

Modern equality: speech at the launch of *Making it Personal*

Rt. Hon. Ed Miliband MP,
Minister for the Cabinet Office

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Check against delivery

I want to start by congratulating Charlie Leadbeater, Niamh Gallagher and Jamie Bartlett for their report and thanking Demos for organising this conference and giving me the chance to speak today – the ideas in their report say a lot about where our public services need to go.

I was talking last month to a young lady called Hedi Dori. She has learning and physical disabilities, and was offered standard care from a private company. She and her mother described to me how their lives were transformed when they got the power to spend their own budget.

In the seven or so sessions before they got fed up and asked for their own budget, they only had the same carer twice. So each time, Hedi's mother had to spend an hour explaining all the things that had to be done. With Direct Payments set up, she has kept the same carer for four years – and it was someone she chose herself, recommended by a friend not sent from an agency.

It had helped Hedi to feel like an independent person and make independent decisions – and in that moment of meeting her, we see the liberating power that public services can have.

My argument today is for that liberating force to have its effect we need a different kind of equality in our public services.

For the founders of the welfare state, equality was about securing a basic minimum of services – a basic minimum of healthcare, a basic minimum of housing, a basic minimum of income.

Now, we can be more ambitious: equality comes not just from the basic goods but from the ability to choose the life you want to lead. This modern equality,

based not only on the equal moral worth of every citizen but our equal right to express our choices and exercise our capabilities, demands a deeper mission for public services. It demands an interest in both what public services provide but also how they are provided, and whether they are genuinely liberating or not.

There are five parts to this mission, which I want to talk about today and which put the policy announcements made in the last few months in context.

First, we need more personal services. People will only have a better chance to meet their own ambitions if everyone—and not just those who can either argue loudest or supplement public services with private services—have access to services organised around their needs. And despite the improvements in public services, this is not always the case.

Second, we need services which respect and make the most of everyone's abilities. The knowledge and skills of users is a huge resource, which increasingly is being tapped into but still not enough. The skills of parents, patients and neighbours must be mobilised if services are to succeed in their mission and be sustainable. This is what some people call co-production.

Third, we need services that give space to professionals. Why? Because if unlocking the talents and knowledge of those who use services is the key, this can only be done with flexibility, empathy and skill at the frontline to shape the relationship in the way will liberate the individual.

Fourth, we need services that are accountable to the community. Public services are not simply like private services provided outside the market. They are often experienced collectively and we need new mechanisms for the community to come together to make decisions.

Fifthly, however, we need a welfare state that evolves not just in how it is organised but what is provided. We need a welfare state which is adequately equipped for to meet the new risks of globalisation, the new threats to equity, the new demands for public goods.

More personal

First then, let me start with the focus on the user of the service. Services need to be built around their priorities and personalised to their needs and convenience.

More personal services can come from individual budgets – and the pamphlet gives interesting ideas about how this might be taken further. It also comes from choice and contestability which can put power in the hands of the user. For example, choose and book is giving people a choice of hospitals for elective care and we are opening up primary care services to new providers.

But it is also about basic customer insight in public services. For example, a few years ago if you wanted to claim a pension you used to have to go into a

DWP office for a meeting, fill in a long form, and wait 60 days while it was processed.

Sometimes it was thought this face-to-face contact was what older people wanted. The Pension Service took time to listen to their customers, put a heavy emphasis on the techniques of customer insight, and redesigned their service. Now you can claim over the phone, you find out in 20 minutes, and they tell you if you can claim other benefits too.

And now we are going further. That's what Sir David Varney, who is in the audience, is working on with the Cabinet Office.

Putting the patient or pupil at the centre is also about services that are personal to each. In education, December's Children's Plan announced a commitment to one-to-one tuition for 300,000 kids a year in English and 300,000 in maths by the end of the decade. And to help people into work, we are building on the success of personal advisers, developing a Flexible New Deal, and bringing together training and support for job-searching.

More collaborative

Secondly, respect for the user means respect for their skills and for what they can contribute to their own care, their own learning, their own health. Indeed, as I said earlier, the problem in the past with some public services was that they saw the user as the individual to whom things should be delivered rather than a participant who could shape their own life.

This is an absolutely crucial point and as a minister who is responsible for the third sector in government, I see all the time the way the third sector has a particular ability to engage individuals so they can contribute to meeting their own needs.

This is particularly important given the challenges we face today. For the 15 million people with chronic diseases, and for the eight out of ten hospital inpatients who have a long-term condition, their welfare is as much about their learning how to care for themselves as about their doctor. In fact, Derek Wanless calculated that the difference between success and failure in preventative health could cost two per cent of national GDP through the NHS alone.

For children to succeed in school, it is as much, if not more, about the capacities of parents to help them, as about what teachers deliver to them. Quite simply, we know that a 'delivery' model of public services which says it is for the state to simply give the service to the user – like a parcel delivered to the individual – won't work.

I think we are in the foothills of what co-production can achieve in public services but already we are showing a new seriousness of intent. The Children's Plan expands the role of parent support advisers, and over this

year 15 million patients with a chronic or long-term condition will be given new ways to help with self-care.

A renewed professionalism

If users are able to design and personalise their own service, then the role of the professional is not just provider but navigator and advocate. And this is my third point.

In the case of Hedi, the woman I mentioned at the start, her use of direct payments was informed by more than an hour talking through her options with a professional. This will be a familiar experience for many people in this room, and will be increasingly familiar with people in other public services.

But to do this, to ensure the relationship with the individual is designed in the right way, we need to give professionals the space they need.

Recently I met Jo Pritchard, the driving force behind a nurse-owned social enterprise called Central Surrey Health. She talked to me about how becoming a social enterprise has freed them up to make a huge difference to the community – for example, cutting waiting times for physiotherapy from 6 months to 3 weeks.

That's why we are making major changes to the way in which Government sets targets: reducing the number of overall targets and ensuring that they focus on broad outcomes.

Moreover, the changing role of professionals does not simply demand more autonomy to be responsive but a new relationship with national and local government.

I am convinced that there is more we could do to capture the knowledge and expertise of professionals. Go to any Job Centre Plus and you can have some of the most useful conversation about welfare reform.

So the question is, how do professionals feed more into policy not just in the best places but everywhere?

Here we need to learn from the best of the private sector, where R&D is not only done by research departments but using a network of people with different sources of knowledge and expertise, including frontline providers.

So for example, the Darzi review has groups in every region of the country involving frontline professionals and we want to find ways of extending this approach.

Community accountability

So a seriousness about modern equality means we need services more personal, more collaborative, with more autonomy for the professional – and also more accountable.

Decisions about the way public services are run must combine individual accountability and collective accountability. For example, we need both to make learning for every child more tailored to their needs and ensure the school as a whole reflects the priorities of that local area.

We need to deepen both formal and informal, representative and participatory forms of democracy.

That means giving more powers to local government, as we are doing in transport and economic development.

It also means finding ways in which in areas like the NHS and policing, we strengthen the accountability of key institutions respectively through the Darzi review and the plan for an NHS constitution and by building on the Flanagan report on police accountability.

And it also means more participatory forms of accountability. In some cases, it is through new institutions. When I first came into parliament I chaired the all-party group on young people, because I saw the extent to which young people in my constituency had no places to go, and no activities to divert them and expand their horizons.

The interesting thing is, when the government then set up local funds for youth activities, the fact that it was run by young people themselves, out in conversations with their peers, transformed how willing young people were to engage. For the first time, when they ask for money I can actually say that young people themselves will decide how it is spent. This is a crucial part of the youth strategy published last summer.

In most cases, though, it will not be through new institutions but new channels, new responses to all the wide-ranging ways people want to get involved – such as through directly presenting their views to local politicians and services, debating and discussing issues on-line as well as through meeting.

That is behind our proposals just after Christmas to strengthen the power of petitions, our experiments to involve people in setting local authority budgets, and the use of citizen's juries to inform policy.

The demands on the welfare state

All of this tells us that public services need to evolve in the way they are organised so that we meet the demands of equality in the modern world.

But there is a fifth challenge about the condition of Britain: to ensure the welfare state evolves in what it offers.

That is what transformative governments have achieved in the past.

The 1906 government founded a state pensions system, which responded to the need to pool risk in old age and tackle inequality.

The 1945 government founded the NHS, which tackled the risk of ill health and stopped those in poverty being denied health care.

And that is what the welfare state at its best has always done: it alleviates the risks the individual faces, leans against inequality and provides public goods that the market cannot provide.

We know that needs change. New risks, new inequalities, new sources of demand for public goods emerge.

The great strides forward in healthcare and longevity have produced the new risk that while our old age lasts longer, it produces new insecurities around care, independence and isolation.

We face new and profound threats to equity. Globalisation means bigger winners and losers and the risk that those without skills will get left behind. And we know now that the roots of inequality start to grow long before children reach school.

And finally, we know about new sources of demand for public goods. Just as we realised in the 19th century that no individual could protect themselves from inadequate sanitation, so too we know that no individual can truly protect themselves from climate change.

The role of government is to strike the right balance between the role of the individual and the role of government in order to meet these risks, inequalities and demands for public goods. But they cannot be ignored.

It was because of the commitment to the dynamic welfare state that we recognised the new needs of the under-fives.

It is because of this commitment that we are introducing education till 18 to alleviate the risks people face from low skills, at the same time as we found new ways through tuition fees of financing mass higher education.

It is because of a rise in chronic, long-term conditions that we are moving healthcare closer to people.

It is because of changing patterns of crime and community that every area will have a neighbourhood policing team.

Conclusion

Let me end with this thought.

I talked earlier about the institutions that different governments built. For me, one of the reasons Sure Start is one of the proudest achievements of this government is that it draws together the five challenges I have talked about today. And I see this as a constituency MP.

It is built around the needs of parents, personalised to their needs.

It draws on the ideas and contributions of parents and the wider community.

It values the workforce as people able to shape the service in response to community needs.

It is accountable to local parents.

And it meets new needs: leaning against inequality, supporting parents to fulfil their potential, and responding to the demands for public goods by creating a new space for the community to grow.

And so, in a way, the Sure Start test embodies the question about the condition of Britain: who can best meet the evolving demands of our society? Who can build public services that in the way they are organised and what they offer liberate the individual to lead the life they want to live?

Who will recognise the new needs and can pass the Sure Start test?

Sure Start is the best refutation I know to those who say that public services are a drain on individual freedom and can never liberate the individual.

It shows the best way to defeat their argument is for the moral defenders of the welfare state to be the biggest advocates of change.

That means never defending unresponsive services and always ensuring that where it can the welfare state evolves to meet new needs.

Together, we can build the kind of public services we want to see, and the kind of society we want to see.