



# Welfare Systems – an introduction to comparative social policy

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## Building resources for pooling pedagogic practice in Social Policy

'Welfare Systems – an introduction to comparative social policy'

### A Problem-based Module

#### Origin

- Introduced to problem based learning through EU exchange programme to the Netherlands
- Developed at level 1 as emphasis on team work enables new students to develop informal learning networks and friendships, produces a more integrated student body, improves the students' experience and prevents attrition.

'At APU all of the social policy modules that we teach contain comparative material. A comparative welfare systems module has formed part of the first year syllabus for many years. Students seem to benefit from doing a module that does not look at the UK at all early on in their studies. The focus on new countries and cultures allows teachers to more easily challenge student preconceptions about the nature and reasons for social policies. It also provides excellent material with which to explore the tricky question of what social policy actually is. In addition, equipping students with some models and regimes early on gives them some security as it provides a much needed standpoint from which the novice can begin to see different patterns of policy provision'.

#### Design features

- Learning in this module is primarily driven by a problem/ scenario which students have to try to solve whilst working in teams. Most of the module is delivered through workshops although six lectures are offered as support.

#### Module in action

- Students are allocated to groups and given 2 countries' welfare systems to compare
- Groups prepare a 50 minute assessed presentation to report findings to other students taking the module. Students marked individually.
- Groups also produce a short book comparing their welfare systems. Each team-member writes a chapter assessed on an individual basis.
- Students are expected to work as a team, support and learn from one another; organise meetings and divide up work between members.

## Benefits to students

The problem-based approach encourages students to:

- take more responsibility for their own learning
- reflect on the process of knowledge acquisition
- improve communication and team work skills
- get to know each other and build informal learning networks

## Benefits for teaching

- Lecturers are forced to change their role from instructor to facilitator.

‘The most beneficial thing that I learned was that student learning is not as dependant on my ‘wonderful’ lectures as I thought it was. For those who get bored easily, mixing up one’s approach to teaching can also be invigorating’.

## Feedback

Students enjoy the task centred group work. Perhaps surprisingly, most also enjoy the opportunity to study another country’s social policy in some depth. Having taught the module by the traditional lecture/ seminar approach for many years, I anticipated that changing the delivery to a problem based approach would lead to a trade off involving more and better team working at the expense of knowledge and understanding. This did not happen. The problem-based approach has generated work of a surprisingly high quality.

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