

A Guide to Key Sources on UK Social Policy

○ Introduction

Information on UK social policy issues comes from a wide variety of sources. This Guide organizes them in terms of four general types of provider:

- ❖ [Academic](#)
- ❖ [Government](#)
- ❖ [Foundations, government-funded bodies, think-tanks, and pressure groups](#)
- ❖ [Commercial](#)

Designed for both undergraduates doing small-scale research projects and assignments and their postgraduate counterparts engaged in more substantive investigations for essays and dissertations, it describes the range of materials offered by providers in each category and the means of accessing their different sources.

○ Key Academic Sources

❖ **Social Policy Journals and Reviews**

There are a number of 'generic' UK social policy journals offering articles across the spectrum of welfare issues from funding to the delivery of benefits and services. These include

- *Critical Social Policy*
- *Global Social Policy*
- *Journal of Social Policy*
- *Policy and Politics*
- *Policy Studies*
- *Public Money & Management*
- *Social Policy and Society*
- *Social Policy and Administration*
- *Social Policy Review*
- *The Political Quarterly*
- *Work, Employment, and Society*

Others offer a more thematic coverage, such as

- *Ageing and Society*
- *British Journal of Criminology*
- *British Journal of Social Work*
- *Disability and Society*
- *Housing Studies*
- *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*
- *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*
- *Journal of Poverty and Justice*
- *Journal of Youth Studies*
- *UK Housing Review*
- *Voluntary Sector Review*

Many journals are now only/also accessible in electronic formats to registered subscribers. Check with your university or college library as to the licensed agreements it holds.

❖ Bibliographic Databases, Digests, and Dictionaries

■ Bibliographic Databases

The databases listed below provide a time-saving way of searching for relevant research material. They draw together and classify many thousands of social policy articles, reports and books, typically providing abstracts or summaries of each publication (although some libraries also provide full text articles). Most require subscription, so again check with your university or college library as to whether it has access to these sites.

ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts): A subscription database that provides abstracts covering areas such as: criminology; education; health; housing and social services among other relevant areas.

Care Knowledge: A subscription database that provides news, summaries of policies and articles on social care and social work practice.

IBSS (International Bibliography of the Social Sciences): A subscription database offering broad coverage of international social science topics, including: crime; education; housing; health and social care.

Social Care Online: A free access database provided by the Social Care Institute for Excellence. It contains references to articles, books, reports and legislation on all aspects of social care, social welfare and social policy.

Social Policy & Practice: A subscription database of abstracts (with links to full-text materials) covering: social policy; public health; social services; mental and community health.

■ Digests

There are two key UK digests for social policy, organized in slightly different ways, providing current information on UK funding, provision, and practice.

Social Policy Digest Online (www.journals.cambridge.org/spd/action/home) is a free-access site offering synopses of recent developments across the whole UK social policy field – it also covers European issues.

Welfare Reform on the Web (www.bl.uk/welfarereform) is also a free site that provides a set of abstracts (with full bibliographic references) collected from government publications, think-tanks, pressure groups and newspapers focusing on debates on recent or proposed welfare changes.

■ Dictionaries

The *Blackwell Dictionary of Social Policy* is the major dictionary in this discipline; it is a sister volume to the *Companion* offering definitions of key terms and concepts. Some introductory texts also provide glossaries including the web-entry on this site.

❖ University-Based Sources

Many UK universities and colleges have research centres undertaking investigations on different aspects of social policy and publishing their analyses on their web sites in the form of 'briefing notes', 'working papers', 'interim', or 'final reports'. The simplest way of checking what is available is to go to the home page of a university web site and then search by 'department' for example, 'applied social studies' or subject, for example, 'social policy'; this usually reveals the research centres or research groups operating and their repositories of research papers. To provide just a few examples: the University of Edinburgh (www.ed.ac.uk) has research groups in social policy working in the areas of: families, children, and welfare; policy and governance; global public health; and work, economy, and welfare. Each research group lists its staff membership, current research, and key recent publications. The London School of Economics (www2.lse.ac.uk) has a 'Research Online' icon on its home page that allows access to listings of research papers (some full text) via LSE author, research centre/group, or year of publication. The University of Birmingham (www.birmingham.ac.uk) has an Institute of Social Policy, which has three research groups – families, communities, and social justice; health and social care; and wealth, welfare, and well-being. It hosts two research centres: the Centre on Household Assets and Savings Management (CHASM) and, in collaboration with other Universities (see below), the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) both of which have listings of staff members, current research, and publications. The Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York (www.york.ac.uk) lists current research, staff, and abstracts of publications (some of which are also available as full text items).

❖ Collaborative University Sources

- The UK Data-Archive (www.data-archive.ac.uk)
Based at the University of Essex, it is the 'largest curator of digital data' in the social sciences and humanities with over 5000 collections. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), and the University of Essex, it collects, stores, and disseminates both quantitative and qualitative data produced by academic researchers, government departments, intergovernmental organizations, independent research institutes, and market-research organizations. Relevant social policy datasets can be browsed and searched through its sister web site *Economic and Social Data Service* (www.esds.ac.uk). Although guidance is provided, it is assumed that users are competent in the handling of one or more data-software packages. Quantitative microdata are usually made available in SPSS, Stata, and tab-delimited formats, while macrodata can typically be viewed and analysed in Microsoft Excel. Qualitative research materials can be downloaded in Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, or RFT formats. To access these sources, students either must be a member of a UK institution of higher and further education that is registered with UK Data-Archive (check with your tutor or library) or, if the institution is not registered, must apply personally for a username and password.
- Economic and Social Research Council (www.esrc.ac.uk)
The Economic and Social Research Council is the largest organization funding UK academic research on economic and social issues. Its main social-policy-relevant threads are on: the global economy; health and well-being; and social diversity. It also collaborates with other research councils as in the initiative on poverty alleviation. It publishes two magazines, *Society Now* and *Britain in 2011*, to showcase the diversity of its funded projects and their outcomes as well as research reports and evidence briefings. All are accessible on the web site and downloadable free as PDF files.
- History & Policy Web site (www.historyandpolicy.org.uk)
This collaborative project involving historians at Cambridge, King's College, London, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine seeks to demonstrate the relevance of history

to contemporary policymaking. It has published papers on: charities, volunteering, and civil society; criminal justice; education; families and children; medicine and public health; the NHS and social care; pensions; and policing and emergency services. All are accessible on its web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files.

■ Third Sector Research Centre (www.tsrc.ac.uk)

The Centre is a joint venture between the Universities of Birmingham and Southampton with contributions from the Universities of Kent and Middlesex. Its aim is to develop an important resource for practitioners, policymakers, and academics through both the examination of past evidence and the undertaking of new research on Third Sector policies and practices. Its publications include briefing papers, working papers, and reports, which are accessible on the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files. It also hosts *The Third Sector Knowledge Portal* (at the above address) an online library and web catalogue developed in partnership with the British Library.

○ Key UK Government Sources

In the course of undertaking their activities, the UK government and its departments, the national administrations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and local authorities are required to collect and analyse data on a variety of social policy issues. This creates a bank of research resources that are available in text and/or numerical formats for further investigation.

❖ UK Central Government Sources

- Office of National Statistics (www.ons.gov.uk)
The Office of National Statistics is the largest single statistical provider collecting, compiling, and disseminating numerical information about the United Kingdom's society and economy. Publications: Among its numerous publications are: the decennial census; reports; survey analyses, statistical bulletins, digests, and trends. It provides the evidence-base for most Government policy decision-making and therefore publishes information on a wide variety of social policy topics. It conducts and publishes its own research (e.g., the *Integrated Household Survey*, the *Family Resources Survey*, the *Life Opportunities Survey*, the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings* and the *Labour Force Survey*) as well as undertaking commissioned research for other government departments, such as the *Health Survey of England* for the Department of Health. Access to the aggregated census and statistical data, as well as the survey reports, is via the web address above, and all the information can be downloaded free as PDF files. The datasets for many surveys can now be accessed through the *UK Data-Archive* web site (see the Academic Resources section of this guide).
- Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk)
Directgov provides introductory information (in a read-only format) on a range of social policy areas, including: benefits; crime and justice; disability; education; employment; health and pensions.
- Data.gov.uk (www.data.gov.uk)
Data.gov.uk is a collection of over 5000 datasets from all central government departments and a number of other public-sector bodies and local authorities, some of which could be of relevance to social policy students. The site provides guidance on how to access and manipulate the raw data to construct trends and how to compare the policy decisions of different departments.
- Info4local.gov.uk (www.info4local.gov.uk)
Info4local is designed for local government staff and contains information (in a read-only format) on a wide-range of recent central government policies and decisions, including those on: benefits; education and skills; health, well-being and care; housing; and public order, justice, and rights.
- The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)
This archive is the digital store of the UK Central Government web sites. Among the relevant categories of information for social policy students are: health, well-being, and care; people, community, and housing; home affairs, public order justice, and rights; and work, education, and skills. The documents are accessible via the site (or links), and many are downloadable as PDF files.
- Social Trends (www.ons.gov.uk)

Social Trends is often the first port of call for social policy data. It is an annual user-friendly web publication that draws together social and economic data from a variety of Government departments and other public bodies. It paints a broad numerical picture of UK society today and how it has changed over recent years. Its coverage includes statistics on: population; families and households; labour market; income and wealth; expenditure; crime and justice; health; lifestyles and social participation; and social protection.

❖ UK Government Department Sources

- Department for Business, Skills and Innovation (www.bis.gov.uk)
The Department for Business, Skills and Innovation has responsibility for achieving the Government's goal of sustained growth and higher skills across the economy. The social policy-relevant areas within this remit include: employment; further education and skills; higher education and lifelong learning.
Publications: Consultation documents, guidance, and research reports, which are accessible on the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (www.communities.gov.uk)
This Department is responsible for local government; communities and neighbourhood; housing and the homeless; building and the environment; planning; regeneration; and the fire services. Publications: Briefings; consultation documents; impact assessments; research and statistical reports. All are accessible on the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files or, occasionally, Microsoft Word files. It conducts the *English Housing Survey*, which is an important source of information on: household composition; economic status; education; health; housing history and aspirations; rent and mortgage payments; and attitudes to the neighbourhood. The survey's dataset is available from the *UK Data-Archive* (see the Academic Resources section of this Guide); its headline report presenting the key findings and the subsequent full report are also free as PDF files from the Department's web site.
- Department for Education (www.education.gov.uk)
The Department for Education is responsible for education and children's services in England. Publications: briefings; consultation documents; papers; research reports and statistics. It commissions and publishes surveys including the *Children and Early Years Provider Survey* as well as a number of evaluative assessments of different educational strategies. All are accessible on the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files. The web site also hosts the *Edubase* public portal that allows the search of educational establishments in England and Wales (from nurseries to colleges) by name, location, or type.
- Department for Health (www.dh.gov.uk)
The Department for Health is responsible for the provision, strategies, and standards of health and social care in England.
Publications: Booklets; consultation documents; leaflets; reports; surveys (including the *Health Survey for England*, *GP Patient Survey*, and *the NHS Staff Survey*) and statistical bulletins. All are accessible on the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files.

The NHS has its own information centre (www.ic.nhs.uk). Designed as a source of health and social care information for 'frontline decision-makers', it provides data on: audits and performance; health and lifestyles; hospital care; mental health; primary care; screening; social care; and the NHS and social care work-force. The site has also assumed responsibility for publishing a number of surveys previously published on the Department of Health site. These and statistical bulletins are also accessible on the web site and downloadable free as PDF files.

- Home Office (www.homeoffice.gov.uk)
The Home Office has responsibility for equalities; crime; drugs and alcohol; immigration, policing, and the voluntary sector.
Publications: Occasional papers; research reports and statistical bulletins. All are accessible from the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files. The Home Office also commissions and publishes the *British Crime Survey*, which is a key annual source of information on the prevalence and people's perceptions of crime. The survey's datasets are available from the *UK Data-Archive* (see the Academic Resources section of this Guide), and an analysis is provided in the Home Offices annual report *Crime in England and Wales*. There are less frequent crime surveys in Scotland and Northern Ireland (see the National Administration Sources section below).
- Ministry of Justice (www.justice.gov.uk)
The Ministry is responsible for criminal law, sentencing policy, prisons, probation, and parole.
Publications: Consultation papers; court statistics; guidance; impact assessments; legislation; policy reports and reviews (most of the reports are stored on the National Archive web site – see the address above). All are accessible from the web site or the National Archive and can be downloaded free as PDF files.
- Department of Work and Pensions (www.dwp.gov.uk)
The Department of Work and Pensions has responsibility for benefits reform; state and occupational pensions reform; return to work strategies; tackling child poverty; child maintenance and the ageing society.
Publications: Consultation documents; impact assessments; research reports; statistical bulletins and monthly statistical summaries. All are accessible on the web site and downloadable free as PDF files. The site also provides the facility to analyse the data from the *Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study* and its 5% sample surveys, offering guidance on access and the use of tabulation tools.

❖ National Administration Sources

The devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are responsible for a range of services and the research facilitating their policy decision-making.

- National Assembly Government of Wales (Llywodraeth Cymru) (www.wales.gov.uk)
The Welsh Government has responsibility for: children and young people's services; crime and social justice; education and lifelong learning, employment, and economic development; equality and diversity; health and social care; housing, and community and local government. It collects its own data on these themes and/or disaggregates information from broader UK surveys. Among its publications are: circulars, consultation papers; leaflets and strategy statements. These are available from the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files (or occasionally as Microsoft Word files). 'Statistics for Wales' is the main source of numerical information for the country and is available on the same web site.
- Northern Ireland Assembly (www.niassembly.gov.uk)
This is the devolved legislature for Northern Ireland. It is responsible for crime, police, and social justice; education; employment and lifelong learning; equality and diversity; health and social care, and housing. It publishes: briefing papers; circulars; consultation papers; leaflets; statistical reports and strategy documents. These are accessible from the web site and downloadable for

free as PDF files. Statistical information can be found on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency site at: www.nisra.gov.uk

- Scottish Government (Riaghaltas na h-Alba) (www.scotland.gov.uk).
The responsibilities of the Scottish Government include: communities and housing; crime and social justice; economic development; education; equality and diversity; health and social care; housing and community policy; and local government. It commissions and conducts research in each of these areas and publishes: audits; briefings; consultations; reports and surveys. All are available from this web site and downloadable free as PDF files; some statistics are also available in the Microsoft Excel format. The 'Statistics Service for Scotland' is the principal source of policy statistics and can be found as a field on the same site.

❖ Local Government Sources

Information on local government comes from a variety of sources.

- Local authorities in England and Wales provide information (in read-only or printable formats) about the benefits and services they offer residents. This includes details on council tax and benefits; children and family services; housing and planning; schools and education; and social care and health. Check each local authority for specific details on their services and resources.
- Scottish local authorities, like their English equivalents, largely provide information (in read-only or printable formats) for their residents about the range of services for which they are responsible. Services include: education (school, adult and community); economic development; housing; social work and community care; tackling poverty; and promoting social inclusion. Check each local authority for their specific resources and services.
- Northern Ireland's local councils do not carry out the same range of functions as those at a similar administrative level in other parts of the United Kingdom. 'Boards', for example, covering several local authority areas, are responsible for education, health and social care, and housing. Check the Boards and local authority sites themselves for detailed information on their services and resources.

An A–Z of county councils, borough and district councils and unitary authorities for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (with links) can be found at www.direct.gov.uk.

- Local Government Association (www.local.gov.uk)
The Local Government Association addresses the issues facing English and Welsh local authorities and their staff, including the impact of changes in central government funding and the reorganization of service provision. Its work covers such topics as: children and young people; the environment and housing; health, adult social care, and ageing; local government finance; and localism. Publications include media releases and reports. The reports can be downloaded free from the web site as PDF files.
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (www.cosla.gov.uk)
The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has a similar role to the LGA (above). It seeks to be the 'voice for local government in Scotland' and is committed to promoting local authorities as a key tier of governance. Its coverage includes: community well-being and safety; education, children, and young people; health and well-being; and regeneration and sustainable development. Publications include: media releases; newsletters and consultations which can be downloaded free from the web site as PDF files.

- Northern Ireland Local Government Association (www.nilga.org.uk)
The Northern Ireland Local Government Association represents the collective interests of elected members in local councils and facilitates the development of the sector. It publishes booklets, bulletins, newsletters, and weekly updates, which can be accessed on the web site and are downloadable free as PDF files.
- Audit Commission (www.audit-commission.gov.uk)
The Commission is a public corporation that has worked with local authorities in England and Wales (and their partners) to improve services for local people through its audit, inspection, and research activities. It has provided briefings and evaluative reports on a number of local authority services, which can be accessed from its web site and are downloadable free as PDF files.

At the time of writing (December 2011), the Government is considering out-sourcing the Commission's auditing and inspection functions to private-sector organizations, and it is unclear whether, as a consequence, the corporation will be disbanded or continue to exist with a more limited role. Keep reviewing its current web site to get further information on where its reports will be archived and whether reports from the firms that replace it will be publically available on the same terms.

- Audit-Scotland (www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)
Audit-Scotland undertakes a similar role to the Audit Commission. It publishes briefings and reports on the performance and finances of the Scottish local authorities. These are available from the web site and can be downloaded free of charge in RTF or PDF formats.
- New Local Government Network (www.nlgn.org.uk)
An independent research body committed to promoting the decentralization of power, enhancing local governance and empowering communities. It undertakes a range of sponsored research projects across the spectrum of funding and service issues. Some can be purchased as hard copy or PDF files from the web site; others are downloadable free of charge.

The Department for Communities and Local Government and the national administrations for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (web addresses above) will also carry detailed information and links for local governments on their respective sites.

○ Foundations, government-funded bodies, think-tanks, and pressure groups

An important feature of the UK social policy landscape is the range of foundations, government-funded bodies, think-tanks, and pressure groups undertaking their own investigations or commissioning research and publishing the outcomes with a view to shaping policy and influencing provision and practice.

❖ Foundations

Foundations usually derive their income from endowments, which provides a tax-exempt income for funding research. The key foundations supporting social policy research are:

- The Nuffield Foundation (www.nuffieldfoundation.org.uk) finances projects in areas such as: children and families; changing adolescence; tax, benefits, and employment; pensions; and the recession and poverty. Publications emanating from this research can be downloaded as PDF files from the web site.
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (www.jrf.org.uk) funds policy research that seeks to both understand social problems and identify ways of overcoming them. Recent research support has been for projects on homelessness; poverty; social housing; income inequality and health; the empowerment of disadvantaged groups; and community and community engagement. Most research projects provide detailed summaries downloadable from the web site, and the full publications can be purchased from the Foundation and/or in bookshops.
- The King's Fund (www.kingsfund.org.uk) is a key foundation in health-care research. Its mission is to understand how health care can be improved in order to shape policy and transform services. It undertakes and commissions research in a wide range of areas, including: acute and primary care; funding and finance; governance, accountability, and regulation; health inequalities; quality of care; technology and telecare; and work-force and professionalism. It produces blogs, press releases, briefing papers, articles, and reports, most of which are available free from its web site and accessible as PDF files.
- The Building and Housing Foundation (www.bshf.org.uk) sponsors and undertakes research on a broad range of UK and international projects. It has published reports on: housing benefits; the supply of new homes; provision for refugees, gypsies, and travellers; and the use of empty properties and community land trusts. Most of its reports are downloadable as PDF files.

❖ Government-funded bodies

The number of organizations in this grouping has receded rapidly with the changes in funding policy introduced by the Coalition Government. There are now just two key bodies working in the social policy field:

- Citizens' Advice (www.citizensadvice.org.uk) is a part-funded charity with responsibilities for consumer advice, education, and advocacy. Among the social policy areas it covers are: benefits and tax advice; credit and debt; education; employment; equality, diversity, and discrimination; health and social care; housing; criminal justice; and immigration and asylum matters. It publishes parliamentary briefings, reports, and a free quarterly journal, *Evidence*. All are accessible through its web site and downloadable as PDF files.

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission (www.equalityhumanrights.com) has a statutory remit to monitor and promote human rights and equality across the nine 'protected' grounds of: age; disability; gender; race; religion and belief; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; sexual orientation; and gender reassignment. It commissions and undertakes UK-wide research as well as specific investigations in England, Scotland, and Wales. Its briefing papers and published reports are free to read and download in either PDF or Word files.

❖ Think-tanks

Social-policy think-tanks are research institutes whose aims are to stimulate thought, promote debate, and influence government, the media, and the general public in determining welfare policy and practice. Their work typically ranges from speculative pieces (articles, think-pieces, and blogs) about welfare reform to analyses of key theoretical conceptions and evidence-based assessments. They are largely registered as charities or not-for-profit organizations and are typically funded by donations, subscriptions, and sponsorships (although the sources of funding in many instances are far from transparent). While most have no legal or formal affiliation with political parties, it is important to recognize that a number operate from ideological bases (linked either explicitly or, via shared vision and membership, with the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal parties), and this strongly influences both what they identify as policy problems and what they propose as solutions.

- Adam Smith Institute: (www.adamsmith.org)
 Perspective: A 'libertarian' think-tank linked to the right-wing of the Conservative Party. It seeks to expand choice and competition in the delivery of key welfare services by extending the influence of markets and redesigning public services to make them more responsive to consumers.
 Coverage includes: Benefits; criminal justice; education; health care; philosophy of welfare and social-care provision.
 Publications: Articles; blogs; briefing papers and reports available free from the web site – downloadable as PDF files.
- Centre Forum (www.centreforum.org)
 Perspective: Describes itself as a 'liberal think-tank', and although its advisory board has members from all three major UK political parties, it is primarily a forum for developing Liberal Party policies. Its key message is the creation of social justice through greater equality of opportunity.
 Coverage includes: Education; crime and social justice; family policy; health policy; social housing; and pensions.
 Publications: Briefing notes and reports. Available free from the web site as downloadable PDF files.
- Centre for Policy Studies (www.cps.org.uk)
 Perspective: Free-market think-tank linked to the Conservative Party whose main social policy concerns involve the reduction in state welfare provision through the greater use of voluntary and commercial sector sources and the championing of greater personal responsibility.
 Coverage includes: Benefits; criminal justice; education; family policy; health care; social services and social work.
 Publications: Articles; blogs; factsheets and reports available free from the web site – downloadable as PDF files.
- Centre for Social Justice (www.centreforsocialjustice.org)

Perspective: 'Independent' think-tank seeking effective solutions to poverty in the United Kingdom.

Coverage includes: Child poverty; educational exclusion; families and family breakdown, and social exclusion in later life.

Publications: Policy reports which are accessible on the web site and downloadable free as PDF files.

- Compass (www.compassonline.org)
 Perspective: Established to revitalise the democratic left; advocates policies designed to secure a more equal, democratic, and sustainable society and, within this, to promote welfare policies that redress the inequalities relating to gender, race, childhood, ageing, and disability. A source of influence in Labour Party policy debates.
 Coverage includes: Ageing; disability; education; health; housing; philosophy of welfare and poverty.
 Publications: Press releases; think pieces; pamphlets and reports. These are available on the web site and downloadable as free PDF files.

- Fabian Society (www.fabian-society.org.uk)
 Perspective: Affiliated to the Labour Party, the Society's social welfare programme looks to explore the democratic-left welfare reforms that will create a more just and more egalitarian society.
 Coverage: Education; fiscal policy; health; housing and poverty.
 Publications: Books; free-thinking papers; ideas pamphlets; policy reports and the quarterly journal, *Fabian Review*. Full versions of the free-thinking papers are accessible free of charge and can be read online; the other publications can be purchased from the Fabian Bookshop.

- Institute of Economic Affairs (www.iea.org.uk)
 Perspective: Sees its mission as the dissemination of free-market thinking. In social-policy terms, this involves: the reduction in taxes and deregulation; the minimization of state welfare funding and provision; the promotion of commercial and voluntary sector services; and the support for greater personal responsibility.
 Coverage includes: Ageing; criminal justice; education; employment; fiscal policy; health care; pensions and poverty.
 Publications: Blogs; books; papers; press releases and reports. These are available from the web site and downloadable as PDF files. The Institute also publishes a journal, *Economic Affairs*, available through your library or via inter-library loan – lists of its contents are also accessible on the web site.

- Institute for Fiscal Studies (www.ifs.org.uk)
 Perspective: Provides rigorously independent commentaries and assessments of a wide-range of socio-economic matters including tax and welfare policies.
 Coverage includes: Education; fiscal policy; inequality and poverty; pensions; public finance and public services.
 Publications: Briefing notes; commentaries; observations; press releases; reports and working papers; it also publishes a journal *Fiscal Studies*. Most of the Institute's publications are available free of charge online; some are also sold as hard copy.

- Institute for Public Policy Research (www.ippr.org.uk)
 Perspective: Left-wing think-tank favoured by the Labour Left. It is committed to combating inequality; empowering citizens, promoting social responsibility, and developing a progressive approach to welfare funding and reforms.

Coverage includes: Community policy; criminal justice; employment; family policy; health; housing and social care.

Publications: Articles; books; discussion papers; policy briefings and research reports. All recent publications are available to download as PDF files free of charge; some of the older books and reports are available for purchase via the web site or via the IPPR's distributor, Central Books.

■ National Centre for Social Research (www.natcen.ac.uk)

Perspective: Describes itself as "Britain's leading independent research institute". It undertakes research for public-sector bodies and commercial organizations.

Coverage includes: Children's services; schools and families; crime and justice; employment, skills and education; health and lifestyle; income and welfare; social inclusion; and transport and the environment.

Publications: Abstracts; findings and full research reports. The findings and research reports are available from the web site and can be downloaded free of charge as PDF files.

■ New Economic Foundation (www.neweconomics.org.uk)

Perspective: Left-leaning think-tank that seeks a new economy based on social justice, environmental sustainability, and collective well-being. Within this, its approach to social policy looks for the development of a welfare system that is fair and equitable between people, generations, and countries.

Coverage includes: Community policy; education; employment; housing; poverty and well-being.

Publications: All of the Foundation's reports are available free from the web site and are downloadable as PDF files.

■ Policy Exchange (www.policyexchange.org.uk)

Perspective: Particularly influential in current Conservative politics. It links free-market thinking with the promotion of philanthropy, voluntary action, and 'local' solutions to social policy questions. State-driven welfare is seen to have created perverse incentives, undermined the social fabric of society, and failed to tackle the underlying causes of many social problems.

Coverage includes: Crime and justice; childcare service; education; family policy; health; housing; pensions and poverty.

Publications: Articles; press releases and reports. Available free from the web site and can be downloaded as PDF files.

■ The Poverty Group (www.poverty.org.uk)

Perspective: Left-leaning site concerned with promoting social justice.

Coverage: Maintains a web site on which it monitors UK poverty and social exclusion across a range of social indicators (e.g., income, work and unemployment, low pay, health, and housing) across differing age ranges (e.g., children, young adults, working-age and older adults) and by geographical area (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, rural England, as well as aggregate UK statistics).

Publications: Drawing on Government primary sources, it publishes: key facts and the annual Joseph Rowntree report: *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*. The reports are free from the web site and downloadable as PDF files.

Further think-tanks with left-leaning sentiments and policy agendas include: *Bevan Foundation/Sefydliad Bevan* (www.bevanfoundation.org.uk); *Demos/Demos Scotland* (www.demos.co.uk); *The Fawcett Society* (www.fawcettsociety.org.uk); *The Radical Statistics Group* (www.radstats.org.uk); *The Resolution Foundation* (www.resolutionfoundation.org); and *The Smith Institute* (www.smith-institute.org.uk). Among their counterparts with right-wing political sentiments are: *Civitas* (www.civitas.org.uk), *Politeia* (www.politeia.co.uk), *Reform* (www.reform.co.uk), *ResPublica*

(www.respublica.org.uk) and the *Social Market Foundation* (www.smf.co.uk). In Scotland, there is the *David Hume Institute* (www.davidhumeinstitute.com) and *Reform Scotland* (www.reformscotland.com).

❖ Pressure Groups

Like think-tanks, pressure groups also try to actively influence governmental agendas and legislation; they however employ a broader range of methods that includes: lobbying, campaigning, and direct political action as well as evidence-based policy assessments. Those groups concerned directly or indirectly with social policy issues can vary in quite substantial ways but are classified here in terms of their breadth of concerns. On a sliding scale, they range from 'major sectional agencies' at one extreme, through 'promotional or cause groups' to 'single issue groups' at the other. Illustrations of the sectional agencies include the TUC and individual trade unions (e.g., UNISON), business employer organizations (e.g., the Confederation of British Industry), and representative professional groups (e.g., the Bar Association). Their list of welfare interests depend, to some degree, on the impact they have on their members, but they only ever form part of the work of these national organizations. At the other extreme are the 'single issue' pressure groups often consisting of a loose alliance of individuals formed in response to a particular welfare issue and continuing to exist only while it remains. An example is Tax Uncut, which was formed to expose corporate tax avoidance and maintains that if these sums were paid into government coffers, there would be less/no need to make cuts to the welfare system. It engages in direct action organized through its web site. In between these two extremes are a host of 'promotional or cause groups' who, typically, have long-standing interests in raising the profile of particular welfare 'user' groups in order to achieve better benefits, living conditions, legal protection and care. Well-known examples of this latter grouping are Age UK, Child Poverty Action Group, Disability Alliance, Shelter, and Mind.

While all three types of pressure group can supply useful research data, primary consideration is given here to the 'promotional and cause groups', on the grounds that they can provide valuable insights and detailed case studies of user groups and user-group assessments of service provision. A sample of the most helpful for student researchers is provided below with information on their aims and publications. As with think-tanks, given the political agendas of pressure groups, great care has to be taken in the interpretation of the data they produce.

- Age UK – Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland (www.ageuk.org.uk)
Aim: To improve the living standards of those in later life through information and advice, campaigns, products, training, and research.
Publications: Factsheets; information guides and reports. All are accessible free from the web site, downloadable as PDF files.
- Carers UK (www.carersuk.org)
Aim: To support people providing care for a partner, family member, or friend by giving advice and information, offering support, and campaigning to make life better for carers.
Publications: newsletters; parliamentary consultation papers; policy briefings and a statistical digest 'Facts about Carers'. All are accessible from the web site and downloadable free as PDF files.
- The Children's Society (www.childrensociety.org.uk)
Aim: To help vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. This includes: safeguarding children in care and young runaways, providing a voice for disabled children, helping young refugees to rebuild their lives, and providing relief for young carers.
Publications: Literature reviews; parliamentary consultation papers; newsletters; and reports. All are accessible from the web site and can be downloaded free of charge as PDF files.

- Child Poverty Action Group (Scotland) (www.cpag.org.uk)
 Aim: To end child and family poverty in the United Kingdom through research, campaigning, publications, and training.
 Publication: Information guides; policy briefings; poverty statistics; reports and welfare rights briefings. All are accessible from the web site and can be downloaded free as PDF files. Child Poverty Action Group also publishes a magazine, *Poverty*, three times a year; many of its articles are also free from the web site.
- Disability Alliance (www.disabilityalliance.org.uk)
 Aim: To relieve the poverty and improve the living standards of disabled people.
 Publications: Briefings; case law summaries; factsheets; guides and the Disability Rights Handbook. All are downloadable free, apart from the Handbook, which needs to be purchased from the web site.
- Mind (www.mind.org.uk)
 Aim: To promote good mental health for all while ensuring that people who experience mental distress are treated fairly, positively, and with respect.
 Publications: Booklets; guides; a magazine (*Open Mind*) and reports. All are purchasable from the web site.
- Mencap, Mencap Cymru, Mencap Northern Ireland (www.mencap.org.uk)
 Aim: To change laws, challenge prejudice, and support people with a learning disability in living the lives they choose.
 Publications: Advice leaflets; books; a magazine (*Viewpoint*); an e-newsletter; press releases and research reports. The books and research reports can be purchased from the web site; the other types of publication are accessible free and downloadable as PDF files.
- National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (www.nacro.org.uk)
 Aim: To reduce crime by changing lives, through crime prevention, working with offenders, and resettlement projects.
 Publications: Briefing papers; leaflets; policy responses and reports. All are accessible free and downloadable as Word or PDF files from the web site.
- Shelter (www.shelter.org.uk)
 Aim: To alleviate the distress caused by homelessness and bad housing both by helping those with housing needs and by campaigning for change to end the housing crisis.
 Publications: Briefings; factsheets; guides; policy consultations; and reports. Guides and reports can be purchased from the web site; the other types of publication are accessible free and downloadable as PDF files.

○ **Commercial Sources**

There are three main providers of information and analyses on UK social policy issues among commercial organizations: the mass media (newspapers, television channels and magazines), market research firms and financial services companies.

❖ **Mass Media**

■ National newspapers

These vary quite markedly in the space that they devote to commenting on social-policy issues. Some, such as *The Guardian* (www.guardian.co.uk), *The Daily Telegraph* (www.telegraph.co.uk), *The Times* (www.thetimes.co.uk), *The Independent* (www.independent.co.uk), and *The Financial Times* (www.ft.com) – and their weekend equivalents – tend to give quite detailed analyses of welfare legislation and policy changes, while others, such as *The Sun* (www.thesun.co.uk), *The Daily Star* (www.dailystar.co.uk), and *The Daily Mirror* (www.mirror.co.uk), offer more summary information. It is also important to be aware of the political leanings of each newspaper and thus conscious of the way in which welfare matters are reported. Most university and college libraries carry some daily newspapers, and all are available (most in edited versions) online, although *The Times* and *Financial Times* can currently only be accessed through subscriptions.

■ Television channels

TV channels show a similar variation in the quality of information and analysis of issues. The key channels in terms of UK social policy matters are the *BBC* (www.bbc.co.uk) and *Sky News* (<http://news.sky.com/home/uk-news>) – both offer assessments of a range of contemporary health, social care, children's services and benefits policies and provide supporting articles on their web sites. The BBC has the better-managed archive of news stories, but both sites permit their reporting and analyses to be printed.

■ Magazines

Several weekly and monthly political, cultural, and economic magazines devote space to welfare benefits and care issues. *NewStatesman* (www.newstatesman.co.uk) and *Prospect* (www.prospectmagazine.co.uk) are left-leaning publications whose articles are largely available on subscription, but some are available free and printable from their web site. *The Economist* (www.economist.com) and *The Spectator* (www.the-spectator-magazine.co.uk) are right-leaning subscription magazines that provide synopses of their articles on their web sites that are printable.

In addition to these 'generalist' publications, there are also a range of journals with more specialist content. *Public Service Review* (www.publicservice.co.uk) is one of several online magazines focusing on public-sector resources and service provision. Its published work includes articles written by academics, politicians, and practitioners about: education; health and social care; home affairs; and local government. As well as HTML, the magazine also contains content in the SWF (Flash) and PDF formats. *Community Care* (www.communitycare.co.uk) is a subscription magazine focusing on social care. It publishes articles, news items, forum comments, and blog posts on a variety of services for children, adults, and elders. Some of this material is accessible on the web site and can be printed. *Health Service Journal* (www.hsj.co.uk) is a subscription source of information about all aspects of the NHS, while *ThirdSector*

(www.thirdsector.co.uk) is a weekly subscription magazine that focuses on the not-for-profit world. Sample articles in both magazines are available online and printable.

❖ Market Research

Because of the out-sourcing of some public-sector investigations, marketing-research companies offer another useful source of social-policy data and analysis. *Tns-bmrb* (www.tns-bmrb.co.uk) is a leading agency that conducts survey research on behalf of government departments and organizations in the third sector. Its work includes studies of: children and young people; crime and social justice; education; and health care. It provides synopses of its research reports on its web site as well as links to the full reports when they are publically available. *Ipsos Mori* (www.ipsos-mori.com) has a 'Social Research Institute' section, which undertakes research on behalf of government departments, local authorities, NHS trusts, and police forces. Its research reports and other publications that are publically available can be downloaded free from its web site research archive as PDF files.

❖ Company Research

There are a number of companies that, in the course of their working practices, undertake and publish research on social-policy areas. While it should not be forgotten that it is business interests that drive their investigations, they frequently produce incisive analyses particularly around the areas of funding and service configurations. The following three examples give an indication of what is available.

- Kpmg (www.kpmg.com) is an international firm providing auditing, advisory, and tax services. Its policy-relevant research includes assessments of local government, health and social-care reforms, and analyses of the impact of regulatory and economic changes on pension yields. It publishes: newsletters; reports; surveys and videocasts, which are accessible on the web site, with many surveys and reports also downloadable free as PDF files.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (www.pwc.co.uk) is also an international auditing and financial services firm, which, as part of its remit, undertakes research to enhance its clients' strategic development and decision-making. It has 'public sector research centre' and 'health research institute' fields on its web site that have produced reports on: ageing; the funding of long-term care; charging for public services; and pensions among other recently published items. Once registered, reports can be downloaded free as PDF files.
- Towers Watson (www.towerswatson.com) is a human-resource management and professional-services company that offers advice to commercial and public-sector organizations on issues such as: employee benefits; rewards, risk, and capital management. It publishes case studies, technical papers, and reports on occupational benefits; health care; pensions; pensions' reform; and retirement. Many of these are downloadable free as PDF files after registration on the web site.