A quarter of a century into the devolution story, it is absolutely fitting to draw together a series of key themes and developments in one of the core, foundational responsibilities transferred to Wales in 1999.

In the run up to the first Assembly (as it was then) election, a book was published with the aim of setting an agenda across the range of policy areas to be taken up at the start of devolution. It included chapters on services for children, older people, mental health and learning disability: in short, some of the service areas which are reflected in this text.

As we look back, much has changed, but the ambition – for the state to take the leading role in the development and delivery of welfare services; for services to be produced collaboratively rather than in competition and as a partnership between workers and users, based on high levels of trust; for a shift to prevention rather than cure; for collaboration to be entrenched between local government and the health service; for the significance of the third sector to be properly recognised; for the linguistic and other diversities of Wales to be celebrated and promoted – remains remarkably intact.

For some, these continuities might amount to an argument that not enough has been achieved over the first two decades of devolved government. For me, they demonstrate, rather, the tenacity with which progressive principles have been sustained in bad times, as well as good, and the continuing relevance of these ambitions in contemporary Wales.

Of course, one of the lessons any new social work student has to learn is that good intentions, by themselves, are not good enough. Just because a worker sets out to help is not a guarantee, by itself, that help will result. The same is true for government. Principles are essential, but the hard work is to translate those underlying purposes into practical policy. Many of the chapters in this book weigh up that journey, and come to conclusions as to where success has been achieved, and where further ground remains to be gained. As a snapshot of what has been a huge amount of activity, inside and outside government, the book provides a really valuable milestone in our understanding of issues and services which remain essential in the lives of so many of our fellow citizens.

I want to end this brief Foreword by highlighting the work of new and emerging scholars in the field of social work studies and, as the book does, also the diverse voices of social workers, social work students and people who use services. One of the genuine strides of the devolution era, in its first two decades, has been the emergence of new voices and new perspectives in many of
the responsibilities now discharged on a distinctive Welsh geography. Nowhere is that truer than in the study of social work, and that sense of freshness and innovative thinking is apparent throughout the volume. It should give us all confidence that the future of the profession and the discipline lies in strong and committed hands.