

## Preface

This Discussion Paper brings together the papers delivered at the annual seminar held by the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) and Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in July 1991. The theme of the seminar was *Drawing the Line: Purchasing and Providing Social Services in the 1990s*.

The main discussions centred around the implications of introducing the purchaser/provider split in social services departments. Social services departments are now required to secure a mixed economy of care which meets the care needs of their local communities identified in their community care plans. Departments are also required to develop their ability to draw up appropriate contracts for different care services with providers of care, including the authority's own services, and to ensure that quality standards are specified in contracts and that these are monitored and met.

The experience of directors of social services in implementing the purchaser/provider split was shared at the seminar, with clear indications that some had made greater progress than others in introducing it into their departments. 'Changing the culture' of social services departments was thought by Anne Parker, Director of Social Services for Berkshire, to require a major communications exercise both to raise awareness and 'win the hearts and minds of our staff'.

But how far is the purchaser/provider split a permanent fixture or just a passing fashion? These and other issues were raised in the paper given by David Browning, Associate Director for Health and Social Services at the Audit Commission, and hotly debated. He stressed the need to grasp the political nettle of setting eligibility criteria, but hoped that once the storm had settled the service would grow and develop in a positive way, benefiting both users and carers.

Contracting with the voluntary sector is an important part of the role of the 'enabling' authority. The papers by Denise Platt, Director

of Social Services for Hammersmith and Fulham, and Tom White, Principal and Chief Executive of the National Children's Home, looked at the issue from different sides of the fence. The voluntary sector is made up of a wide variety of organisations, ranging from small, local, informal self-help groups to the big, national voluntary bodies. The importance of disentangling the different ways in which contracting and agreements can be introduced and monitored with such a disparate set of organisations was a matter of concern, and the need to involve the user or consumer of services was regarded as crucial by both speakers.

Quality assurance is obviously a key factor in the implementation of the purchaser/provider split. Graham Gatehouse, Director of Social Services for Surrey, was concerned about definitions of quality and called for more research into quality measures. Gillian Dalley, Research Fellow at Policy Studies Institute, looked at the lessons that social services departments could learn from the experience of introducing quality management in the National Health Service.

The aim of the seminars organised by the ADSS and PSI is to stimulate debate among practitioners, researchers and policy-makers on the most topical issues in social policy. The seminars are funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and the ADSS/PSI Group greatly value the continuing support of the Foundation.

**Isobel Allen**  
Policy Studies Institute