Illustrations of Essay and Report Writing

Introduction

Using assignment questions from the Companion and drawing on the General Guidance, this component of the website provides suggestions on how you might respond to essay and report assignments in the different fields of the discipline.

Illustrative Essay Answers

Field: Concepts and Approaches

Question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of increasing choice in the provision of public services? (Chapter 6)

Assignments in this field generally seek to gauge your ability to distil and examine differing understandings of the principal concepts and theories that underwrite social policies and welfare arrangements and their implications. Analysing the disputed ways in which these are viewed can initially appear rather daunting, but, once unpacked, you will find most assignments in this area revolve around on one or more of the following core issues:

- differing definitions/interpretations of key concepts, theories and philosophies;
- the grounds on which they are upheld;
- their policy implications.

In unravelling the question, an astute answer would make it more manageable by recognising the problematic nature of what is meant by ‘choice’, the differing values embedded in the varying uses of the notion and the perceived consequences flowing from these usages. This would enable you to focus on a particular viewpoint and use it as a basis for considering the benefits and costs of increasing choice. In doing so, given that there are several existing and potential (direct and indirect) stakeholders involved in service provision (e.g., the government, taxpayers, the state agency/agencies delivering the services, the commercial/ voluntary organisations to which services might be outsourced and the users), an effective essay could then address who would be advantaged and who might suffer from increased choice. Your discussion should of course also outline what is meant by ‘public services’.

With regard to the sequence of your essay:

- You might ease your way in by signalling the context and importance of the issue posed by the question and the centrality of ‘choice’ in current and recent UK governments’ welfare agendas. A strong account would also point out that, arguably, this applies more to England than the rest of the UK. It would also clarify what is meant by ‘public services’ for the purposes of the essay.
- You could then turn to explicating the concept of ‘choice’, outlining its roots in economics and its usage in social policy discussions before elucidating how it is going to be treated in your assignment. The obvious move here would be to link it with ‘neo-liberal’ thinking which favours market mechanisms in place of direct state provision, advocates competition in the supply and delivery of public services, and sees choice as an expression of individual liberty.
- Having clarified how you are using ‘choice’, you could then address the question by reviewing examples of choice-based measures introduced by the current or earlier governments or which...
are under consideration, being careful to distinguish those that apply across the UK or only to certain national administrations. There are a wealth of examples you could look consider. But the most straightforward approach would be to concentrate on measures that have attracted a lot of attention (such as ‘internal markets’; the opening up of state services to competition from commercial and voluntary sector providers; the promotion of user-based services; vouchers, direct payment, personal budgets or other user-controlled schemes).

Depending on the length of your essay two or three strong examples would give you ample scope to demonstrate your awareness of the main areas of contention and provide an indicative assessment of which benefits from increased choice and for whom such changes are/would be detrimental. In discussing your examples you could take one of two possible routes: addressing each in turn or collating the common points in a synopsis. In either instance, however, your discussion should encompass the differing stakeholders in terms of benefits and costs. Taking up a central concern in social policy you might find it worthwhile looking particularly at whether choice-based policies (or certain policies) affect some social groups more than others.

In considering your conclusion, there are several ways in which the essay could be rounded off; you might:

- confine yourself to a résumé, acknowledging in a balanced manner that there are both advantages and disadvantages to increasing choice in public services, or, more sophisticatedly, that these vary by service and the mechanisms involved;
- suggest that there is a short-run/long-run distinction to be made; for example, short-run benefits could be undermined by long-term costs (or vice versa);
- conclude by arguing that current evidence does not allow you to reach an overall verdict on whether benefits outweigh costs and that further research is required;
- adopt a particular position, arguing that your findings uphold the neo-liberal perspective (or opposing positions) and the view that increasing choice is always beneficial (or always generates disproportionate costs in terms of equity and social justice).

Chapter 6 provides the main source for your essay and a wealth of ideas on how to take it forward. A close reading of the other chapters in Part I and Chapters 19 and 40 will help you clarify your response and increase your awareness of the key issues. For examples of UK governments’ attempts to increase choice, you should look at Parts VIII and IX and, for the often different approach of the devolved administrations, Part IV.

Field: Key Perspectives

Question: What are the main criticisms of neo-liberal ideas about welfare? How convincing are they? (Chapter 9)

In varying ways assignments in this field are vehicles for you to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of differing perspectives in social policy by asking you to explicate a body of thinking and tease out its strengths and weaknesses. Directly or implicitly, this often involves a comparison between two/more perspectives and can also give you the opportunity to form your own judgement on the merits of a particular standpoint. In this case the question also takes you to the centre of debates about the future of state welfare in the UK (and elsewhere) and the theorising that underlies them.
In responding to it, as with multi-part questions in general, it is vital that you tackle each element. In terms of neo-liberalism, you need to familiarise yourself with:

- the key arguments made by its proponents;
- the tenets on which these arguments are based;
- the illustrations and evidence they utilise in support of their case;
- their implications for welfare provision.

With regard to the criticisms the risk here is that you could cast your net too widely and try to cover too many disparate points rather than focusing, as the question asks, on the principal lines of attack. One way forward here would be to concentrate on the central concerns raised by what has long been the primary countervailing approach in social policy, the social democratic perspective. A more discerning response would acknowledge that neo-liberalism is also open to criticisms from other perspectives (e.g. feminist, socialist, post-modernist and within the Conservative tradition) that can both overlap with and add to those proffered by social democrats. Depending on the word length, consideration of these though might need to be very brief.

In terms of the social democratic perspective, you need to be aware of:

- the central arguments made by its proponents and how these are used to counter the neo-liberal position;
- the illustrations and evidence they have employed to support their case.

Extending your discussion to include other perspectives would entail determining the concerns you feel warrant consideration and their assumptive bases.

The essay sequence is largely set by the question. After an Introduction signalling the significance of the issue and the structure of your essay, your first task is to clarify what is meant by the neo-liberal perspective. If you look at Chapter 9 (and Chapter 19), you will see this would involve a summary of its roots in classical liberalism, the central ideas and principles of its key advocates, their criticisms of state welfare, their market-based reform proposals and emphasis on personal responsibility (see the boxed summaries). You could then provide illustrations of policies/proposals based on neo-liberal prescriptions in the UK (and, possibly, further afield).

This would be followed by a brief overview of the social democratic perspective. But note here, the focus of the question is on criticisms of neo-liberalism. Hence you need to identify the most important points in the social democratic critique, showing how they link with its proponents’ core arguments and/or the policies and evidence they offer in support of them (Chapter 9 gives you a head-start here, pointing to four main criticisms). In doing so it would be worth reflecting on whether this involves a clash over ‘first principles’, the policies derived from them or the welfare interventions undertaken in the name of neo-liberalism. Bearing these issues in mind you could then refer to the criticisms advanced from other positions.

The next part of your essay (which should be at least a third of the total length of your assignment) should focus on evaluating the persuasiveness of the criticisms you have highlighted. Looking at the social-democratic case first, it would be helpful to ask yourself: Where does the strength of its approach rest? What are the weaknesses (if any) in its arguments? What is the potency of its evidence base? Have the neo-liberals successfully countered its arguments? In the same vein you could then turn to the other criticisms, though here space constraints may necessitate a brief general appraisal rather than weighing up each one by one.
Taking the criticisms together, you can then move on to your conclusion. Here, your findings might lead you to:

- re-emphasise the significance of the debate over the neo-liberal welfare agenda and then adopt a circumspect approach, pointing out that there are strengths and weaknesses in both neo-liberal theorising and the main criticisms made of it and that their salience may vary between welfare domains and according to wider socio-economic developments; or

- take a stance and argue that the criticisms of neo-liberalism advanced from a social democratic and other perspectives are not convincing.

To tackle this (and similar essays on key perspectives), you will need to look at Chapters 9 and 11. But you will also find it worthwhile looking at the other chapters in Part II and at Chapters 3, 6, 7, 19, 21, 30 and 40.

Field: Historical Context

Question: Did the reforms of 1906–14 form the foundations of the welfare state? (Chapter 18)

Assessments on historical issues usually centre on one or more of four general issues:

- the key features of and developments in social provision in a particular period (focusing either on particular measures, policies/policy sets or the overall welfare mix);
- contemporary controversies over these provisions;
- the ways in which continuity and change in particular domains/welfare systems have been explained;
- how new initiatives have been viewed/assessed in terms both of their contemporary impact and subsequent developments.

Although the emphasis will obviously vary with the topic, a good historical answer will, as in this illustrative essay, capture aspects of all of the above. Here the question utilises a common ‘cause and effect’ format, asking you to assess the extent to which the pre-First World War UK Liberal Government brought about the welfare state. Hence it turns on the characteristics associated with ‘the welfare state’ and the degree to which its principles, policies and services were formed during this period of government, prior to its election, or subsequently.

Whatever view you take, the essay sequence would be similar. Your Introduction would:

- set your response in the context of the wider debate concerning definitions of the ‘welfare state’ and its origins;
- signpost your response to the question and the order in which you are going to answer it; you might choose to argue either that the 1906–14 Liberal Government’s reforms did indeed found the welfare state, that the seeds of the welfare state were sown by earlier measures or that its social legislation did not or only partially instituted the welfare state.

No matter which option you choose, your essay could then:

- open your discussion by looking more closely at differing notions of the ‘welfare state’ and outlining a working definition for the purpose of the essay;
- move on to charting the chief welfare measures introduced by the Liberals between 1906 and 1914;
then consider the main arguments concerning their significance, before;

assessing the degree to which, in terms of ideology, the range of provision, funding, entitlements, coverage, delivery and outcomes the reforms established a 'welfare state'. Here, you might focus first on the ways in which they followed previous policies and thinking, or diverged from them and reflected a different view of the role of the state and collective investment. You could then consider the limitations of the Liberal reforms, referring (briefly) to key developments between the wars and comparing them with the social protections introduced by the Labour Governments of 1945-51 (for instance in terms of selectivism/universalism).

Discussing these a shrewd answer would also allude to the varying pressures driving the welfare interventions of both administrations and the constraints they faced.

You could then conclude by reiterating the standpoint set in your Introduction and summarising your reasons as to whether or not, or to what extent, the 1906–14 Liberal Government can be credited with founding the welfare state.

Thinking through this question and its sequence will enable you to manage other assignments on the ‘genesis’ of state-provided welfare services as well as developing your understanding of the notion of the ‘welfare state’. You will find the bases for your answer in Chapter 17, but you will also need to reflect on the discussions in Chapters 1, 16, 18 and 34. To get to grips with the main concepts of the ‘welfare state’, scan through the discussions in Part II and for further insights into the arguments over the development of the welfare state look at the chapters in Part X, especially Chapter 63.

 questões de campos: Produção de Assistência e Provisão de Assisência e Governo da Assisência

Questão: Why are contemporary politicians and social policymakers so enthusiastic about voluntary welfare? (Chapter 37)

Assignments in welfare production, provision and governance are generally designed to assess your understanding of and skills in analysing one or more of a cluster of aspects of social policy, including:

- the role and operation of non-governmental forms of welfare;
- shifts in the welfare mix;
- changes in the role/s of its constituent elements;
- accounts of the patterning of or changes to the welfare mix and their implications;
- the governmental levels (local, regional, devolved, national and pan-national) in which social policies are instigated and implemented;
- policymaking processes;
- changes in the institutional framework and structures of policymaking, service management, regulation, user and public participation;
- the outcomes and repercussions of these changes.

A word of warning: whatever the topic, in a British context it is particularly important in questions in these fields to check whether there are variations in the policy or provision between the devolved administrations of the UK (see Part IV). Hence, for some assignments, you might find it helpful to narrow your coverage. The complex interplay between different features of the welfare mix in the UK/its constituent nations can, as in this instance, also mean that a question seemingly focused on one element can be more far-reaching. Here, rather than plunging straight in, a perceptive essay would reveal an awareness of the broader significance of the issue being addressed. In particular it would avoid taking the question’s starting point for granted. Rather it would expand on it, explicating both the main ways this ‘enthusiasm’ has been reflected in recent policymaking and the misgivings it has aroused.
In the light of your Introduction, you could:

- Begin your answer by pointing to the difficulties of defining ‘voluntary welfare’ and clarifying your take on it.
- Explicate the question by demonstrating policymakers’ interest in it through comparing its place in the post-Second World War and contemporary welfare nexus and, to this end, delineate how governments since 1997 have promoted the role of voluntary agencies and volunteers. An effective response would also note the differences between England and the rest of the UK and, focusing on England, spotlight the strategies of the Coalition and Conservative administrations, including the ‘Big Society’ agenda.
- Then turn to the crux of the question and review the main reasons, from your reading, for successive governments’ promotion of voluntary welfare, especially in England. One strategy would be to limit yourself to discussing the concerns over the drawbacks of both state and market-based provision and the merits ascribed to voluntary action, with some mention of its major proponents. A defter alternative would be to rank these in order of significance, distinguish any differences between the Labour administrations of 1997–2010 and their successors, and also consider other explanations, such as the fiscal pressures faced by recent governments.
- Finish by recapping the explanations for policymakers’ enthusiasm and the ‘mainstreaming’ (see Chapter 37) of voluntary welfare. For a stronger concluding section you could adopt a useful essay technique, that of querying the question. This strategy would allow you to briefly note the key concerns over the changing role of voluntary welfare (e.g., its capacity and the impact of voluntary organisations’ provider role on their other activities) before rounding off (for instance, with a call for further research).

Chapter 37 gives you the basis for fashioning your report, but you should also look at Chapters 21, 34, 35 and 39 and Parts VIII and IX.

- **Fields: Welfare Domains and Experiencing Welfare**

  **Question:** What is the Child Poverty Act 2010 and what are the implications for children of this legislation? (Chapter 58)

  This sample question illustrates the standard essay format in both these substantive fields. Assignments here usually give you the opportunity to address current developments and debates, asking you in varying ways to outline and evaluate social policymaking and provision. Typically, you would be expected to consider either an existing intervention, one that is in the legislative pipeline or a social policy proposal. In addressing current welfare arrangements your task may be confined to the first of the following, but is more likely to require you to:

  - describe the origins, aims, and objectives of your topic (whether it is a piece of legislation, particular policy, service, benefit or scheme);
  - establish its key features, including entitlements, provider(s), delivery structure, mode of funding, and, where relevant, regulatory arrangements;
  - evaluate its implementation and impact
  - consider possible reforms and their implications.

  In the case of a planned or proposed provision you will be expected to use your sources to similarly denote its aims and key features, though your discussion of its likely effectiveness/impact will be more speculative and involve a predictive assessment. Whatever the focus of your assignment, in
addressing it you should try to bear in mind a driving concern in social policy, the effect of policies or the overall structuring of welfare on levels of inequality and the ways different social groups and areas experience social policies.

To repeat a caveat, it is particularly important in unlocking assignments in these fields to ascertain whether there are variations in provision within the UK (see Part IV). This illustrative question is a case in point: while the 2010 Child Poverty Act was a UK-wide piece of legislation setting UK targets for relieving child poverty, it made the administrations of Scotland and Northern Ireland responsible, within their powers, for producing strategies detailing how they would meet these targets in their countries. This duty was not, however, placed on Welsh Ministers as the Welsh Assembly had already introduced parallel provisions.

Furthermore the Act was amended by the 2010–15 UK Coalition Government, which extended the remit of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in 2011. As indicated in Chapter 57, its provisions were substantially (and controversially) revised in 2016 under the Conservative Government’s Welfare Reform and Work measure, though contrary to the government’s proposals this included a commitment to annually publish child poverty statistics based on income.

On the surface the question is making two relatively straightforward requests: what was the Act intended to achieve, and what consequences has it had for children? Beyond these, however, lie the further issues arising from its revision. Hence in structuring your response, an initial decision concerns the relative proportion of your answer to be devoted to the two direct parts of the question, and how much space you devote to the new legislation. The danger here is that you could easily devote too much space to detailing the 2010 Act and its amendment at the expense of evaluating the repercussions. You should, therefore, try to limit the descriptive elements of your response to between a third and no more than a half of your essay.

A further danger is that in considering the implications you could slip into looking only at the estimated impact on child poverty and not indicate your awareness of other possible repercussions for children. To make the essay manageable you might therefore decide to confine your discussion to the UK overall (though this should be made clear in the Introduction, where you could also alert your assessor to your recognition of possible variations between the devolved nations).

Following your Introduction you might develop your assignment by:

- Providing a brief summary of the Act’s main aims; the child poverty targets and measures it set; the obligations placed on the UK government and national administrations and the role of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.
- Linking this with an outline of its origins: one option would be to simply list the main reasons for its development; another more sophisticated possibility would be to identify the differing grounds offered in the literature and order these in terms of what you see as their significance. At a minimum, both accounts should include trends in the estimated numbers of children living in poverty (and, relatedly, changes in its conception and measurement – see Chapter 33); concerns about ‘social exclusion’; and the growth of interest in the ‘social investment state’.
- Then, drawing on these sections address the ‘implications’ element of the question. Here, the initial focus should be on whether the provisions of the 2010 legislation and the UK government’s most recent Child Poverty Strategy (for 2014–17) are likely to alleviate child poverty in the specified period and the debate over the factors that might thwart this. This would then lead you into a brief synopsis of the key changes introduced in 2016, their rationale and the concerns they have raised with regard to reducing child poverty.
Thereafter you could extend your discussion to point to other possible outcomes of the 2010 Act, in terms, for instance, of: childcare, early years education, wider opportunity structures, the rights and responsibilities of families and the state, the status of children and the ways these might be affected by its revision.

Your conclusion could take the form of a ‘summing up’ of your discussion, or it might reaffirm a particular view that you have formed on the effectiveness of the legislation and the prospects for the future.

In addition to Chapters 58 and 33, you will find further insights into the issues raised by the question in Chapters 21, 30, 31, 47 and 57.

Field: International Issues

Question: Are ‘developmentalism’ and ‘productivism’ still useful labels to examine welfare systems in East Asia? (Chapter 67)

International and comparative social policy assignments generally give you a platform to explore and assess policy developments and the welfare mix in other countries. This may involve appraising theoretical frameworks accounting for past, current and possible future arrangements, or considering the strengths and drawbacks of the main approaches and methods employed in comparative studies. It can also entail empirical evaluations of the ways other societies structure their welfare systems and the extent to which social policy aims are met. These can range from country-centred analyses to cross-national comparisons of programmes, funding and/or delivery of services. Assignments here can also require you to survey the role of international governmental or non-governmental agencies in the financing, development and organisation of welfare provisions.

The illustrative assignment draws on both ‘regime theory’ (see Chapter 63) and empirical analyses of the welfare mix in a cluster of countries, taking you to a core issue in international and comparative social policy. Addressing it will give you a foundation for tackling a wide array of other assessments in this field. In saying this, however, it does not demand a detailed account of the theory or lengthy descriptions of the welfare mix in these countries. Rather what it requires is an assessment of the grounds on which some analysts have viewed them as a group of countries with similar welfare systems.

Following an Introduction contexting the issue and pointing the way to your conclusion by indicating your stance on whether these ‘labels’ are still appropriate and well-founded, it thus lends itself to a four-stage answer:

• Your first objective would be to specify which countries you are including under the umbrella of ‘East Asia’ (here it would be best to follow Chapter 67) and provide a preliminary definition of ‘developmentalism’ and ‘productivism’ (in two/three sentences).
• You could then locate both concepts in the debate over regime theory, starting with a summary of Esping-Andersen’s typology and the relevant critiques of it before providing a fuller account of the proponent of ‘developmentalism’ and ‘productivism’ and the criteria used to demark a distinctive welfare order in East Asia.
• This would give you the basis to consider the main criticisms of both approaches, particularly those that point to the impact of recent socio-economic changes and financial crises and the differing responses to these in the countries of East Asia.
• In the final section to note moves to modify or rethink the notion of a distinctive pan-East Asia welfare order.
Your conclusion should sum up your estimation of the value of each approach, making it clear whether you think one/both may have been a helpful way of capturing the patterning of social policy in East Asia but are now outmoded or whether you feel they are still relevant. In doing so a well-crafted answer would finish by emphasising that developing ways of encapsulating the welfare mix in East Asia is part of a wider debate over ‘big picture’ analyses in comparative social policy. *Chapter 67* offers you the groundings for this essay. You should also consult *Chapter 63* and the other chapters in *Part X*, which will give you different angles on regime theorisation.

### Illustrative Report Writing

While essays are the main form of assessment in social policy, for reasons outlined in the *General Guidance on Assignments*, you might well be asked to submit a report in any field of the discipline and in one of several formats. Whatever the topic the effectiveness of your response hinges on recognising the format that is expected of you, the likely audience and ensuring you do not digress from your remit.

#### Field: Contemporary Context and Challenges

**Brief:** Write a report outlining some of the implications for social policy of population change in general in the UK. *(Chapter 26)*

As with all reports, the structure and remit of the document play a large part in the distribution and sequencing of its contents (see Box 2 in the *General Guidance on Assignments*). In the case of this briefing report you have been given a chance to show your cognisance of social policy by selecting ‘some of the implications’. Your first task then is to determine which of the many possible issues and hence the forms of population change to focus on. A low-risk ploy that would still make for an insightful report would be to chart the main constituents of population change, mention the type of social policy concerns they can give rise to and then spell out which type(s) of change you see as the most pressing and its ramifications. This could be changes in the size or composition of the population or family structures, in migration or population ageing and the assignment length will usually mean you should confine yourself to one of these. You should make sure though that you explain your approach.

In configuring your report:

- The ‘Executive Summary’ or ‘Abstract’ might begin by reaffirming your brief and explaining why it is such an important topic. At this point you can also state how you have interpreted it, and provide a précis of your methodology and findings.
- In the ‘Terms of Reference’ or ‘Introduction’, you need to define what is meant by ‘population change’ explicate its main constituents, provide a fuller account of your approach and the scope of your report, including the time-frame under consideration and the range of benefits and services included as illustrative of social policy.
- The ‘Proceedings’ or ‘Methodology’ section should include a short account of how you tackled your brief, your sources and research methods, an overview of their merits and drawbacks, and their impact on your inferences.
- In the ‘Findings’ section, you should summarise the key demographic trends and projected changes in general and, if they are disputed, the variant views. Then, drawing on *Chapter 26* and other relevant literature, you could (starting with what you found to be the most crucial) itemise their direct and indirect consequences for the chosen welfare services and benefits. A telling report would also note the main wider socio-economic implications (such as those for...
government revenues and expenditure). In the final section you could support your analysis by
detailing the key findings regarding your chosen example, again following the typical ‘report
style’, enumerating them in terms of their perceived significance.

- The Conclusion should take stock of and give your response to the brief. The remit of a report
generally limits this to a résumé of the preceding research and analysis. In this instance,
however, it would be possible to finish by using your chosen example as a vehicle for or drawing
attention to particularly damaging outcomes that need to be alleviated and alerting the reader
to possible strategies to overcome recognised issues.

In tackling this report, your best starting point would be Chapter 26, but you will also find useful
information in many other parts of the Companion, particularly Chapters 3, 32, 40, 54, 57, 59, 60 and
62.

Field: Devolution and Social Policy in the UK

Brief: As a policy officer employed by a charitable foundation seeking to enhance the UK’s welfare
system you have been asked to prepare a preliminary evaluative report advising the trustees on the
extent of social policy divergences and innovations in the devolved nations. (Chapter 22)

As the discussions in Part IV of the Companion indicate, devolution has opened up another field in
social policy research and debate, one that is expanding with the shift of further powers to the
devolved legislatures and administrations, particularly in Scotland, but also to city-regions and
counties in England. In reshaping the nature of the British state it has made for variations in welfare
provisions, adding to the range of comparative social policy research and, potentially, to the avenues
for social policy learning and transfer. Indeed some have seen it as making for a social policy
‘laboratory’, offering opportunities for policy exchange when the one/more of the four nations
adopt different approaches to common problems.

The ongoing debate over the social policy ramifications of devolution will be reflected in the
assignments set in this field. As with the questions for Part IV you might be tasked with:

- describing, accounting for and/or evaluating a particular policy development in Northern Ireland,
  Scotland or Wales;
- comparing a policy development between two or all of the devolved administrations;
- detailing the general trends in social policy in one/each country;
- comparing those trends between two or all the devolved jurisdictions;
- reviewing one policy or overall provision in one or all of the devolved countries in the light of
developments in England;
- assessing the scope for policy learning across the UK.

You should be aware though that whatever the phrasing an implicit comparison with developments
in England is often embedded in assignments focused on the first four of the above. Looked at
closely in this instance, which requires an explication of your interpretation of the
notions of ‘divergence’ and ‘innovation’ is called for. While acknowledging the often disparate
conceptions of both you might find it helpful to view the latter straightforwardly as referring to an
initiative that meets a previously overlooked or newly recognised social need/problem, or a social
policy measure, a benefit or scheme, or an aspect of policymaking or service delivery that is new and
qualitatively different to previous/historical provision.

Similarly you could construe ‘divergence’ as referring to differences in social policies and provisions
and (following much of the literature) use England as a ‘benchmark’ to identify these, before noting
variations between the three devolved nations since 1999. To respond to the brief, though, you should focus on the most far-reaching instances of differentiation and innovation and the welfare principles and values that underlie them. A high calibre report would also draw attention to continuing similarities and points of convergence.

In constructing your report:

- The Executive Summary could (again as with reports in general) start by restating the topicality of this issue and its significance for the foundation, indicate how you interpreted the brief and outline your approach, timetable, sources and methods, their limitations and how these affected your conclusions which should then be itemised.
- Your ‘Terms of Reference’ need (as indicated above) to clarify your use of the terms ‘divergence’ and innovation.
- The ‘Proceedings’ or ‘Methodology’ should enlarge on the Executive Summary by describing the sources and methods of investigation you employed and why, your assessment of their reliability and validity, and how this has affected your observations.
- Your ‘Findings’ would commence with a brief reminder of the genesis of the original devolution settlement, the differences in the powers devolved to the three jurisdictions and the changes since, including fiscal devolution. At this stage it would also be helpful to point to the possible constraints on differentiation and innovation arising from the structuring of devolution, the powers retained by the UK government and the funding system. The next section could comprise your assessment of the extent of divergence by charting the prime general variations from policymaking in England. Here you could either provide a general overview of the key domains of health, social care, education and housing or focus on a few more detailed illustrative case studies. Whatever your approach, however, you would need to highlight the thinking behind the differences in provision and (where your findings allow) the outcomes. In considering the last a skilful report would note both the outcomes in a particular domain and the wider implications for social protection.

The subsequent, third, section could then focus on specific national policy differences. The final section should address the issue of innovation, noting the main developments cited in your sources (including, for example, new styles of policymaking) and give your valuation of their significance in terms of their aims, design and (possible) outcomes. In line with report writing generally, in all these sections the most important findings should be presented first. A discerning report would also touch on the potential for further divergence and innovation, arising from recent reforms, especially fiscal devolution in Scotland.

- The ‘Conclusion’ would recap the findings and then present an overall assessment. Though not called for it could also reiterate the importance of the issue for the Foundation’s decision-making.

Part IV gives you the basis for fashioning your report, but you should also look at Chapters 45, 49–54 and 64.