

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Challenging scalar fallacy in state-wide welfare studies: A UK sub-state comparison of civil society approaches to addressing youth unemployment

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Abstract

Here we make an original, empirical contribution to debates on welfare pluralism, the mixed economies of welfare and territorial rescaling by comparing civil society approaches to tackling youth unemployment in England, Scotland and Wales. Our core finding is that academic and policy literature's frequent characterisation of the UK as a single Liberal welfare regime is based on methodological nationalism privileging state-wide analyses. In short, a scalar fallacy pervasive in international welfare studies. In the context of the global rise of meso-government and so-called 'stateless nations' pressing for greater autonomy, our case-study challenges the dominant paradigm. Our analysis shows the liberal characteristics of work-first policy orientation and marketised civil society are concentrated in England then tempered by devolved (social) policy. Based on contrasting, left-of-centre and civic nationalist governing traditions, grounded in multi-level electoral politics, we show the devolved nations taking a different approach to Westminster, partially eschewing the market and incorporating collectivism and co-production.

KEYWORDS

civil society, employment, jobs, social policy, social welfare policy, the labour market, youth development

INTRODUCTION

Here we expand debates on welfare pluralism, mixed economies of welfare (Chaney, 2013; Hatch, 1980), 'work first' policy orientation (Frayne, 2019; Peck & Theodore, 2000) and territorial rescaling (Arrighi & Stjepanović, 2019; Delaney, 2005; Keating, 2013), by comparing civil society approaches to youth unemployment in three distinct UK territories: England, Scotland and Wales. The aim is to examine and critique the notion of a single UK liberal welfare regime with a focus on two key characteristic proxies: a *work first policy orientation* and the *marketisation of civil*

society. While remaining focused on these two core concepts our critique extends to a methodological nationalism privileging state-wide analyses hinging on territorial rescaling. Arrighi and Stjepanović (2019) summarise territorial rescaling in Crimea, Scotland, Catalonia, Corsica and Kosovo respectively as '[having] in common to challenge established jurisdictional boundaries'. (2019, p. 2). They go on to describe the process as occurring 'when a policy attempts to change its status or affiliation within a broader constellation politics' (2019, p. 2) and include the expansion of the EU in this. This type of vertical territorial rescaling therefore includes multilevel governance going

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downwards to regions and sub-regions and upwards to supra-national states like the EU. Horizontal rescaling refers to distribution of power between different regions or sub-regions within the same state.

Drawing on empirical data we propose that both a work first policy orientation and associated marketisation of civil society emanating from central UK government's dominant policy paradigm, could be going through a process of change as they reach the devolved nations. This change is taking place both formally, as social policy is created through applied devolved power, and informally, in the spaces between devolved and reserved competencies, resulting in tangible differences for young people. This study adds to the literature on welfare decentralisation, underling the importance of sub-state or meso-level developments and identifying transferable lessons that may beneficially shape practice in other polities. Subsequently, its content will be of interest and relevance to scholars of welfare, work, devolution and civil society.

The UK is described as a liberal welfare regime in most global categorisations, characterised by its minimal welfare support and exclusive and flexible employment model (Bambra, 2007; Cinalli & Giugni, 2013; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Giugni et al., 2021) and its work first policy orientation (Peck & Theodore, 2000). However, since 1999, the UK has had three devolved governments with different political narratives belying separate ideologies, currently led in Scotland and Wales by civil nationalist and Labour parties respectively and with different socio-political history to much of England. Territorial rescaling, and specifically the devolution of social policy powers, poses an alternative starting point to previous studies examining youth unemployment, civil society and welfare regimes (Baglioni & Giugni, 2014; Bambra, 2007; Giugni et al., 2021), as we go on to show.¹

Debates surrounding the effects of devolved divergences on policy approaches within the UK's sub-nations often focus on welfare and social policy (Greer, 2010; Keating, 2013), highlighting the role of civil society (Beel et al., 2021). Birrell and Gray (2017), for example, discuss the increasingly complex systems of governance within the UK as a potential revolution in social welfare delivery, with two key principles underpinning this change—devolution and outsourcing of provision to the voluntary sector. Similarly, McEwen and Moreno's (2008) and McEwen's (2017) work on devolution and social security

in Scotland, provides a strong foundation from which to build on our understanding of territorial divergences in welfare. Chaney and Wincott locate civil society within welfare state theory showing an emergent 'post-devolution territorial politics [which] envisions the sector's role as a welfare provider' (2014, p. 757). The authors identify 'new spatial policy dynamics' occurring as a result of territorialisation led by devolution and then, six years later, go on to highlight 'the iterative, reciprocal relationship between governance reforms and third sector territorialization' arguing that:

... welfare decentralization is driven by discontinuity at critical junctures related to governance transitions (phases of devolution), national crisis (war) and political shifts (Thatcherite reforms) ... (Chaney et al., 2020, p. 2)

Hazenbergh et al. (2016) argue that there are 'devolved ecosystems' in England and Scotland exemplified by differences in social enterprises—community enterprises in Scotland and business enterprises in England—and shaped by their different socio-political contexts. Other authors have examined the impact of devolution in the context of localism in England leading to variation in welfare provision by elected councils and as a means of implementing austerity (Hick, 2021). Relating more specifically to the field of employment and citizenship, Simpson's (2017) research shows a will to diverge from UK central government's focus on employability among senior Scottish and Northern Irish civil servants and politicians. Similar, sub-state socio-political context at key junctures is also highlighted in a number of key, international welfare analyses (Giugni et al., 2021; Vampa, 2014; Zamorano, 2017). In the case of employment, the devolved administrations have semi-devolved jurisdiction over what is a far-reaching field, detailed below.

While these studies show significant devolved divergences in the field of welfare and social policy (most often including employment) emphasising the role of context, the most comprehensive and wide-scale categorisations of welfare regimes, employment regimes, youth unemployment and civil society to date, do not take devolution into account (Baglioni & Giugni, 2014; Bambra, 2007; Cinalli & Giugni, 2013; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Giugni et al., 2021; Hobbins et al., 2014). The way in which welfare divergences take shape in policy and delivery, therefore, would benefit from a better understanding of any moderation or adaptation taking place as it reaches the devolved nations. It is important at this point to acknowledge the inherent limitations of exploring welfare regimes through the lens of one policy

¹Due to the vastly different and specific socio-political context and history of Northern Ireland and its implications for youth unemployment and the role of civil society (Lagana, 2021), here we focus only on the devolved territories of Scotland and Wales. Similarly we are aware of the relevance of English devolution (including city-regions and Mayoral elections) (Beel et al., 2021) to this work, but are unable to give this its full attention within the parameters of this piece.

area, however, the focused nature of this approach has led to a conclusion rooted in empirically based, salient findings which contribute to the wider field of international social welfare. Taking devolution as a starting point, this sub-state comparison of civil society approaches to youth unemployment will now contextualise the UK's work first policy orientation, its devolved jurisdictions and the subsequent marketisation of civil society which is, we argue, conducive to welfare pluralism.

THE UK'S WORK FIRST POLICY ORIENTATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The UK has a work first policy orientation (Peck & Theodore, 2000) evidenced more recently through continuous emphasis on employability in key policy documents and the UK's 2010/12 welfare reforms (Simpson, 2017; UK Government, 2021a, 2021b). The overarching aim is getting people into employment, one which arguably prevails over fair work, equal pay, quality of working conditions or in-work poverty; opponents of this policy regime argue that this has resulted in the UK's lowest unemployment figures (ONS, 2021) coinciding with historically high levels of in-work poverty (Hick & Lanau, 2018) shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Thus 'forcefully [redistributing] the risks and burdens of job-market instability from the state to unemployed individuals, the solution to whose "welfare dependency" is presented in terms of a one-way transition into (low) waged work' (Peck & Theodore, 2000, p. 119).

Work first is coupled with a vested interest in flexible working conditions, to increase access to employment, which has been established as damaging to health in many of the same ways as unemployment including due to low credentials, low income and disadvantage due to demographic characteristics (Benach et al., 2002); the same applies to temporary work and health (Pirani & Salvini, 2015). Flexible and temporary work has also been shown to promote social exclusion (Bynner & Parsons, 2002) and diminish future earnings (Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). This aspect overlaps with increasing use of activation policies by governments across Europe in the past decade, the German Hartz Reforms promoting part time work and self-employment being one example (Giugni et al., 2021). However, work first in the UK is coupled with minimal (and contracting) welfare systems, stemming from the 2010/12 reforms, aimed at incentivising claimants to take employment with high levels of conditionality and exempting fewer groups

from job seeking as a condition of welfare receipt (Simpson, 2017).

Young people are particularly heavily impacted by work first and associated precarious labour market conditions because they are more likely to be unemployed, particularly post-Covid-19 (Eurostat, 2020a, 2020b; ONS, 2021), working part time (often not out of choice—Pay Rise Campaign, 2015), working on zero hour contracts, in the gig economy (MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019) and experiencing in-work-poverty (Hick & Lanau, 2018). Shortly after the beginning of the pandemic, approximately 35% of young people (aged 15–29) were employed in low-paid and insecure jobs on average across OECD countries, compared to 15% of employees aged 30–50 (OECD, 2020). This was and still is exacerbated for young people of colour and young disabled people. In the UK, labour market disadvantage is coupled with the rising cost of higher education and tightening of social security conditionality. This could also explain a drop in eligible young people claiming welfare support (Wells, 2018), therefore not having access to the majority of UK employment support programmes including the government's main response to youth unemployment during Covid-19—Kickstart (UK Government, 2021b).

The long-term scarring effects of youth unemployment include negative impacts on future earnings, job satisfaction, health, life satisfaction and susceptibility to depression. These effects are directly linked to being young, being exposed to a recession between the ages of 17 or 18 and 25 and being unemployed in the past or present, but are also inseparable from the negative impacts of work first and precarious working conditions:

In comparison with other young people, the young unemployed were significantly more likely to feel ashamed, rejected, lost, anxious, insecure, down and depressed, isolated and unloved. They were also significantly less happy with their health, friendships and family life ... (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011:15)

In terms of policy response and responsibility, Giugni et al. (2021) attribute the negative personal, social and political impact of youth unemployment across the EU to increasingly flexible labour market regulations and more exclusive (un)employment regimes and policies. Their study focuses on France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, to argue that existing welfare regime categorisations (Bambra, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996) are not always a good fit for unemployment regimes. Taking their argument further, we make the case for incorporating devolution and new forms of

governance into any examination of policy, delivery and welfare pluralism; to critique the notion of a single UK welfare state.

DEVOLVED AND HYBRID COMPETENCES IN THE UK

Youth unemployment in the UK is quasi-devolved to the Scottish and Welsh Governments, in England devolution and policy divergence—including to city regional actors pursuing local employment programmes—is piecemeal, with local and regional authority approaches often in contrast with the dominant, central UK government's paradigm (Beel et al., 2021).

While Education, Skills Training, Youth Services, Youth Work and (mental) Health are fully devolved competencies, Employability, Welfare and Social Security are reserved in Wales and only partially devolved in Scotland. However, it is possible to identify clear differences in Scottish policy narratives which reject work first, notably its roots in the language of human rights explicitly rejecting the UK's increasing welfare conditionality:

the needs of those who require assistance will always be the first and most important consideration As the other principles and our wider approach make clear, this is principle is firmly not, and never will be, about using public finances as an ideological excuse to breach or undermine people's rights (Scottish Government, 2017: webpage)

In terms of youth unemployment, the Scottish system is more centralised than England and Wales with most key programmes running through the statutory sector; notably Developing the Young Workforce (Scottish Government, 2021) and the Scottish Youth Guarantee (Scottish Government, 2020a). Scotland's principle of *no one left behind*, making support systems and signposting for (young) unemployed people easier to navigate, has been central in trying to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups are given equal opportunity to thrive (Scottish Government, 2020b). This does not mean employment for everyone, evidenced by Scotland's Youth Guarantee of employment, education or training opportunities for all young people aged 18–24.

There are overlaps between Scottish Employment programmes, many delivered by Skills Development Scotland, and UK government programmes. The transition from one to the other usually occurs around 18 or 19 years of age when young people move out of education or training and into work or unemployment,

representing a clear line between devolved areas (education, skills and training; youth services, youth work and health) and areas that are not fully devolved (employability, welfare and social security). In this transition the Scottish Government has tried to push forward its policy influence. For example, Skills Development Scotland's delivery bodies perform a 'warm handover' for young people at age 18 when they are moving from Scottish employment programmes to UK-wide systems. A Scottish representative introduces the young person to their Job-Centre Plus Work Coach and stays in touch over the long term to ensure continuing support. This is a key example of the way Scottish policy is infiltrating at the margins between devolved and reserved areas of social policy underpinned by a rejection of many of the underlying principles of work first and promoting the language of no one left behind in line with broad concepts of rights and citizenship (Scottish Government, 2017).

In Wales youth unemployment is also semi-devolved according to the same policy areas. However, unlike Scotland, the Welsh Government has less jurisdiction over social security.² Notably, Welsh policies relating to youth unemployment include the Young Person's Guarantee (Welsh Government, 2021), the Welsh Employability Plan, Jobs Growth Wales (for young people), Working Wales, ReAct (a devolved employability scheme for people facing redundancy) (Careers Wales, 2021), the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and the Welsh equivalent of ERASMUS. Wales does not have an equivalent of *no one left behind* but a key example of interactions between devolved and non-devolved policy areas in Wales is apprenticeships which are not time limited, while in England they are a minimum of 12 months. This difference is partially explained through a Welsh focus on early intervention, which in turn is linked to the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). However, it also belies the same cut off point as Scotland in terms of what is devolved to Wales and what is reserved to the UK government. Since education, skills and training are fully devolved areas in Wales, the devolved policy focus is often on those aged up to 18 or 19. As young people reach the age of 18, and become or remain unemployed, so their sources of support shift from devolved systems to the UK, most often the Department for Work and Pensions.

Taking these key elements of welfare competence relating to work first, which have been devolved in

²Social welfare is a devolved competence in the Government of Wales Act 2006 and aspects of employment are reserved under 'economic development' which is devolved to Wales, and apprenticeships are one example of this. Also, while social security is not devolved there is the WG emergency payments scheme and a raft of WG direct payments and grants.

Scotland and to a lesser extent in Wales, we will now move on to look at devolution through increasingly mixed economies of welfare characterised by the marketisation of civil society.

MARKETISATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF WELFARE

Increased marketisation of welfare across the Western world is defined by Salamon as ‘the penetration of essentially market-type relationships into the social welfare arena’ (Salamon, 1993, p. 17); pertaining to welfare pluralism (Chaney, 2013), or mixed economies of welfare and third sector hybridity (Hustinx et al., 2014). Welfare pluralism, or the mixed economy of welfare, in its broadest sense refers to social policy delivered through a mix of statutory, voluntary, commercial and informal sectors (Hatch, 1980). However, more recent studies into welfare pluralism (post-1980s), have focused on increasing commercialisation and private sector characteristics permeating statutory and voluntary sector roles and structures (Chaney & Wincott, 2014; Osborne, 2006; Peters, 2018); framed here by literature on the marketisation of public and civil sectors. The ‘creeping marketisation’ of civil society describes the transformation of state and not for profit relations across Continental Europe, from a relationship based on corporatist ideals to a set of networks and regulations (Bode, 2010); leading to institutional hybridisation between the state, the market and the third sector in a shift from government to governance (Hustinx et al., 2014; Jessop, 2008).

While marketisation ‘creeps’ across Continental Europe in the move from corporatist to ‘supermarket state’ (Olsen, 1988); the Anglo-Saxon and liberal regimes of Western Europe (the UK), the USA, Australia and New Zealand, have seen a stronger, longer-term erosion of collective approaches to welfare and social provision emphasising marketised practices in the public sector (Feltenius & Wide, 2019). Competition has long been replacing collaboration as liberal states both retreat from directive over welfare systems (hollowing-out) and centralise (filling-in) by becoming distant regulators, purchasers and contractors; buying or commissioning, what were previously public services, from the market (Jessop, 2001; Jones et al., 2004). The repositioning of citizens as customers in this context puts growing emphasis on the individualisation of responsibility for welfare which in turn is a key underpinning ideology for marketisation in employment.

Individualisation within the processes and mechanisms of marketisation has potentially serious implications for civil society organisations (CSOs) including those working to advocate and give voice to vulnerable groups of young people facing unemployment and precarious working conditions.

... this development towards a stronger emphasis on the individual are predicted to be dire for civil society organisations ... Likely to lead to ‘the ultimate disowning or even devouring of social movements’ (Newman & Tonkens, 2011, p. 10 in Feltenius & Wide, 2019, p. 235)

Bennett’s (2017) illuminating research argues that this is partly due to ‘encumbering costs associated with operating in the [British] welfare-to-work quasi-market’ (146); part of wider context shaping the limitations of civil society responses to social policy issues. Anheier, Lang and Toepler’s examination of ‘a shrinking space’ for civil society identifies ill-fitting regulatory frameworks within government and governance structures restricting CSO responses and inhibiting communication between state and civil society. The authors depict a modern civil society as one rooted in the New Public Management, central to social cohesion and a source of innovation (Anheier et al., 2019) in short responsive, flexible and well positioned; but limited by misfitting government frameworks which could otherwise offer support. Similarly, a diminishing infrastructure (see Macmillan, 2021 for the English context) means that a well-positioned and hybrid civil society (Dayson et al., 2022) is not able to respond to social welfare issues with its full potential.

This is important context for the argument put forward here as we begin to identify differences in infrastructure and framework support available to civil society with the three nations of the UK under study. Beyond the UK, Hobbins et al. (2014) find that CSOs in countries with liberal welfare regimes (Poland in the study), tend to focus on the individual and what they can do to increase their ‘employability’; in contrast to more Social Democratic regimes where CSOs frame youth unemployment as a structural issue. Support in liberal contexts, therefore, tends to focus on individual solutions to an individual problem. The marketisation of civil society, and subsequent individualisation of responsibility for welfare, feeds directly into the idea of work as *the* individualised solution to welfare dependency, though notably not the solution to the structural problems of poverty and inequality exacerbating and causing it.

TABLE 1 Sampling: Detail of the organisations from which respondents were recruited

Organisation	Area	Service area	Policy remit
Civil Society 1	England	Employability for young people from marginalised backgrounds	Improving employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds
Civil Society 2	England	Skills development	Improving employment in the area by working in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions
Civil Society 3	England	All issues affecting marginalised young people	Providing the evidence and support to policy-makers and practitioners to support young people
Civil Society 4	England	16+ employability support to young care leavers	Addressing the disconnect and widening gap between policy makers and care-experienced people
Civil Society 5	England	Employability and apprenticeship for people with disabilities	Influencing national policy on education, employment, transport, human rights and other issues—shaping policy through direct experience and expertise
Civil Society 6	England	Employability for people with disabilities	Improving specialist support and training opportunities for young disabled people to access work and learning
Civil Society 7	Scotland	Employability and training	Social enterprise in Scotland
Civil Society 8	Scotland	Training, support, advice and work placements for people at the margins	Social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants
Civil Society 9	Scotland	Employability	Promote diversity through education, inspiration and changing perceptions for migrants and refugees
Civil Society 10	Scotland	Membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Scotland	Supporting, promoting and developing a confident, sustainable voluntary sector in Scotland
Civil Society 11	Scotland	Skills development at the national, sectoral, regional and local level	Economic growth ambitions for Scotland
Civil Society 12	England	Education, training and employability of 16–24 years old young people	Tackling poverty and give young people the opportunities they need to succeed in life and the workplace
Civil Society 13	England	Skills and confidence development to achieve personal goals and reach a brighter future	Improving everyday support to vulnerable young people
Civil Society 14	Wales	Training	Tackling youth unemployment
Civil Society 15	Wales	Employability for disadvantaged people	Reducing economic inactivity in Wales
Civil Society 16	Wales	Accommodation, support and employability opportunities for vulnerable young people	Supporting young parents, raising awareness on homelessness in the area and at the national level
Civil Society 17	Wales	Employability and community leadership	Reducing economic inactivity of young people in Wales
Policy 1	England	Government department	Youth employment
Policy 2	Scotland	Education/employment	Youth employment
Policy 3	Wales	Education/employment	Youth employment

STUDY DESIGN

This study is a UK-wide, sub-state comparison of civil society *approaches* to youth unemployment carried out over 2 years. The study has been granted full ethical

approval from our institution and has adhered to strict anonymity, confidentiality and data management protocols throughout. Findings from 31 qualitative interviews with CSO and policy representatives in England, Scotland and Wales are presented here under the four themes:

(1) a work first policy orientation; (2) individuation of responsibility for (un)employment; (3) 'stepping up' to tackle gaps in welfare and employment support; and (4) the marketisation of CSO structures and networks.

Respondents were recruited through purposive sampling techniques to ensure organisational representation from each of the following, often with more than one criteria in each civil society organisation:

1. Supported by state funding/non-state funded.
2. Providing service delivery/policy mobilisation.
3. Complementing/challenging state policy.
4. Formal/informal structures.
5. Size (from micro to super major).
6. Geographical classification (urban, rural and town/fringe).

Interviews were also carried out with both political and policy representatives in England, Scotland and Wales recruited for their involvement with current (devolved) youth unemployment policies. Table 1 gives more detail on the organisations recruited, while maintaining anonymity, and in many cases multiple respondents were interviewed from the same organisation resulting in the 31 interviews.

Interviews took place using a mixture of online and face to face techniques due to fluctuating pandemic restrictions throughout fieldwork. The typical duration was 60 min but many were longer resulting in rich data. Interviews focused on organisational approaches to youth unemployment including but not reducible to: projects, funding, ideological drivers, the balance between advocacy and service delivery, future challenges and cross-overs with devolved and centralised policies.

Analysis was thematic and began with coding, categorising and theming to better organise and understand the data. As themes emerged, both grounded and top-down approaches informed development of the findings and key arguments presented below and contextualised by the literature outlined above.

Based on this data we argue that both a work first policy orientation and marketisation of civil society emanating from central UK government, could be moderated, tempered and adapted as it reaches Scotland, both in terms of policy and a direct impact on young people through CSOs.

THE WORK FIRST POLICY ORIENTATION

The work first policy orientation was rejected by CSO representatives in all three countries with subtle differences in focus. CSO representatives based in England

directed critique of the UK government towards its focus on employment figures rather than on policies to address youth unemployment. Government ministers were seen as claiming success based solely on steadily dropping figures to the detriment of developing policy solutions, over the past 8 years:

So, [in England, the Government] haven't actually done a huge amount of serious work thinking about the residual problem because they've been too busy claiming success (England CSO 4)

In Scotland both policy and CSO representatives focused on the principle of no one left behind underpinning much of Scottish unemployment policy, in direct and deliberate contrast to work first. The principle is linked in the interviews to the Scottish Youth Guarantee recognised as flexible, joined-up, responsive, again at odds with the UK Government's approach.

The UK Government's [Work Programme] was horrendous, you know, it was very much pile 'em high, get the numbers through, get the money in. There was a lot of private sectoral message, they made a lot of money delivering it (Scotland CSO 2)

The UK's Kickstart programme was also critiqued by Scottish CSO representatives for lacking compatibility with Scottish policy developments. Specifically, the complex jigsaw of successfully aligning Scottish youth unemployment policy with Kickstart is a major challenge for the Scottish government, but notably not the UK government pertaining to the dominance of UK central policy when it comes to implementation:

So, Scottish government are busy developing the no one left behind strategy looking at that culture ... developing a range of support for young people through the guarantee and then UK government comes along and just plonks Kickstart in the middle of it. So, it's a challenge for Scottish government ... just aligning around Kickstart, not rejecting Kickstart but accepting that it's potentially a good bit of investment that could be made in one or two or a lot of employers. So, how do you then align a lot of the things Scottish government want to do around Kickstart, recognising that Kickstart isn't a solution for all ages, for example, most sixteen, seventeen-year-olds wouldn't get access to a

Kickstart job because they're not claiming Universal Credit. So, Scottish government then say right okay, can we focus more on support for sixteen, seventeen-year-olds but also, not ignoring how to help young people who're eligible for Kickstart jobs get ready for them and move into them. So, a lot of that alignment sort of piece goes on around the Kickstart policy and the Kickstart scheme that UK government decided they were just going to do. That's an emerging issue in Scotland (Scotland CSO 7)

There was more acknowledgment of the overlaps between youth employment and youth work in the Scottish policy interviews, when compared to the English policy interviews; thus, expanding perceptions of CSO remit in relation to youth unemployment beyond employability. Scottish Government attempts to differentiate from the UK narrative around welfare and benefits was discussed in a positive light with a focus on a more sympathetic, softer, understanding and responsible set of Scottish values.

In Wales policy representatives consistently referenced fair work, career progression and the importance of skills matching, however, within the CSO interview data there was a recurring view of Welsh policy (narrative) as 'lost in translation' when it came to delivery as key policy aims simply do not permeate into practice. Essentially CSO representatives favoured Welsh policy narrative *because* of its contrast to UK policy but did not feel that this narrative had translated into delivery. The Welsh CSO interviews gave a much more positive sense of policy actors and CSOs working *with* or *alongside* UK government policy when compared to the more critical Scottish responses. In Wales programmes and organisations such as Kickstart and JobCentre Plus were not explicitly rejected or criticised, rather critique was aimed at the Welsh Government.

INDIVIDUALISATION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR (UN) EMPLOYMENT

The data on individualisation of responsibility for employment and welfare arose most commonly in the form of 'solutions' within all three countries. Individualisation of solutions to unemployment were frequently referenced including the benefits of taking a 'tailored approach', or 'starting with the individual'. Individualisation of service support and 'the customer' were the priority for many CSOs carrying out delivery. However, the

importance of individualising service support was most prevalent in England:

... we have a delivery of high-quality tailored support that remains flexible and individualised. We provide that sort of emotional, physical, practical support, so we'll address the personal barriers ... They might not have the right clothes. They might need food ... those sort of things ... We have a menu of support. It's all bespoke ... (England CSO 8)

While this quote does not directly individualise responsibility for unemployment, by focusing on what the individual can do and how they are going to gain employment; the onus is indirectly put on the individual with strong emphasis on employment.

Scottish CSO representatives also discussed the benefits of individualised support starting with the person:

our services are flexible and person-centred, and they're also very asset-based. So, we start with individuals' aspirations, we start with what they're good at, where their skills lie, rather than focusing on the deficit, say, the addiction or the poor mental health, or whatever (Scotland CSO 2)

However, Scottish CSO views on individualisation were often also in direct response to recent centralisation and emphasis on statutory delivery in Scotland. CSO responsiveness to individual situations was posed as an alternative to the Scottish statutory approach. There was an element of justification for this type of work in the face of a new and different approach to delivering key policies like Developing the Youth Workforce:

And I think culturally and in terms of delivery, a statutory local authority provision would not have person-centred focus, it will not have the added value, it will not have the flexibility that a provider [us] will be able to provide. Because, for us, you know, we are very values-driven, we're very person-centred ... (Scotland CSO 2)

Welsh policy representatives used similar language, with young people referred to as 'customers' and individualised responses common and celebrated, but crucially there was a frequent linking of CSO work with Welsh policy. One example is a CSO working to deliver mental health support for young people as part of the Healthier Wales Strategy. The Healthier Wales Strategy aims to

increase community based care in-line with the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) and underpins the Transformation Fund, delivered through Local Health Boards which in turn commission CSOs.

This is an example of a bigger, emerging theme. Where youth unemployment overlays fully devolved areas of Welsh policy, the interviews reflect a legitimised space for action underpinned by devolved policy, bringing with it a policy-based coherence across CSOs which translates into a more established network in the Welsh interviews, not visible in the same way in England. Scotland paints a completely different picture with recent policy not involving CSOs in the same way due to centralisation and emphasis on statutory delivery; thus, removing legitimised spaces for some CSOs while creating closer partnerships between Scottish Government and other, larger, organisations.

‘STEPPING UP’ TO TACKLE GAPS IN WELFARE AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Interestingly when asked about their work and connections *with* policy or public services, CSO representatives used terms such as ‘stepping up’ and ‘plugging the gaps’ in welfare or employment provision. In the English interviews the term ‘stepping up’ was used to describe the role of CSOs operating in the climate caused by post-austerity, public sector cuts and the pandemic. This related to both youth unemployment and, particularly in England, to youth work which has faced significant cuts in recent years.

... the civil society sector has to step up because we're social leaders with social consciences and we won't allow those gaps and lack of provision to continue in our communities. I don't think that should be my job to do, I don't think, I don't think we should be celebrating the fact that we've got civil society leaders who have created amazing organisations doing amazing things, because they're doing that because of an absence of government support (England CSO 1)

CSO interviews from England in particular painted a picture of CSO representatives being overworked, overwhelmed and motivated by principles, in an environment that creates a vacuum for this type of operation; conscious gap-filling is framed as a moral intervention in a governance ecosystem lacking empathy:

right now it doesn't feel like a partnership it just feels like civil society are picking up the pieces that government and local authorities are leaving in their wake of removing funding and statutory responsibilities (England CSO 1)

For more service-orientated CSOs there were also elements of duty and compliance in reflections on working ‘with’ government:

[Government] have given us a job to do. We write reports, we give the evidence that we've done what they've asked us to do. I mean obviously we get feedback (England CSO 2)

Stepping up as a metaphor extended beyond working with government to working with other public service bodies such as schools:

... where a charity or a non-profit is able to provide really coherent and focused support in partnership with the school, that works really effectively because schools have that access, that consent access to the young person and the understanding of the young person and a connection to the family and all of that is really, really vital ... Often they're relying on the school to provide that access ... we can fill in the gaps for you ... (England CSO 7)

Here the relationship is described as a purchaser-provider model with inconsistencies frequently acknowledged; the view being that there are many gaps and CSOs are plugging some but making provision even more variable by targeting specific groups or geographical areas for example:

... there's been this process of recentralising and reducing local authority support. And, I think we haven't really found how to plug that gap properly And, I think little by little we are seeing charities and non-profits and other organisations stepping up, particularly when it comes to groups of vulnerable young people ... But, it's ... happening organically on a case by case basis rather than any wider systemic way and it depends on what's available in a local area and who's identified a particular problem or a particular gap or a weakness and stepped into that (England CSO 9)

Another key issue with stepping up to address gaps in the English and Welsh interviews was the loss of connection to grassroots approaches and communities:

I think, there tends to be a bit of a laziness in policy, I think, which says, right community organisations, understand their community [But] ... Because projects are what are funded, [CSOs] have very little time to actually listen to their community and to go through the processes of building that kind of local democracy ... and the projects, are policy influenced, of course they are, because the funders decide what needs to happen (Wales CSO 4)

While we see more established networks for CSOs working in Wales under devolved areas of youth unemployment and subsequent legitimisation of action spaces, in terms of funding mechanisms Wales and England have more in common. However, Welsh narratives around stepping up reflect stronger recognition of civil society as an entity and its value at a very small geographical scale within communities; a theme not apparent in the English or Scottish interviews:

We couldn't do without [CSOs], we really couldn't do without civil societies, organisations. So if the issue is really ... I think that is recognised ... (Wales Policy 2)

... I think COVID illustrated this really, really well, when it worked well. You can have a national programme that says, right, we're going to provide food parcels for everybody, who needs them ... but underneath it, you still support an infrastructure that is picking up people who fall through the net (Wales CSO 4)

... we're just a charity, we're just tiny, but really we are the people who are doing the work (Wales CSO 3)

The Scottish interviews revealed more instances of CSOs selling what they do than in Wales but less than in England. Many Scottish CSOs emphasised their value as a local provider for youth unemployment, in contrast to the 32 local authorities servicing Scotland's 6 million population; thus re-envisioning their position and re-emphasising their value as local providers with local knowledge:

It may be more cost-effective, but you don't necessarily have the breadth of choice that

will suit, you know, each individual ... the locality level, community level, has been left out of this whole [no one left behind] plan ... (Scotland CSO 2)

CSOs in Scotland contrast much of their working practice with the centralisation and statutory delivery of the key youth (un)employment policy and the devolved principle of no one left behind. Conversely, the English interviews gives the impression of CSOs predominantly trying to justify their work and existence generally, with a much stronger sense of the language of marketisation focusing on selling, competing and being efficient. In Wales the focus is on the value of grassroots and community based approaches to delivering under difficult circumstances, highlighting structural barriers like funding mechanisms or a lack of strategic influence. Across the board, service-orientated (and to a lesser extent policy-orientated) CSO representatives discussed the difficulty of balancing organisational principles with bidding for and being contracted to deliver employment provision to create sustainable revenue streams.

MARKETISATION OF CSO ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES AND NETWORKS

Strong private sector influence was most evident in the English interviews and more than one CSO was compared with a business model, but with less (or no) profit. Language around investment in CSO organisations, efficiency and a 'strong business model' was also commonly used by CSO representatives based in England.

... we're not in the business of saving organisations that we would be the only funder. So, we tend to work with organisations that have been going for a number of years. Minimum turnover is usually about a quarter of a million pounds, but, most of them are half a million pound plus ... So, a lot of the actual model that we do is inspired a little bit by private equity guys at their best (England CSO 4)

Organisational flexibility and responsiveness were also cited most often in the English interviews, as were Social Enterprises, Think Tanks and Community Interest Companies (with limited profit allowance). However, in contrast to narratives on competition, shared values between different CSOs in England was also mentioned on more than one occasion.

I think our success is that the ... organisations ... are different in what we deliver and how we do our own work, so we bring ... different perspectives but actually, we're all, we all have the same values, we all have the same desire, so that's been, that's been really useful (England CSO 1)

In contrast, Welsh organisational structures were most often referred to as Charities, Voluntary Organisations and The Third Sector in the Welsh interviews. The WCVA was also seen as giving space for collective action and a well-established network.

I mean ... If you're looking at civic society in its totality, and you would talk to a group like WCVA ... who've got about 30,000 member organisations under their umbrella. And we're members of theirs too, of course they encompass the whole of the third sector, the whole of the voluntary sector (Wales CSO 2)

The English equivalent, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, is not mentioned once in the English interviews and neither is the Employment Related Services Association which could constitute a large-scale and well-established support network for civil society working in the field of employment. While a stronger common identity could be the result of Wales's smaller scale, a probable advantage in terms of networks, it is important to note here that smaller-scale networks in regions and sub-regions of England could form similar networks irrespective of UK central government policy.

For Scotland, discussion about CSO structures is, again, inseparable from views of a very centralised Scotland lacking local or community based delivery and (market) choice:

I think what there is in Scotland is a real deficit in terms of local democracy, in terms of community activity, sort of civil society. I think it's a big gap, ... you've got large local authorities ... there's 32 of them across Scotland for 6,500,000 people ... That's massive, those are massive tiers of government, which really aren't particularly well-equipped to deal with local issues (Scotland CSO 2)

In Scotland shared values were also cited as underpinning internal, Scottish partnerships working towards a long term goal and, crucially, based on devolved policy principles, while external (non-Scottish) partnerships were seen as more pragmatic:

... yeah, we will partner with other organisations in the other nations. But I mean, that would probably be on a more pragmatic sharing expertise and adopting their good practice sort of model, rather than a more sort of strategic overarching model (Scotland CSO 2)

The Scottish interviews also revealed more of a strategic role for larger, umbrella CSOs directly involved with the Scottish Government policy. This highlights a devolved coherence around governance which legitimises certain CSOs to act strategically under the conditions of being 'close' to the Scottish Government.

Here we begin to see CSO structures and networks in England displaying more fluidity, episodic tendencies, more formation/deformation and vulnerability in a volatile market. CSOs come together for (pragmatic) purposes or short term funding delivery, based on shared values, and then move on. This could partially explain the large amount of sales pitching in the English interviews. England CSOs lack the stability of the networks seen in Wales and Scotland, are more responsive but also more vulnerable to market forces than in the other two countries; and certainly represent more explicit marketisation of CSOs.

In Scotland discussion of CSO structures and networks are inseparable from the Scottish Government's move to centralisation in policy delivery. While Scottish CSOs are unanimously on board with Scottish policy in principle, some feel somewhat marginalised from delivery in the process while others have been brought closer to the Government inside the policy tent. Those on the outside are presenting marketised characteristics (individual choice and localism) as their selling point to argue for their value in an increasingly state and statutory driven policy environment.

In Wales CSO collaboration is more long-standing and underpinned by broader (less pragmatic) principles; there is a sense of network stability; countered by critique of Welsh networks being overly-formalised and answerable to the statutory sector through. However, as the themes presented here show, the narrative of a less marketised CSO sector in Wales is disrupted by references to funding mechanisms that require competition between CSOs, metric and project-driven evaluation and monitoring and short term goals.

CONCLUSIONS

Here we have presented findings from a sub-state comparison of civil society approaches to youth

unemployment with two aims in mind. First, to test the idea that both work first policy orientation and marketisation of civil society can be moderated, tempered and adapted through periphery nation policy. Second, to critique the wider notion of a single UK welfare state (Bambra, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 1990), thus adding to literature considering devolved divergences in welfare provision (Birrell & Gray, 2017; Chaney et al., 2020; Chaney & Wincott, 2014; Hick, 2021).

In the data we see a rejection of work first by CSO representatives in all three countries; based on a broadly sympathetic view of young unemployed people, the value of a youth voice and the will to provide opportunities, not just jobs. However, in Wales there was a stronger sense of CSOs working harmoniously *with* UK employment programmes and systems like JobCentre Plus while in Scotland they were working *alongside* them, perhaps belying Scotland's stronger devolved powers and current transferral of welfare competencies.

The English interviews contain stronger language of marketisation among CSOs than the other two countries, evidenced through CSO structures (as business models) and networks as fluid and responsive, but more vulnerable to market forces. One explanation is that England-based CSOs lack the stability provided by umbrella CSO networks in Wales and state-led/statutory networks in Scotland. There were, however, elements of English CSO frustration at having to step up to fill gaps left by the state to the detriment of grassroots work. Stepping up in England was done consciously by many, often larger, CSOs as a morally driven intervention motivated by principles rather than pragmatism and filling gaps based on identified need, alongside funding availability. Smaller CSOs in England are filling the gaps to assist government in a purchaser-provider model, revealing a more varied mix of hybrid CSOs responding to the England policy environment. It is important to note here that further exploration into regional and sub-regional networks on a smaller scale in England would be beneficial in future; this would allow a clearer understanding of the findings relating to Wales and would also separate geographical scale and political differences due to devolution.

The Scottish interviews reveal a strong focus on state and statutory centralisation in youth unemployment policy. In this context there appears to be a more strategic role for certain CSOs working directly with the Scottish Government, providing policy coherence for CSOs which is supported by CSOs across the board. However, for smaller organisations there is also a sense of exclusion from this big policy picture and process of centralisation, leading to stronger elements of the language of marketisation and emphasis on local delivery. Selling of CSO work by these smaller groups focuses on individualisation, tailored

delivery, responsiveness to local needs and more justification of the work being done. For those somewhat marginalised from policy delivery (outside the policy tent), they are promoting marketised characteristics as their selling point to argue for their value in an increasingly state and statutory driven environment.

In Wales civil society is viewed as one entity and its community based approach acknowledged and celebrated. Long-standing networks are underpinned by broader (less pragmatic) principles giving a sense of stability in collaboration. However, this depiction of a less marketised Welsh CSO sector is disrupted by references to funding mechanisms that require competition over collaboration and short-term thinking. These mechanisms also cause Welsh policy to be 'lost in translation' and are seen as detrimental to a community-based, collectively orientated civil society underpinned by coherent Welsh policy. Gap filling is subsequently expressed subtly differently in Wales when compared to England and Scotland and framed more in terms of organisational survival than in terms of services, support or advocacy for young people. There is also a sense of freedom to criticise Welsh Government which was not apparent in the English or Scottish interviews; in-line with models of grassroots CSOs (Feltenius & Wide, 2019).

While the language of marketisation was used among CSOs in all three countries, it is possible to say that devolved policies in Scotland and Wales feed directly into narratives that use less of, or a less concentrated version of, this language—but in different ways. The principle of no one left behind underpinning the Youth Guarantee and Developing the Youth Workforce in Scotland in particular depicted a strong state-led move away from marketisation which was broadly supported by CSOs. Thus, if the marketisation of CSOs, and particularly its tendency towards individualisation of responsibility (and solutions) for unemployment, is detrimental to young people; we can tentatively say that devolved policy goes some way towards shielding them.

In terms of the wider implications of these findings for a single UK welfare state, CSO organisational hybridity leaning more towards statutory (Scotland) or grassroots (Wales) models are directly linked to devolved policy in the data. In addition, where youth unemployment overlays fully devolved areas of policy, more legitimised spaces for CSO action underpinned by policy bring with it a coherence across devolved CSO data not visible in the same way in England despite exceptions seen in city regions and civil society initiatives.

Given the significance of multilevel governance across Europe and particularly the role of regions as 'loosely bounded and contested spaces [which will] not replace the nation-state, but ... do transform it'

(Keating, 2013, p. 1), this research highlights the institutional and tangible impact of sub-national policy and civil society variations. In terms of transferrable lessons for international research, while Wales and Scotland are more aligned with England than they are with more social democratic or conservative welfare regimes such as Denmark or Germany, for example, diverging from England's dominant liberal welfare ideology is a significant step given the geographical, political, economic and cultural 'closeness' of the three countries. In the face of increasing pressure for centralism from the UK government, highlighted throughout the Brexit process (Lloyd, 2016), and the very real possibility of Scottish independence; even the most piecemeal policy divergences come with great constitutional struggle (Rawlings, 2022). In the case of work first and the marketisation of civil society, Scotland and Wales appear to be succeeding, despite this struggle, to keep a more progressive culture of fair work and collaborative civil society networks on the policy agenda. From this, perhaps most importantly, our data shows potentially different experiences for young people living in different territories as a result of devolved social policy and the role of civil society under three respective policy umbrellas. Given Bell and Blanchflower's (2011) research highlighting the lifelong impacts of unemployment and precarious employment on young people, the idea that labour market entry in one region may be a more positive experience for young people than in another, has long term ramifications.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data will be available via the UK Data Service repository, with a DOI identifier, at the end of the project.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The data on which the paper's findings are based has been gathered as part of an ESRC New investigator

project with full ethical approval from Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Board. In-line with this, ethically sound participant information sheets, consent forms, statements of anonymity and data management have been integral parts of the data collection and analysis.

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