

What is devolution?

Devolution is about the interaction and transfer of powers between parliaments and governments across the UK. Across the UK, there are four law-making bodies (parliaments) and four executive bodies (governments), and certain legislative and administrative powers are transferred or 'devolved' from the UK Parliament and Government to those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Legislature	Executive
UK Parliament	UK Government
Scottish Parliament	Scottish Government
Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament	Welsh Government
Northern Ireland Assembly	Northern Ireland Executive

The UK Parliament is sovereign, which means it can make laws on any issue. The devolution settlements (laws) set out in which policy areas the parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can make laws, and by convention the UK Government will not normally legislate in these areas without the consent of the respective devolved parliament.

The word devolution is now regularly used to refer to the restructuring of powers within England. The main difference here is that English Devolution doesn't involve law-making or tax-raising powers. More information on English Devolution is available [here](#).

Why do we have it?

Devolution sees people benefit from multiple layers of government delivering in their communities. It provides for devolved services to be tailored and delivered from within the places they serve. Devolution is not new or unique to the UK. There have been different forms of devolution in the UK for decades and it is common in other parts of the world.

The current form of devolution in the UK goes back to the late 1990s. In 1997, voters chose to create a Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru (previously called the National Assembly for Wales). In Northern Ireland, devolution was a key element of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and was supported in a referendum in 1998. In 2000, the UK Government started to devolve powers within England through the transfer of powers, budgets and responsibilities to mayors and through city deals (beginning with the establishment of the Greater London Authority).



How does it work?

Devolution can lead to different political parties forming governments in different parts of the UK, each with their own ministers supported by civil servants to deliver their priorities.

Effective engagement between the governments is key and this can happen in lots of different ways. For instance, the Council of the Nations and Regions brings together the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the First and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, with the

Mayor of London, the Mayors of Combined Authorities and the Mayors of Combined County Authorities to collaborate on shared challenges and opportunities.

Ministers also have one-on-one discussions and correspondence with their counterparts. Civil servants should also have regular contact with their counterparts in devolved institutions. By working together, we can promote common professional standards, develop a complementary approach to policy-making and ensure good lines of communication. Our relations are guided by the Memorandum of Understanding, the 2022 Review of Intergovernmental Relations and Devolution Guidance Notes, which you can find on GOV.UK.

What do I need to know?

The powers of the devolved parliaments stem from individual settlements. In Scotland and Wales, those state areas that are **reserved** to the UK Parliament – only the UK Parliament has the power to make laws in those areas. Everything else is **devolved**. That means the parliaments in Scotland and Wales have the power to make laws in those areas, as does the UK Parliament. Northern Ireland has slightly different terminology – we use transferred (similar to devolved), reserved and excepted matters.

It is important that you know how devolution affects the policies you work on or the public services that you manage. Even if you work in an area that is completely devolved or completely reserved, you may often need to work with other governments to make sure your policy or service is delivered successfully. It can also help you learn about what has worked elsewhere. You can find out more about the settlements at: gov.uk/regional-and-local-government/devolution



Where can I find out more?

The settlements can be complex, with some areas partially reserved and partially devolved. It is therefore important to speak to colleagues or experts in:

- constitution teams - if you work within a devolved government
- departmental devolution teams, or the Offices of the Nations (Scotland Office, Wales Office and Northern Ireland Office) - if you work within the UK Government

You can find contact details on your intranet pages or on GOV.UK. You can also get in touch with us if you have any questions at devolution@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

New from the Devolution and You programme, the **Devolution Learning Platform** is your one-stop shop for access to training materials on all things devolution and intergovernmental working, all year round. Join using our QR code or at: devolution-learning-platform.orcula.co.uk/

