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Abstract  Public policy for people with an intellectual disability has been shaped since 1945 by universalistic ideas of human rights and social inclusion. These universalistic ideas are increasingly under challenge from consumerist ideas, which is reflected in public policy in the New Public Management (NPM). NPM involves a critique of poor coordination and quality in public services, and proposes the enhancement of consumer choice through a greater diversity of providers and market mechanisms to allow consumers to select between them, partnership arrangements to improve coordination, and target-setting and monitoring by governments. NPM has been widely applied internationally in the reform of public services, and has been implemented for services for people with an intellectual disability in England, following the white paper Valuing People in 2002. There is limited research data on the outcome of this policy, but it indicates that: (1) enhanced choice to be achieved by person-centered planning has probably affected only a minority of those eligible and has not changed access to public services; and (2) partnership boards have primarily existed to convey and manufacture consent for centrally determined policies. These problems match those identified in surveys of NPM in other sectors, but there is an additional concern that the consumerist ideas incorporated in Valuing People may be used by governments to replace, rather than supplement, policies to directly enhance access to public services through such measures as antidiscrimination laws. The review indicates a need to assess policies for people with an intellectual disability, in a wider social context and through international comparative research.

Keywords: intellectual disabilities, new public management, public policy, Valuing People

UNIVERSALISM AND CONSUMERISM

Public policy for people with an intellectual disability has always confronted the most fundamental of political questions: the qualifications for citizenship (specifically, whether those deemed to be of impaired rationality can be citizens), and the extent to which even the most stigmatized groups in society can be considered worthy of determining their own way of life. As a result, public policies for people with intellectual disabilities (and hence, the way in which people with intellectual disabilities are depicted) have been shaped by the dominant political ideologies of the day. After 1945, the defeat of the axis of states espousing racist ideologies led to the political dominance of universalistic ideas of human rights, as expressed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR; United Nations, 1994), followed by the European Convention of Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950). Key elements in the universal declarations of rights were the concept of active citizenship and equal access to public services. The UDHR included the right of all to take part in the government of their country, which should base its authority on the will of the people expressed in periodic and genuine elections (Article 21). It also specified a right of equal access to public services (Article 21), a right to social security (Article 22), and a right to education (Article 26). These rights were not fully implemented in all countries, but many expanded welfare services, and aspired to provide social security and education for all their citizens.

Although none of the initial declarations of rights specifically mentioned disabled people, the principle of human rights was subsequently expanded by the United Nations to include the 1971 Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, the 1975 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (United Nations, 1994), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). These declarations of rights not only involved an emphatic statement that universal rights applied to the aforementioned groups, but also required governments to provide specific services to ensure that disabled people would be able to exercise their rights. These were specified in detail in the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, approved by the United Nations in 1991 (United Nations, 1994).