



Public Attitudes to Public Services: A Comparison Across the UK



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Background

The extent and direction of attempts to reform public services varied across the different parts of the UK from the late 1990s to the late 2000s.

In England, considerable stress was laid on giving users 'choice', buying services from non-state providers and encouraging market-style competition. But the administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland either explicitly rejected or ignored such policies of 'choice'. These administrations also variously reduced or eliminated certain charges for public services, including drug prescription charges, university tuition fees and charges for personal care services. No such developments occurred in England.

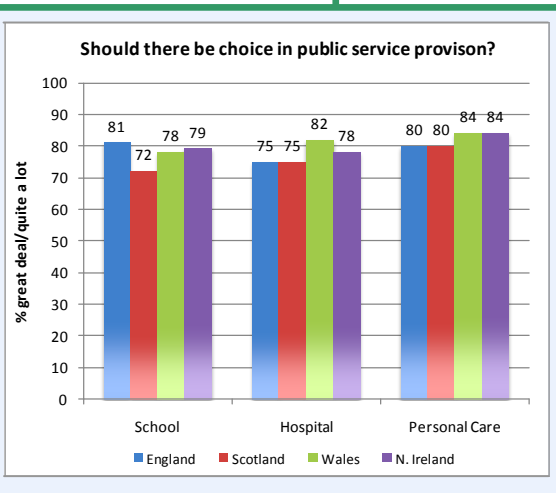


Figure 1
Choice of provider is popular in all parts of the UK

What We Did

We designed a module of 60 questions on attitudes towards and satisfaction with public services that was included in the following UK surveys:

- ❖ The 2007 British Social Attitudes Survey (which provided a sample for both Great Britain as a whole and for England in particular)
- ❖ The 2007 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey
- ❖ The 2007 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey

- ❖ An especially commissioned survey in Wales, known as the 2007 Wales Life and Times Survey.

The module focused on three public services, health, education, and social care for older people.

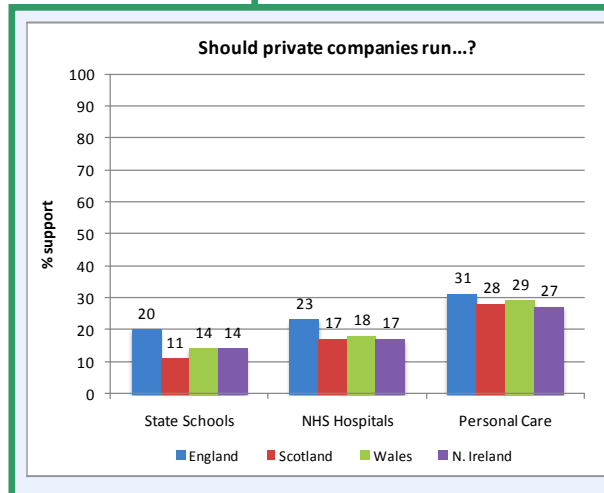


Figure 2
Provision of care by private companies is unpopular

Aims

In the light of these policy developments and divergences, we wanted to:

- ❖ Assess the level of public support for the agenda of choice and non-state provision pursued in England;
- ❖ Examine whether the provision of choice resulted in higher levels of satisfaction with public services;
- ❖ Consider whether the differences between the policies being pursued in different parts of the UK reflect differences across the UK in public attitudes towards choice and charging for services; and
- ❖ Collect data on attitudes to provision of public services across the UK that could be replicated in the future to analyze changes over time.

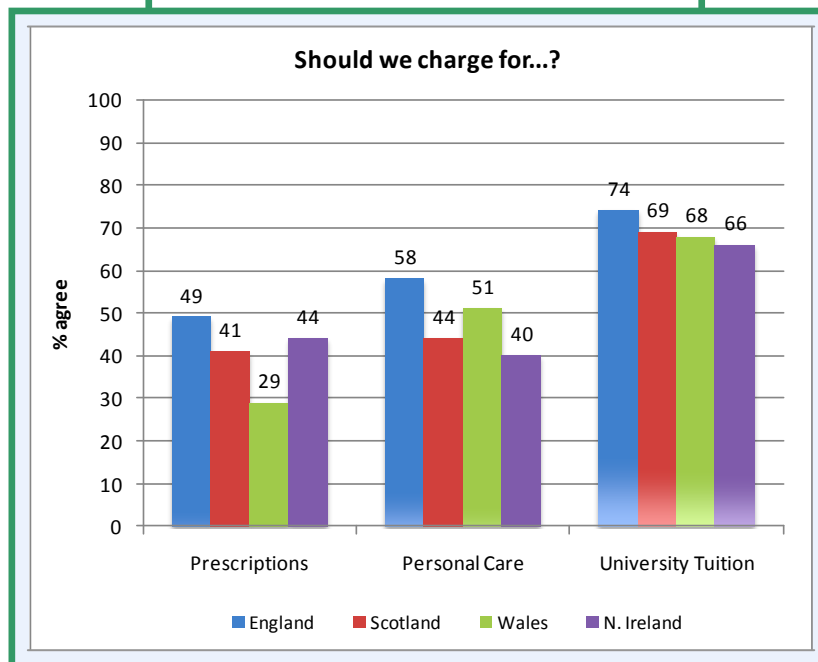


Figure 3
Charging for services is less popular outside England

Findings

- ❖ Choice appears to be popular throughout the UK (Figure 1) but the provision of services by non-state providers – and especially by private companies – is not (Figure 2).
- ❖ Those who think people do have a great deal of choice about which hospital they attend are more likely to be satisfied with inpatient services. But this relationship disappears once we take into account what people think of other aspects of hospital performance.
- ❖ Choice is no more popular in England than in other parts of the UK, while opposition to non-state provision in England is only a little lower than elsewhere. There is some evidence that charging for services is less popular outside of England (Figure 3), but all parts of the UK support university tuition fees.

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