

Devolution revolution

Devolving power to the nations and
regions of the UK



Briefing paper
By Torrin Wilkins, May 29th, 2023

Centre

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The author



Torrin Wilkins

Director of Centre Think Tank

Torrin founded Centre in 2020. In his role, he has written numerous papers, including one backed by an APPG made up of over 260 MPs, and multiple policies written by him have been adopted by political parties.

Foreword



Lord Kinnock

Former Leader of the Opposition and Labour Leader

Neil Kinnock was the Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition for eight years. He was also Vice-President of the European Commission and a Member of Parliament. Neil is currently a Member of the House of Lords.

Researchers



Jack Meredith

Regular writer for Centre Think Tank

Jack is a social democratic liberal.



Jasneet Samrai

Deputy Director (Internal Operations)

Jasneet coordinates our team and helps to set the policy direction for Centre. They currently work at the Royal College of Physicians and previously worked at Breast Cancer Now, Oxfam as a campaign organiser helping to elect 3 MEPs.

Editor



Joe Gellman

Head of Publications at Centre Think Tank

Joe is the Head of Publications for Centre and is studying for a Masters in Philosophy at Durham University.

About Centre

We are an independent non-profit foundation and cross-party think tank. Our mission is to rebuild the centre ground and to create a more centrist and moderate politics. We support better public services and a strong economy inspired by policies from the Nordic countries.

To achieve these goals, we work with people from across the UK and party politics. This includes engaging with politicians and our networks, which include academia, politics, and law.

Our work includes creating new conversations by hosting events and conducting interviews. We also produce new policy ideas to better inform debate, publish papers, and release articles. We aim to build consensus, shape public opinion, and work with policymakers to change policy.

Published by

Centre

Polling partner Millbank and polling by Deltapoll

Millbank Think Tank is a not-for-profit, cross-party, independent UK think tank. They work to ensure that better policy is being made and that it serves the interests of those it is being made for. They are proud to produce insightful analyses on what the British public is thinking, working to put their ideas to politicians, to bring about nation-changing discussion on matters important to ordinary people, and in turn, to help those working in politics get their voices heard by those they represent.

Centre Think Tank and the Millbank Think Tank are partners and will collaborate on polls to determine public opinion. We co-commissioned a poll paid for by Millbank and with a question area created by Centre Think Tank.

The polling was carried out by Deltapoll, which is an independent public opinion consultancy founded in 2017.

Polling partner

MILLBANK

Polling by

DELTAPOLL

Foreword from former Labour Leader Lord Kinnock

For a mixture of historical reasons and short-term expedients, the United Kingdom now has a uniquely centralised national administration and a patchwork of local governance that only has underfunding in common. It all comes nearer to flattening down than "levelling up."

That sometimes results in confusion (and adds to alienation) for the public, often produces frustration among those who take on the responsibility of being elected, and signifies incoherence in national policy-making and application.

The current diversity (a polite term for the disarray that actually exists) obviously has economic and social as well as political effects. Constitutionally, it defies the term "United," but at least the "Kingdom" is biologically accurate again.

The consequence of this mish-mash is closer to stasis than "settlement." It needs to be changed for profound reasons of operational efficiency and representative democracy.

This paper, therefore, provides a useful contribution to the thinking that has to be done by offering a clear route map towards workable and fair devolution for the whole of the UK.

By setting out practical ideas about accountable powers to foster economic development and improve public services, it is focused on the main challenge, which must be to serve, empower, and enrich the lives of the communities which give identity, security, and opportunity for the British people.

Obviously, the changes advocated will require adequate and proportionate funding: Devolution without resources is a heavy responsibility without effective power. That weakens rather than strengthens public interest and confidence.

But vigilance about value for money and - crucially - value for people is manifestly not guaranteed by excessive centralisation. There must be a better way - and now is the time to design it.



A handwritten signature of the name "Neil Kinnock" in black ink, with a horizontal line underneath the signature.

Former Labour Leader and
Centre supporter Lord
Kinnock



Summary



The devolution settlement that exists within the UK is not fit for purpose, and power is unevenly distributed. Devolved governments also have wide-ranging powers over public services without adequate funding.



Polling co-commissioned by Centre Think Tank and Millbank Think Tank by Deltapoll shows there is widespread support for devolution. The poll also shows support for further devolution of powers in England and Scotland, along with strong levels of support in Wales.



This paper proposes expanding the existing devolution settlement in areas including broadcasting, justice, social security, energy, and transport. These new powers will expand the role of devolved parliaments and assemblies and will rebalance the current devolution settlement.



It also proposes a new funding system from Westminster, which would allocate money to devolved governments according to the needs of their area. This will help to rebalance spending in the UK, giving real meaning to the levelling up agenda.

Introduction

This paper aims to set out a roadmap for the future of devolution. It covers both the expansion of devolution in our nations alongside new devolution deals for areas of England which do not yet have large-scale devolution.

At the moment, devolution is not working in its current state. The powers which have been offered to each nation often differ with an uneven distribution of such powers. When calls are made for further devolution from devolved governments, often in areas where other nations have seen devolution, they are commonly ignored by Westminster. Even when devolved governments do hold powers in an area, those powers can still be overruled by Westminster.

The aim of devolving further power is one shared by MPs across party lines. The Conservatives are pushing ahead with their plan for Metro Mayors not just in built-up areas but for every corner of the UK¹. Within Labour, there is a similar commitment to devolution with the Labour Party report by Gordon Brown, "Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy"², which has shown an appetite from Labour for devolution.

This paper, therefore, is a clear roadmap towards a workable and fair devolution settlement. It fixes the existing issues that have prevented devolved institutions from improving the lives of the communities they serve. It also goes further, giving the nations and regions of the UK more powers to create policies that work for them. These would be powers that they can use to grow their economies and to support their public services. It should be grounded in the very real needs of communities across the UK. It should include their need to be heard by their representatives; access to good public services; and access to well-paying jobs.

Chapter one

Overview of powers



This paper proposes a wide range of powers which should be offered to Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. These are to:

- Devolve justice to Wales.
- Give Wales the powers to consent to inshore projects above 1MW and offshore projects of 5MW and over.
- Devolve the Crown Estate to the Welsh Government.
- Specific representatives of each nation on the Ofgem Executive Committee.
- Westminster should ensure that bus franchising, subsidies, timetabling, and adjacent areas of policy are all devolved to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, where they do not currently hold these powers.
- The UK Government should hand over full ownership of the rail infrastructure and management of infrastructure to Wales and Scotland.
- Wales and Northern Ireland should both be offered powers over shipping services which begin and end in their nations.
- For both Scotland and Wales, full powers over roads within their borders should be devolved, much like in Northern Ireland.
- Devolution of the Air Passenger Duty to Wales.
- An independent commission should be set up with representatives of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, alongside representatives from BBC English Regions, to decide the licence fee.
- An updated replacement to the BBC Audience Councils as part of Ofcom to represent the nations of the UK.
- New members of the BBC Board for Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The Director of Nations, which is currently a position on the BBC Executive Committee, should be split into separate Directors for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.
- Powers over S4C in Wales, BBC Alba and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal in Scotland, and Radio Ulster in Northern Ireland should be devolved. These include setting a remit for the broadcaster and ongoing accountability.
- A fairer funding formula to replace the Barnett formula. This should take into account the share of children and pensioners in the population, poverty rates compared to the UK as a whole, employment rates and income levels, morbidity rates, the rate of inflation (to ensure devolved budgets are not reduced compared to English spending), and population density.
- Social security powers in Wales should be expanded to match Scotland, which may also lead to a new social security agency in Wales.
- Further powers over social security. This includes powers to increase existing benefits, to put in place measures that reduce the size of the sanctions regime, to create new schemes similar to the Discretionary Assistance Fund to supplement different types of social security payments, to offer more options for receiving benefits similar to Scottish options, and the devolution of Jobcentre Plus services.
- A replacement for the Barnett formula should be accompanied by an offer of new income tax powers for Wales and Northern Ireland. This should include income tax powers similar to those currently held by Scotland.

Chapter two

Polling in devolved nations

To understand how devolution is currently perceived by the public, both in areas with devolution and in areas without devolution, we co-commissioned a poll on the issue with the Millbank Think Tank. The poll consisted of 1567 adults within Great Britain and was carried out by Deltapoll. The fieldwork for this poll was carried out between the 13th and the 17th of April 2023.

The poll asked the question: "Please think about the devolution of powers from the Westminster Parliament to other political institutions across the UK. For each of the following political institutions, do you think the powers currently devolved to it have gone too far, are about right, or have not gone far enough?" Included in the separate answers was also a section looking at a hypothetical system of "Regional Assemblies in England, which some people want to be brought into existence" to further understand the views of the public on devolution in England.

The poll results will be broken down and analysed within the next few pages. When looking at these polls, the results only show respondents in the areas affected; for instance, we only show the results from Scottish respondents to questions about the Scottish Parliament. In short, the poll shows widespread support for the current devolution settlement and signs of support for further devolution in some areas of the UK, especially in Scotland. They also show that in most areas, there is little opposition to devolution in its current form.

Devolution in Scotland

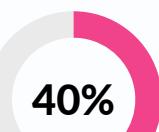
In Scotland, whilst there is support for devolution, it is also clear that the issue has divided opinion very clearly, with 30% of respondents saying that devolution has gone too far, whilst 21% of respondents said its powers were about right. The proportion of respondents who said "don't know" stands at just 9%, the lowest in the UK.

Figure 1: Support by area

In Scotland, the public supports further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament, with 40% of respondents saying that devolution to the Parliament has not gone far enough.

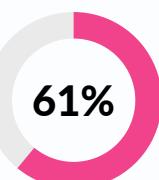
Support for further devolution

There is support for expanding the devolution settlement in Scotland, with 40% of respondents preferring this option.



High overall support

Combining those who think Scotland has "not gone far enough" or that devolution levels are "about right" shows high levels of support for devolution in Scotland.



40 40



Source: ONS Open Geography Portal, ONS

Figure 2: Polling breakdown

Not gone far enough

40% of respondents indicated that devolution had not gone far enough.

About right

The option with the fewest votes was "About right," indicating a clear division in public opinion on devolution.

Too far

30% of people think that devolution has gone too far, marking the highest level of discontentment in the UK.



Devolution in Wales

Wales is happy with the powers the Senedd currently holds, with 41% of respondents saying that its powers were "about right."

Figure 3: Support by area

In Wales, the prevailing opinion favours the current devolution arrangement. Of those surveyed in Wales, 26% expressed a desire for an expansion of its powers, while 21% believed that its powers have gone too far.

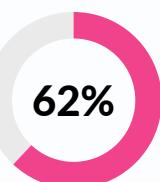
Support for maintaining devolution

Maintaining the current levels of devolution is supported by 41% of respondents, who believe that devolution in Wales is "about right".



High overall support

Combining individuals who believe Wales has "not gone far enough" with those who think devolution levels are "about right" reveals strong backing for devolution.



Source: ONS Open Geography Portal, ONS

Figure 4: Polling breakdown

Not gone far enough

Of all the respondents, 21% of respondents belonged to the smallest group, who believed that devolution had not gone far enough.



About right

There seems to be widespread support for keeping the devolution settlement in its current form from 41% of respondents.



Too far

Surprisingly, 26% of participants believed that devolution in Wales has been taken too far.



Chapter three

A new framework for devolution

Any further devolution of powers first requires the government to look at the current devolution framework. This framework includes the UK constitution, or lack thereof, and the methods used to hold devolved governments to account.

The current unstable nature of devolution allows Westminster to undermine devolved assemblies and parliaments. In effect, they only exist through the agreement of Westminster and the electoral pressure from those who support devolution. Any framework for expanding and improving the current settlement must address this fundamental underlying issue. This is why both new and existing powers should be enshrined in a single, written constitution.

Whilst cementing devolution is important, we must also expand the current level of cooperation between nations on non-devolved issues and areas of possible cooperation. At present, the Interministerial Standing Committee and the Prime Minister and Devolved Heads of Government Council are the main forums for devolved governments and the UK government to cooperate. As Suzy Davies said at our event, looking at devolution, we need to “Use what we have got with the Joint Ministerial Committees to ensure that it is better embedded in legislation, it needs to deal with the issue of the Sewel Convention.”³ Neil Kinnock also said on the same issue, “They are gathering dust. The Joint Ministerial Committees meet about as often as I run a four-minute mile.”⁴. It should be noted that Neil is in his 80s.

Part of this reform can be achieved through the Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council meetings, which should be scheduled every three months rather than on the current irregular basis. Joint Ministerial Committees should also meet on a regular basis.

Only one of these meetings has been held so far⁵, but the aim should be for these to become a regular occurrence. The meetings should act as wider discussions on UK-wide policy decisions, areas of cross-government cooperation, the future of devolution settlements, and dispute resolution.

The new arrangement should also aim to be flexible for those areas receiving new powers. As was highlighted in our event on devolution by Suzy Davies, “I don’t think you can transfer one model to another, it has to be designed as Andrew was talking about, it has to come from the bottom to meet demand, and that requires its model very often.”⁶ This especially applies to those areas of England which have not seen large-scale devolution for decades.

To achieve flexibility, the UK government should set out the maximum level of devolution an area can have. The powers set out in this paper are exactly that, the maximum powers a nation can have, rather than powers they must accept. It will then be up to different areas to decide how quickly or slowly devolution occurs within that area. This allows areas which want further devolution to acquire it without needing to spend time campaigning for new powers from Westminster. It also allows areas which are new to devolution to gain new powers at their own rate and for devolution movements to continue growing naturally.

With this flexibility, there should also come a fresh decision on whether to consider a new version of English Votes for English Laws (EVEL). Any new settlement needs to take into account the fact that “Were a Government, for instance, to pass legislation setting a fee for GP consultations in England, the Barnett formula would reduce the grant to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to reflect reduced expenditure on health services in England”⁷. It may also be preferable to create a new procedure, as, whilst an arrangement exists where SNP MPs abstain on bills that do not impact Scotland, rather than an EVEL rule, this can be easily broken.

When making decisions around devolution, something all devolved governments and administrations will look at is the cost of devolution. When establishing new bodies and regulations, the costs can be large. This was seen with the Scottish Parliament building, for which an early estimate of £10–40 million was put forward, but which eventually cost £414 million⁸. For the Welsh Parliament, the cost was “£70 million”¹⁰ to create the new Welsh Assembly building. These are just one-off costs, but this paper also discusses the individual costs of devolving currently reserved areas, which include both one-off and regular costs. To ensure these costs do not deter devolved areas from pursuing further devolution, a devolution fund should be created by Westminster. This would ensure that new parliaments, new assemblies, or new devolution settlements are paid for by the UK government.

The National Audit Office also needs to be strengthened. When discussing the office, Neil Kinnock said at our event, “In Scotland and Wales and indeed across the United Kingdom, there is a National Audit Office. The problem with the National Audit Office is not its expertise or its independence, both of which are excellent, but by definition, the fact that they investigate after the event more than during the expenditure and their conclusions can be partially implemented or neglected. So we need a strengthening of the audit function on a national basis, but also in terms of local government as well as devolution”¹¹. Reforming the National Audit Office so it has the resources and authority to investigate issues whilst they are occurring would strengthen the office.

Finally, whilst this report mentions offering further powers to Northern Ireland, this should always be viewed in the context of the Good Friday Agreement. Whilst these powers may be offered by Westminster, it is up to Northern Ireland whether to accept those powers.

Chapter four

Justice devolution

The first area of devolution this paper will discuss is justice. This includes devolving powers over the police and the courts to a devolved parliament or assembly. It also allows individual areas to make decisions on their justice systems, such as whether to reduce their prison populations¹² or around the prevention of crime.

Justice devolution is one area that has been granted to multiple areas of the UK, and therefore, it is easy to understand how this can work in practice. At present, justice is devolved to Scotland¹³ and Northern Ireland¹⁴ but is reserved by Westminster for Wales¹⁵.

Scotland is perhaps the most well-known example of justice devolution within the UK. The roots of this system are historical, as the system was first created in 1707 when the United Kingdom was created. However, it took until 1999¹⁶ for the system we know now to come into force. This system has given Scotland considerable scope for change, including their use of "...jury trials [which] do not require unanimous verdicts..."¹⁷, alongside the use of the not proven verdict. It is clear that not only can nations create a separate justice system, but they can also change their systems in major ways.

Whilst divergence has occurred, there are also multiple areas where Scotland and Northern Ireland cannot legislate unanimously. These include "...counter-terrorism, firearms, extradition, misuse of drugs and legal safeguards for human rights"¹⁸. These are areas that should remain reserved for all areas of the UK. This is especially true where substances such as cannabis or firearms are concerned, as they could easily be moved across borders. Fundamental human rights are also rights that should be protected by virtue of UK citizenship.

One of the largest criticisms of devolving justice powers to Wales is the cost of running prisons and the justice system separately from the UK. The cost estimated by the Silk Commission of devolving justice to Wales was £42.8 million per year, with a £101.5 million initial cost for devolving the prison system¹⁹ per year due to issues such as reduced economies of scale.

There are also hurdles to devolving justice to Wales, one being the large costs associated with devolution. However, this partially depends on whether Wales decides to pursue the same policies as England. One area the Welsh prison system may save money is by "Reducing the size of the prison population by pursuing alternatives to custody where appropriate, such as programmes to address mental health issues and support with treatment for drug and alcohol misuse"²⁰ alongside a focus on preventing crime.

Prisoner reform can include training for work after release and efforts to break the cycle of reoffending. Both of these programs can result in fewer people in prison overall and more former prisoners in employment. One statistic highlighted in our previous paper, Lessons from Norway, shows that among Norwegian prisoners who were unemployed before incarceration, there was a 34% increase in those who completed vocational training courses and subsequently a 40% increase in employment overall²¹. In addition to this, the focus on reducing the number of people who are arrested will also reduce the prison population.

Another benefit of the devolution of justice is the ability to better support Welsh speakers in prisons. Senedd Cymru member Heledd Fychan said on our podcast, “Many of our prisoners are not kept here in Wales when they are in prison. That creates huge impacts on their families and so on, and can impact in terms of rehabilitation of prisoners as well. Especially where they are so far from their communities or perhaps in prisons where there is no Welsh language support, they may be from Welsh-speaking communities. All of that has an impact on their rehabilitation as well.”

Rehabilitation may also be beneficial for supporting people with language fluency. In our interview with Thom Brooks, he mentions, “After a significant period having their liberty and their freedom of movement removed because of their actions...most of these people will come back into our society. If folks do not have language fluency, there is an issue whether it is about how good their English is or, if they are in a part of the country where people speak other languages such as Welsh, then why should we not have English, Welsh, or other training for people if it would help their rehabilitation and would help them to transition to a law-abiding life. It’s in the interests of the law-abiding public, and it keeps the public safe. I think it should be a pretty non-partisan place to be.”

It is clear that whilst devolution may cost money to implement, some benefits may be achievable under the current Welsh Government's plans to reform prisoners. Devolution, even under another devolved government, would still give the Welsh Government far more flexibility to change the justice system. It would allow Wales to structure its court and policing system to better reflect the wishes of people within Wales.

Devolving justice is already supported by the Welsh Government. It should also be noted that whilst there are arguments over costs and added complexities of devolving justice, there is no specific reason that offering the Welsh Government and the Senedd is impractical. It has been clearly shown to work in both Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Wales should therefore be offered the same powers over the justice system, including over the courts and the police. This new model of devolution should be similar to the one already in operation within Scotland.

Chapter five

Energy devolution

With the invasion of Ukraine, the need to harness renewable power sources and to create energy security has never been greater. Devolving power can be a key step in allowing areas to focus on the best use of funds in their area and to take into account the local impacts of projects.

Devolution of energy varies across the UK. Energy is partially devolved in Scotland, with some areas devolved to the Scottish Government. For instance, "The Scottish Government has a devolved responsibility for the operation of the ROS" (Renewables Obligation Scotland), and the Scottish Parliament has "...legislated for stretching climate change and fuel poverty targets," which include the fuel poverty targets, Hydrogen Policy goals, and the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan. The Scottish Government also has powers to grant consent for "...generating stations above 1 megawatt (MW) capacity in the Scottish inshore region and above 50 MW in the Scottish offshore region."

Energy policy is also not fully devolved to Wales, with powers over Electricity, Oil and gas, Coal, Nuclear Energy, Heating and Cooling, and Energy Conservation all reserved by Westminster. However, despite this, the Welsh Government does have powers to consent to projects with under 350MW of energy generation, with no limit for onshore wind projects, licensing of new onshore oil and gas, and the development of infrastructure related to these projects. Wales also has a target for "...70% of Welsh electricity demands being met by renewable electricity sources by 2030."

The situation in Northern Ireland, however, can be summed up as "Broad energy controls are devolved to the Northern Irish on the face of it, but in reality, the country has been compelled to align with the EU rules to keep the SEM functioning and that means the devolved institutions have not directly negotiated or approved these imposed arrangements." In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, storage of nuclear waste is also devolved. Department for Energy Security, 'Consultation Part 1, UK policy proposals for managing radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning.'

Devolving more powers over energy has multiple advantages. It can allow individual devolved governments to focus more on investment in renewable energy generation. It also allows governments to create plans around energy investment that meet the needs of their area and attract new jobs, especially in deprived areas.

When looking at devolving powers over energy, we must balance giving powers to devolved nations whilst also ensuring the continued use of UK-wide regulations. The first step the UK could take to balance the current devolution settlement is to ensure that Wales also has the power to consent to new projects of the same scale that Scotland does. At present, this includes consent for inshore projects above 1MW and offshore projects of 5MW and over.

The UK should also devolve the Crown Estate to the Welsh Government, which would allow Wales to receive the surplus revenues. Such a change would also be justified because, as one argument puts it, “It is antithetical to the spirit of devolution for the Crown Estate to make decisions over Welsh natural resources without considering the will of local communities or consulting the Welsh Government.”

An area where there is a greater role for devolved parliaments is Ofgem, which holds powers over both the regulation of energy and the energy price cap. Whilst full devolution of energy regulation is complex, it is possible to ensure that Ofgem works further with devolved governments. Whilst Northern Ireland has the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, Ofgem is still responsible for issuing Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation Certificates. Ofgem also has powers in both Scotland and Wales. Scotland also already set out plans for how Ofgem can work with the Scottish Government, and Ofgem should commit to working with devolved governments further, one possibility being specific representatives of each nation on the Ofgem Executive Committee.

Chapter six

Transport devolution

Transport itself covers a range of different areas, which include vehicles, planes, trains, buses, and boats. Alongside this, there is also the infrastructure that sits alongside these services, such as roads, airports, bus stations, train stations, rail infrastructure, and ports.

The basic reason for a country to build a transportation system is to allow people to move more easily within the country and to travel more easily between countries. Alongside this, there are also overarching goals such as economic growth in an area and providing easier movement for workers and goods. There is also the challenge of moving our systems towards net zero, something that devolved areas already have some power over.

At present, the devolution of transport powers is varied across different areas of the UK. Transport is devolved to Northern Ireland³⁵, partially devolved in Scotland³⁶, and reserved for Wales³⁷.

Handing transport powers to devolved governments allows them to tackle issues within their nations and, as has been seen with the Welsh bus service, to further hand powers down to local councils. Extra powers in this case also act as an equaliser, where powers have been given to some nations and not others. These changes would ensure the same powers are on offer to all nations.

Wales has powers over “bus service timetabling and subsidies”³⁸ and under a new plan released by the Welsh Government, local authorities would see the Welsh Government as the “...‘franchising authority’...”³⁹. Scotland has the power to legislate over “bus policy – including bus subsidies and regulation”⁴⁰. For Northern Ireland, buses are controlled through the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, which, through Translink, is the parent of Metro in Belfast and Ulsterbus. Whilst powers are broadly devolved, Westminster should ensure that franchising, subsidies, timetabling, and adjacent areas of policy are devolved to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, there are similar arrangements for train franchises. In Scotland, the train operator is ScotRail, which was announced in 2021 using “...powers which allow the Scottish government to take over the rail franchise without a bidding process”⁴¹. In a similar process to Scotland, Wales also nationalised⁴² its railways due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The infrastructure, including railway tracks, is mostly owned by Network Rail. Network Rail currently covers England, Scotland, and Wales⁴³ and owns the railway infrastructure in those areas⁴⁴. For instance, the Scottish Government has been working with Network Rail on electrified lines⁴⁵. In Northern Ireland, both the trains and the track⁴⁶ are run by NI Railways, which itself is controlled by the Northern Irish Government.

Scotland and Wales should have powers to alter both the train services and the infrastructure, including railways. The UK Government should hand over full ownership of the rail infrastructure and management of infrastructure to Wales and Scotland for lines or infrastructure which sit within their borders. Devolution of Network Rail is something supported by both the Scottish Government and a majority of polled respondents⁴⁷.

It is already easy to achieve in Scotland as "...much of Network Rail's functions are already managed from Scotland....The sore point for the SNP is that Network Rail is not fully devolved - so it is not answerable to the Scottish Parliament [and it is not] controlled by the Scottish Government"⁴⁸. This will mean an increase in accountability for railway delays and the ability for those travelling on railways to more clearly identify who is responsible for issues.

For boats, marine transport and waterway transport, there are several areas that the Senedd can legislate on with some restrictions, including financial assistance for shipping services in Wales and regulating works that may obstruct navigation⁴⁹. In Scotland, devolution extends to "...shipping services which both begin and end in Scotland"⁵⁰. In Northern Ireland, "...shipping matters remain reserved..."⁵¹. Wales and Northern Ireland should both be offered powers over shipping services which begin and end in their nations.

Wales has powers over roads which include: powers over taxis, including licensing; regulations; charges on trunk roads, animals in vehicles, and some other minor powers⁵². The Scottish Parliament has powers over "cycling powers; parking policy; local road pricing (including congestion charging); the drink-drive limit...speed limits...road signs and management of pedestrian crossings; and concessionary travel schemes"⁵³. In Northern Ireland the Department for Infrastructure "...is the sole roads authority responsible for all public roads, footways, bridges, and street lights in Northern Ireland"⁵⁴. Both Scotland and Wales should have this power, like in Northern Ireland.

Finally, the devolution of airports and planes varies across the UK. Wales has very limited powers over airlines, which include financial support for airlines or airports and some powers over the carriage of animals⁵⁵. For Scotland, there are limited powers devolved to the Scottish Government, which include powers over airport bylaws, Air Passenger Duty, and 'lifeline' air routes⁵⁶. In Northern Ireland, devolution includes Air Passenger Duty⁵⁷ but "...Responsibility for aviation..."⁵⁸ is reserved to the UK Government.

The mismatch between devolution in Wales and devolution in Scotland and Northern Ireland should be addressed. The Welsh Government has already called for the devolution of the Air Passenger Duty to Wales⁵⁸, and the practicality of implementing devolution in this area has already been proven possible in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Chapter seven

Broadcasting devolution

The main aim of devolving broadcasting powers would be to give devolved parliaments and assemblies more powers over broadcasting within their areas. This power could be used to create more minority language content, to better represent the perspectives of Welsh people in the media, and to create more tailored content.

Broadcasting is currently a reserved area for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In Northern Ireland, the Assembly requires the permission of the Secretary of State to legislate on broadcasting⁵⁹. For Scotland⁶⁰ and Wales⁶¹, the area is reserved.

However, these arrangements are not completely clear-cut. For instance, in Wales, whilst broadcasting is technically reserved, areas including "...appointing the Wales member of the Ofcom board to scrutinising public service broadcasters on their activities in Wales"⁶² have been devolved to the Senedd. Wales also has a Welsh language channel, S4C, which has its own regulator, the S4C Authority, which is allowed "to act as a regulator on certain matters"⁶³.

Whilst there have been moves towards further power over broadcasting, this has often fallen short of calling for the full devolution of broadcasting. Within Wales, there is broad support for the devolution of broadcasting powers in Wales. For instance, the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee in the Senedd also supported devolving greater powers over broadcasting⁶⁴. Whilst this was a cross-party committee, individual parties have differing views on the issue as Plaid Cymru⁶⁵ supports the devolution of broadcasting to Wales, whilst the Welsh Conservatives oppose the move⁶⁶.

In Northern Ireland, part of the proposed deal to restore the executive included to "...explore how the remit of the Ulster-Scots Broadcasting Fund (USBF) and Irish Language Broadcasting Fund (ILBF) can be broadened and will increase funding for the USBF and ILBF to reflect any broadened remit"⁶⁷ within a joint UK Government and Republic of Ireland report. This also highlights two funds which already exist to support Irish broadcasting in Northern Ireland. Whilst a private members' bill was proposed in 2013 by a group of Sinn Féin MLAs⁶⁸ around devolving broadcasting powers, it has not been an issue which has been discussed at much length.

For Scotland, a poll in 2021 showed that "65% of respondents want broadcasting powers to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament, and just 22% want them to stay where they are at Westminster"⁶⁹. There was also the Scottish Broadcasting Commission, which had several proposals, "...the chief of which was the proposal for a new 'Scottish digital television network'..., which never came to fruition. Of particular interest here, the Commission did not call for the devolution of broadcasting powers (with the proviso that it 'does not mean that this option should be wholly discounted')"⁷⁰.

It is clear that within Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, there is now a large demand for broadcasting to be devolved. However, there are also risks to further devolution, including political interference in publicly funded media and ensuring broadcasting channels are balanced in their output. David Hutchison asks this same question, "Would it be easier for politicians, or others, to pressurise federated units and a weakened hub – if there still was a hub – at the centre?"⁷¹. This argument is particularly significant in the context of broadcasting devolution in Northern Ireland. The divide between nationalism and unionism, along with the history of the Troubles, makes devolution of broadcasting particularly difficult.

The argument about a weaker centre is also made more difficult by the logistics of splitting the BBC up where its powers are to be devolved. One of the only ways to devolve both license fee and regulatory control would be to "...split the BBC at the border when its Royal Charter is next renewed. In this way, the staff and assets in Scotland and the license fees (perhaps at a different level) could go to a new body, under a new Royal Charter, accountable to, but independent from, either Westminster or the Scottish Parliament"⁷². This is a possible option, but one which should only be explored if the concerns about neutrality can be addressed and if devolved administrations call for devolution.

There are also worries that devolution may mean less money. For example, devolving the license fee may involve cutting the budget proportionately "...to the populations of the different nations. "That could mean that actually we end up with less money to be spent on broadcasting in Wales than we currently have"⁷³.

However, despite these issues, this does not mean that the current settlement cannot be improved. The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee recommended a series of proposals⁷⁴. Whilst these fell short of outright devolution of the media, they could both serve as a step towards it in the future and increase the say of devolved governments in decision-making. They also serve as a good blueprint for a future broadcasting devolution settlement.

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee recommended "an independent commission, with distinct Welsh representation"⁷⁵. to set the license fee. This would not devolve the power completely to Wales but would be a step towards more powers to devolved nations. An independent commission should be set up with representatives of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland alongside representatives from BBC English Regions to decide the license fee. Then, in future, if Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland call for devolution of the license fee as explored above, then a settlement can be agreed.

This extension of representation for devolved nations should also be copied within the BBC. There have been numerous calls for an updated replacement for the BBC Audience Councils. These audience councils included a council for Scotland, Wales, England, and Northern Ireland, allowing each to have an individual voice. According to the BBC Trust, these councils "...play an important role in providing the Trust with informed insights on the views, needs and interests of audiences in their respective nations, and on how well the BBC is serving these audiences and delivering its public purposes"⁷⁶.

The new versions of these councils should be set up under Ofcom, and the views of the councils should be used to ensure that the views from the councils are used by the BBC. It may also be a possibility to broaden the scope of these councils by partnering with other public service broadcasters or online streaming services. This would complement the existing Advisory Committees⁷⁷ for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, which include individuals with wide-ranging experience in broadcasting.

There are also broader changes to the bodies making decisions within both Ofcom, which focuses on regulating broadcasting, and the BBC. This includes creating new members of the BBC Board⁷⁸ for Wales and Northern Ireland alongside Scotland, which is already represented. The Director of Nations, which is currently a position on the BBC Executive Committee⁷⁹, should be split into separate Directors for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

Finally, for language broadcasters such as S4C in Wales, BBC Alba and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal in Scotland, and Radio Ulster in Northern Ireland, powers over these broadcasters should be devolved, which include changes, "...(such as setting a remit for the broadcaster, and ongoing accountability) and other public service Welsh language broadcasting matters to be devolved"⁸⁰. Ofcom should also have a duty to support languages such as Welsh or Gaelic within the nations of the UK. This should include new powers for Ofcom over the licence agreement for TV and radio stations to ensure languages such as Welsh are supported.

Chapter eight

Social security devolution

Social security can be more accurately described as a financial safety net designed to prevent people from falling into poverty. It does this by supporting those out of work, those with disabilities, and individuals with children who require financial support. This safety net is a basic right and no UK citizen should be left without.

The state of social security devolution differs across the UK. In Wales, this includes "Social Security, Child Support, pensions and Compensation"⁸¹ as areas reserved by the UK Government. For Scotland, this includes "benefits (some aspects)"⁸² with a mixture of reserved and devolved areas. For Northern Ireland, this area is devolved⁸³ to the Northern Irish Assembly. HMRC, however, retains full control over both Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance⁸⁴.

The reason for expanding the current devolution settlement is to give devolved governments more power to tailor their social security systems to their areas. However, any further devolution of social security should seek to avoid excessively increasing the costs of administration. There is also the need to avoid a "postcode lottery", where social security payments are dangerously low in certain areas.

One example of how devolved social security works in practice can be seen in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland runs its system through the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency. However, whilst Northern Ireland has devolved powers to set the rate of social security payments and which groups receive them, they do not have any powers over income tax.

This means that whilst Northern Ireland, in theory, has the power to increase the rates of social security payments, it would also need to find the money to do so. This would also require political will in the Assembly, something that is harder to achieve with the power-sharing agreement.

It has led to a situation where "Benefit rates are the same whether a person lives in Belfast or Birmingham"⁸⁵. This lack of change is reinforced by the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 which states "The Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Minister having responsibility for social security ("the Northern Ireland Minister") shall from time to time consult one another with a view to securing that, to the extent agreed between them, the legislation to which this section applies provides single systems of social security, child support and pensions for the United Kingdom"⁸⁶.

Whilst this may initially make social security devolution seem entirely unnecessary, it has led to smaller changes in the system. One example is a set of flexibility measures introduced by the Northern Irish Assembly. For instance, the current system involves "Twice monthly payments for all households as the default, with monthly payments available on request"⁸⁷, whereas the current system for the rest of the UK only pays claimants once a month.

The Northern Irish Assembly has also used the minimal spending power it currently has to soften the impact of UK Government reforms to the benefits system. One example was "...a series of Welfare Supplementary Payments..."⁸⁸ which supported some of those groups impacted by the UK Government's 2016 welfare reforms. Whilst these changes are small in scale, they do show that, with some spending powers, devolved institutions can alter spending within the benefits system to a small extent.

Unlike in Northern Ireland, Universal Credit is currently reserved by the UK government in both Scotland⁸⁹ and Wales. The First Minister of Wales said on devolving benefits that "...having pointed to those warnings, then my view is that we ought to explore the devolution of administration"⁹⁰, whilst in Scotland, there has already been devolution of social security powers in a wide range of areas. Some aspects of Universal Credit have also been altered by the Scottish Government through "Scottish options"⁹¹.

To administer social security, the Scottish Parliament has Social Security Scotland⁹², whilst the Social Security Agency⁹³ delivers social security in Northern Ireland. In Wales, social security powers should be expanded to match Scotland, which may also lead to a new social security agency in Wales.

To create a framework for devolution of benefits, there should also be a mechanism in place to ensure that devolved Governments can increase social security payments, create new programs, or expand access. To ensure all UK citizens have access to a minimum level of support, Scotland and Wales should not be allowed to reduce access to programs, reduce social security payments, or replace existing programs.

This would build on the existing approach that allows devolved nations to implement systems which support those on benefits. These include the systems put in place by Northern Ireland to reduce the impact of Universal Credit reforms, the Welsh "Discretionary Assistance Fund"⁹⁴ to top up Universal Credit or Scottish Options for Universal Credit.

This should include the powers to:

- Increase existing benefits.
- Put in place measures that reduce the size of the sanctions regime.
- Creating new schemes similar to the Discretionary Assistance Fund to supplement different types of social security payments.
- A top-up for social security budgets based on poverty rates in the individual nation, compared to England.
- To offer more options for receiving benefits similar to Scottish options.
- Devolution of funding and the operation of Jobcentre Plus, which originally functioned as its own agency, merged into the Department of Work and Pensions, should be devolved.

Chapter nine

Fairer funding

The budgets for devolved governments are mainly decided by the Barnett formula in “Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland”⁹⁵. In short, “The Barnett formula takes the annual change in a UK Government department’s budget and multiplies it by two figures that take into account the relative population of the devolved administration (population proportion) and the extent to which the UK department’s services are devolved (comparability percentage). The calculation is carried out for each UK department, and the amount reached is added to the devolved administrations’ block grant”⁹⁶.

The formula itself has a variety of issues and has been widely criticised, not least by “Lord Barnett [who] himself has stated that ‘the Barnett formula has to go’”⁹⁷. The formula itself does not take into account the specific needs of an area. The process of developing a new formula should involve consultation with the devolved parliaments and assemblies on issues that require specific funding in their areas.

A new calculation based on needs must take into account:

- Population indicators, including the “share of children and pensioners in the population”⁹⁸.
- Poverty rates compared to the UK as a whole.
- Employment rates and income levels.
- Morbidity rates.
- The rate of inflation (to ensure devolved budgets are not reduced compared to English spending).
- Population density to support areas with specific geographical requirements. This is especially useful for rural areas, which have difficulties in providing accessible public services over longer distances.

All of these should be measured against those statistics for England and the other nations of the UK.

These measures, and any others used to determine the finances handed from the UK Government to devolved parliaments, should also be transparent, with all of the calculations easily available to both members of devolved governments and the public. The calculations also need to be consistently applied across different devolved parliaments and assemblies, with changes only being made to the formula when strictly necessary. These measures will allow devolved governments to plan for the long term rather than depending on the short-term spending decisions of each UK government department.

Changes to the Barnett formula should be accompanied by measures to ensure that any increase in devolved budgets is matched by greater transparency around expenditure. During our event on devolution, Suzy Davies explained her view that “If there is need, why have we still got need and who should be responsible for fixing need before that becomes a criterion by which we judge how much in the future should come from the central pot”⁹⁹.

Some of these issues have been caused by the use of the Barnett formula over an extensive period of time, which cumulatively disadvantaged devolved areas. This would be solved with the replacement of the Barnett formula, explained above, which involves a fairer funding formula.

Reforming the Barnett formula will also help to improve accountability, as the progress made by devolved governments will not be held back by a lack of funding compared to the rest of the UK. As this will make for a fairer comparison, the government should also publish new statistics each year alongside the block grant, showing changes in NHS, education, and justice outcomes. These should be published each year alongside the workings of the new funding formula.

Chapter ten

Taxation



The other mechanism is devolved taxation powers. At present, Wales can change income tax by "...10p in every £1 for each band"¹⁰⁰ whilst in Northern Ireland, income tax is not devolved to the Assembly^{100.5}. Scotland has the most power over income tax bands as "...the Scottish Parliament has the power to change rates and thresholds (other than the personal allowance) and to create new bands and rates, which it has done"¹⁰¹.

During our event on devolution, Neil Kinnock described the devolution of income tax powers as a "taunt"¹⁰² and that "the idea of taxation powers...before the devolved parliaments is superficial window dressing simply because neither country is going to put itself at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the United Kingdom and in any case, so far as Wales is concerned, there aren't sufficient numbers of high incomes or high-value assets to enable a higher level of taxation on those who can otherwise afford to pay"¹⁰³.

At present, this is true, especially for Wales. In effect, offering further income tax powers to Wales and Northern Ireland would effectively be saying to devolved nations that they are allowed to tax their citizens more, but that the UK Government is unwilling to pay their fair share. There are also far fewer taxpayers earning over £50,000 in Wales compared to Scotland or the UK as a whole¹⁰⁴.

Further income tax devolution does not deal with the core issue of underfunding and, in the short term, would leave devolved administrations with difficult decisions about either funding public services properly or increasing taxes on already low-income families. Therefore, any real conversation around devolving income taxation powers should only happen after the Barnett formula is replaced and devolved governments are not on an unfair footing in terms of funding from Westminster.

There are several potential advantages of devolving tax powers. First is the ability not just to raise taxes but to alter income tax bands and rates. This allows for more flexible tax systems, which can account for smaller or larger numbers of wealthy earners. In Scotland, this has resulted in a system where "...income tax liabilities are a very small amount lower in Scotland for those on less than £28,000 per year, but greater for those on higher incomes"¹⁰⁵ due to changes in Scottish income tax bands and rates. It also means if the UK government makes changes to the tax system in future, then it can choose to offset them within Wales or Northern Ireland.

As Neil pointed out during our event, in areas like Wales, the number of higher earners is low. This means that whilst tax rises may be less effective than in Scotland, it would allow the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to alter or add income tax bands to better reflect their tax base. Tax powers can also act as a safety valve for devolved governments to ensure they have fiscal headroom if needed.

Another issue was highlighted by the recent strikes within public services. This involved devolved governments negotiating with workers over pay increases. However, the actual amount paid can be increased or limited by the budgets of these devolved nations. They are unable to, for instance, increase taxes in Wales to pay for higher NHS wages. Whilst replacing the Barnett formula would improve the situation by helping to tackle inflation-related rises, it would not address the wider issue of NHS pay. This means that while the short-term focus should be on fixing the Barnett formula, in the long term taxation will also need to be revisited once the formula has been replaced.

Another challenge to a devolved tax system that should be taken into account by devolved administrations is the size of the tax base. In the case of Northern Ireland, “Its very size means that economic growth and tax revenues could be volatile”; this is something to keep in mind when considering income tax devolution.

Another concern was also explored by Liberal Democrat MP Wendy Chamberlain when speaking more broadly about tax divergence: “You have to think about where is the best place for powers to lie. So I do think in terms of VAT or corporation tax, those should sit within Westminster because we are seeing some of the challenges where divergence creates problems or potentially creates fiscal flight.” This is also something devolved governments will need to factor in when making decisions about changing bands and rates for income tax.

As a result, alongside any changes to the Barnett formula as discussed above, there should also be an offer of new income tax powers for Wales and Northern Ireland. This should include income tax powers similar to those currently held by Scotland.

There should also be a wider consultation on devolving further tax powers to devolved governments. This should include exploring whether powers over taxing wealth or capital gains can also be handed down to devolved institutions.

Chapter eleven

English and Cornish devolution



When looking to devolve more powers and create new layers of government within the UK, it is important to analyse past attempts. One of the largest defeats came in the 2004 referendum on a North East Assembly, where almost 78% of voters rejected the proposals.

Devolution to areas of England and to Cornwall has been far slower than devolution to the other nations of the UK. The current system involves Metro Mayors in areas such as Manchester, Liverpool, the West Midlands, the Tees Valley, the West of England, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough¹⁰⁸. There is also the London Assembly alongside the North East Combined Authority.

The first issue is the addition of more politicians as "...many voters in the Labour heartland condemning the concept of elected regional assemblies as an excuse for 'more politicians' to run an extra tier of government which would see local council taxes rise as a result of the precept levied to fund it"¹¹⁰. There is a clear lesson here: taxpayers expect a return on increased taxes. With today's climate of increasing council tax bills, this argument would be even less appealing today.

The second, and perhaps largest, issue was the lack of law-making powers. The actual powers the North East Assembly and other Assemblies across the UK would hold were minimal¹¹¹. It certainly did not constitute a large devolution of powers from Westminster, where local policymakers could change the lives of those in the North East. Instead, it effectively increased the number of elected representatives and elections without giving them sufficient powers.

The referendum in the North East clearly showed the three things that need to be addressed for devolution to be successful: the "...negative cost, politicians, and the lack of powers being proposed"¹⁰⁹.

The North East was not alone in this; even in Wales, a similar situation also occurred in the 1997 Welsh devolution referendum. Despite Wales having a distinct history, the referendum for a new Welsh Assembly was only narrowly won. Welsh voters would have to wait until the 2011 Welsh devolution referendum for significant powers to be given to the Assembly.

Metro Mayors

The respondents polled in England showed strong support for Metro Mayors, as 38.5% of respondents said their powers were about right. 15.75% of respondents thought that devolution to Metro Mayors has not gone far enough, whilst 13.75% believe it has gone too far. 32.25% of people, however, are undecided on the issue. Whilst there is support for Metro Mayors across the UK, support is strongest in the Midlands and London, whilst support is lowest in the rest of the South.

Figure 5: Support by area

Support for Metro Mayors is strongest in the Midlands, London, and the North of England. Support is lowest in the South, where Metro Mayors are also less common.

Support for further powers

Almost 16% of people thought the powers of Metro Mayors should be expanded.

16%

Support in London

Support for the powers held by the Mayor of London being "about right" is the highest of anywhere in the UK.

42%

33 42



Source: ONS Open Geography Portal, ONS

Figure 6: Polling breakdown

Not gone far enough

16% of respondents thought that the powers of Metro Mayors did not go far enough.

16%

About right

There is clear support for Metro Mayors retaining their existing powers, with 38% of respondents selecting "About right."

38%

Too far

Just 14% of respondents thought that the powers of Metro Mayors went "too far."

14%

English assemblies

As part of the poll, respondents were asked whether devolved powers would be too far, not far enough, or about right for Regional Assemblies in England, which some people want to be brought into existence. 29.75% of respondents said that this was about right, with 16.75% of people saying that it does not go far enough. However, 42.75% of respondents remain undecided on the question of English assemblies.

Figure 7: Support by area

Support for these assemblies is consistent across England, with high levels of support in the Midlands and the North, with the strongest level of support in London.

Support for English assemblies

47% of people said that English Assemblies were either 'About right' or had not gone far enough.

47%

Support in the North

Northern England sees the highest levels of support for new assemblies. 53% thought they were "About Right" or did not go far enough.

53%



Source: ONS Open Geography Portal, ONS

Figure 8: Polling breakdown

Not gone far enough

17% of those polled thought that the proposal for English assemblies did not go far enough.

About right

The highest proportion of responses were that English Assemblies were about right.

Too far

Some respondents, 13% in total, thought that these proposals would go too far.

17%

30%

13%

The Greater London Authority

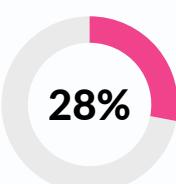
Opinion in London is divided, with 28% of respondents thinking that this level of devolution is about right, whilst 28% of respondents think this devolution has gone too far. 24% of respondents think that devolution to London has not gone far enough, with another 19% selecting "Don't know".

Figure 9: Support by area

Within London opinions about The Greater London Authority and the London Mayor are divided. Similar-sized groups support expanding its powers as think it has gone too far or not far enough.

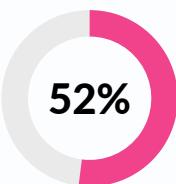
Split opinions

28% of Londoners think that the devolution settlement in London goes "too far"; the same percentage think it is "about right".



Support in London

Just over half of those in London, 52%, think that devolution to London is "About right" or has "Not gone far enough".



4 24



Source: ONS Open Geography Portal, ONS

Figure 10: Polling breakdown

Not gone far enough

24% of those in London support greater devolution to the area, the lowest response level of the three options.

About right

28% of those in London thought that the levels of devolution were about right.

Too far

28% of those in London believe that devolution to the area has gone too far.

24%

28%

28%

One reason the current system of individual mayors is flawed is the lack of new powers given to metro mayors. This deal was described by Andrew George at our event, “It’s very clear this is about centralised control. It’s not a devolution deal, it’s a devolution disillusion that the only way in which... they would be able to get their plans through is that ministers would need to sign it off”¹¹². Any new assemblies should rectify this issue, allowing decisions to be made without needing a Minister to sign them off.

Assemblies can also better represent the diversity of views across an area. As Metro Mayors are a single individual, it means the individual who is elected effectively has all of the power in that area. Another reason is that the mayoral system is not popular in every area of the UK, such as in Cornwall, where there have been long-standing calls for a Cornish Assembly. Yet, when a devolution deal was proposed alongside an elected mayor, the plan was dropped due to “public opposition”¹¹³.

The proposal is an evolution from the current system of Metro Mayors, which are already used in London, some areas of Yorkshire, large parts of the North East, Manchester, Liverpool, and across other areas of the UK. A new devolution settlement should create a new system that gives real power to both England and Cornwall.

Our proposal would be a new system of assemblies across England and Cornwall. The key difference with Metro Mayors here is that these assemblies would have multiple elected representatives and would have greater decision-making powers. They would, however, be built up from the existing system of metro mayors and the London Assembly.

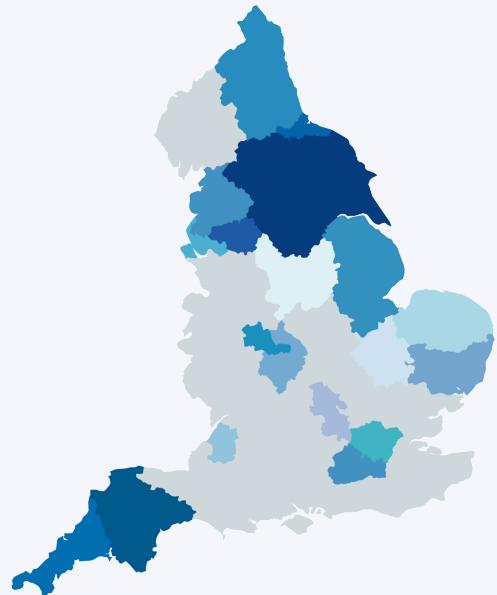
The boundaries of these assemblies would closely mirror the Metropolitan counties system, which was put in place in 1974. The boundaries are also similar to the existing system of Metro Mayors that are used in some areas of England and retain large areas with existing mayors, including London. They also ensure areas which have distinct identities, such as Cornwall and Devon, remain as individual areas.

One area that is covered by neither Metro Mayors nor Metropolitan counties is Yorkshire, in both it is split into multiple areas. Yorkshire has a strong regional identity, with one poll finding that a majority of people feel they are “... more Yorkshire than English, or equally Yorkshire as English”¹¹⁴. Therefore, it may also be beneficial to create a single Yorkshire Assembly. These devolved areas should be large enough to offer economies of scale, but small enough to reflect and serve regional identities.

A few alterations should be made to ensure that the boundaries reflect modern changes.

Figure 11: Areas with a deal

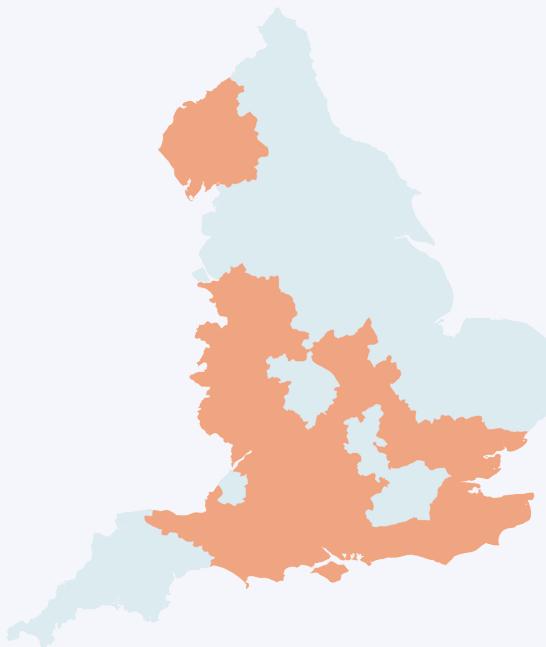
In multiple shades of blue are the boundaries for existing Metro Mayors, devolution deals, and proposed deals. As these borders evolve and new Metro Mayors are created, this map will evolve as well. To continue with the success of the Metro Mayors, the boundaries of existing Metro Mayors should remain rather than using the older metropolitan counties.



Created with mapchart.net and [Metro Dynamics](#) map

Figure 12: Areas without a deal

English countries without any form of devolution deal are highlighted in orange. The government should strive to secure agreements in all remaining regions and work to enhance the devolution arrangements available to different areas across the UK. This would then include the move towards the assembly model and a new model of devolution, as explained below.



Created with mapchart.net and [Metro Dynamics](#) map

The new assemblies need real powers to make meaningful decisions. This should be alongside a new funding formula agreed with Westminster to fund devolved areas. This should mirror the formula used for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland as proposed in this paper. These powers should include:

- Education powers similar to those held by Scotland.
- Health powers are similar to those held by Scotland.
- Transport powers over cycling, parking, buses, roads, and any shipping services which begin and end in their area.
- Elections to assemblies.
- Planning and housing.
- Environmental policies in areas including pollution, waste management, water supplies, and sewerage. This is alongside powers over national parks and flood and coastal protection in areas where this is applicable.
- Local government.
- Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.
- Sport, culture, and the arts.
- Tourism.
- Fire services.

Whilst these powers will be used when establishing the assemblies, further powers should also be open to assemblies in the future. These powers would not be reserved by Westminster but would be available to assemblies on request. This will create a flexible system of devolution that reflects the varied nature of devolution movements in England. These extra powers should include:

- Income Tax powers.
- Justice and policing.
- Local government.
- Powers over social security similar to Scotland and additional powers mirroring the powers proposed in this paper for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland within this paper.
- Powers over train and railway links.
- Energy licensing for onshore projects and for offshore projects where applicable. This will be applicable for projects above 1MW, inshore and offshore projects of 5MW and over.
- Air passenger duty, where applicable.

To exercise their powers, these assemblies should contain enough members for Mixed-Member Proportional Representation or Single Transferable Vote to be used for elections. This level of representation also allows for a simplification of local government within England.

Conclusion

This paper sets out a new plan for devolution which aims to create a workable devolution settlement. It gives real powers to devolved governments, parliaments, and assemblies across the UK. Large-scale devolution must be accompanied by the devolution of taxation powers and a new funding formula. This approach ensures that devolution benefits the most deprived areas of the UK and gives them genuine powers to shape their future.

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Metro Mayors figures 5 and 6

By area of the UK

Area of the UK	Too far	About right	Not gone far enough
North	15%	39%	19%
South	16%	33%	15%
London	15%	42%	12%
Midlands	9%	40%	17%

By age group

Age group	Too far	About right	Not gone far enough
18-24	8%	35%	15%
25-34	15%	36%	19%
35-54	13%	34%	18%
55-64	15%	37%	14%
65+	23%	36%	12%

By voting intention

Party	Too far	About right	Not gone far enough
Conservatives	18%	44%	19%
Labour	13%	38%	16%
Liberal Democrats	9%	38%	13%
Other	22%	22%	24%

English assemblies figures 7 and 8

By area of the UK

Area of the UK	Too far	About right	Not gone far enough
North	15%	30%	23%
South	14%	27%	14%
London	9%	32%	18%
Midlands	16%	30%	12%

By age group

Age group	Too far	About right	Not gone far enough
18-24	8%	34%	12%
25-34	11%	33%	17%
35-54	11%	24%	22%
55-64	20%	31%	12%
65+	23%	28%	12%

English assemblies figures 7 and 8

By voting intention

Party	Too far	About right	Not gone far enough
Conservatives	18%	37%	15%
Labour	12%	32%	19%
Liberal Democrats	15%	32%	14%
Other	19%	21%	20%

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English devolution map created with mapchart.net

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