



© 2017 Mary Shannon. This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book review published by Taylor & Francis in *Social Work Education* on 25/5/17, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/02615479.2017.1331528>

Shannon, M. (2017) *Social Work in Ireland: changes and continuities*, edited by A. Christie, B. Featherstone, S. Quin, and T. Walsh, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 256 pp., £25.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781137383204. *Social Work Education*. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2017.1331528

The book provides a very timely exploration of social work in Ireland that really captures the profession shaped by both a recent period and the particular factors and history in this jurisdiction. The reader is provided with an in-depth and very reflective consideration of the unique role of social work which is established in core areas and developing in others. In this vein, the book draws on writing and texts on the Irish context, such as Skehill's analysis (Skehill, 2004) and Kearney & Skehill's (2005) text. The opening chapter by McGregor and Quinn considers key historical and current forces that are shaping the profession, including the pressures of managerialism, whilst also posing critical questions about the response of Irish social work from a social justice perspective. The complex intersection of global developments and the influence of past welfare regimes in Ireland is considered by Christie and Walsh in chapter two, with both chapters drawing on wealth of writing in this area. This leads into a strong chapter by Featherstone and Powell which calls for a real appraisal of inequality and the key role that ethical considerations can play in shaping social work practice.

The later individual chapters provide a detailed overview of the current policy and recent developments in services across the board. Here, the contribution of practitioners and academics from within each service is valuable in terms of their expertise, bringing together a rich academic and practice experience. In this regard, the text is of an interest to a wider social care and welfare readership, generating a 'snapshot' of current social services across service user groups and setting each in the context of its policy and practice development and with a clear emphasis on service users perspective. In chapter 4, Buckley and Burns outline the children protection field which takes 2014 onwards as a key landmark and provides an insightful consideration of the prospects of TUSLA going forward. Other key contemporary areas are covered in chapters on family violence, fostering and adoption. The spectrum of adult and community services are outlined well in chapters such as those on mental health services, older adults, learning disability, substance misuse, probation and health/illness. Critical questions are posed in each chapter: practitioners and students alike could read individual chapters to consider specific areas, contained within each is a concise summary and expertise which will enable international comparisons to be made. Indeed, from an international perspective, the book could be seen as an examination of how one particular country is evolving within the wider influences that are shaping social work.

Quite a critical analysis is generated throughout the book: this is achieved through considering both the particular past influences and the current socio-political climate, lending to a more analytical appraisal of the current place of social work within Irish services. There is a clear emphasis also on looking to the future and suggesting particular directions that might develop or that social workers could take a more active role in shaping. Indeed some of the analysis suggests that social workers could take a more leading role especially in some emerging or developing areas. Austerity and service cutbacks certainly feature as a factor but the mental health chapter by Brosnan and Sapouna interestingly cautions against seeing this as the only barrier to moving services forward, with a suggestion that a social work perspective could really push social issues to the fore. Overall, social work's function, role and identity are discussed with clear links to the international definition and the underpinning values of the profession. That is a key benefit to the book: really setting the social work profession in Ireland against the backdrop of critical issues and challenges. A comprehensive overview of the social work specific role is outlined and its place within the overall policy context and trends in Irish society is considered: this text provides a valuable critical reflection of Social work in Ireland today.

Kearney, N., & Skehill, C. (2005). *Social work in Ireland: Historical perspectives*. Institute of public Administration.

Skehill, C. (2004). *History of the present of child protection and welfare social work in Ireland*.  
Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.