies.html
- **OpenLearn: welfare.** Free materials from Open University courses. These include activities, audio files and photographs. <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/course/search.php?search=welfare>
- **Spoken Word.** A compilation of audio resources including a substantial portion of the BBC's radio archive. Relevant topics include: the making of the welfare state, the impact of devolution on the social policy context of Scotland and the changing role of women in British society. www.spokenword.ac.uk/
- **NHS at 60:** interactive time line showing the history of the NHS since its inception in 1948 with accompanying photographs and video of an early public broadcast. www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/NHSTimeline.aspx?Tag=
- **Policy Review TV.** Speeches, discussions, question and answer sessions and interviews with senior figures from government, politics and business. www.policyreview.tv/system.php

Books and Journals

- Dean, Hartley (2006) *Social Policy*, Polity
- Heron, E. and McManus, M. (2003) 'Political literacy and the teaching of social policy. A study into the political awareness and political vocabularies of first year undergraduates', *Social Policy and Society*, 2 (1), pp. 23-32.
- Weiss, I., Gal, J. and Katan, J. (2006) 'Social policy for social work: a teaching agenda', *British Journal of Social Work*, (36), pp789-806.
- Young, P. (2004) 'Teaching social policy in servicing contexts' *SPA News*, June 2004, p.29.



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