


Robert Gawłowski 

Uniwersytet WSB Merito w Toruniu

robert.gawlowski@bydgoszcz.merito.pl

DEVOLVE AND FORGET? AN ASSESSMENT OF DEVOLUTION REFORM IN THE UK 25 YEARS SINCE ITS INCEPTION

ABSTRACT: Devolution in the UK is rightly described as one of the most important constitutional reforms since the turn of the 21st century. After 25 years of implementation, there is now good reason to ask about the outcome of this reform. The aim of this presentation is to examine the advantages and disadvantages of this process in the context of a meta-governance approach. To do this, the author (1) presents the theoretical underpinning of a meta-governance approach; (2) checks the process of implementation reform; (3) follows the evolution of devolved governments and, finally, (4) analyses the current state of debate about the future of devolution. The research methodology is based on comparative studies, desk research and content analysis of the interviews with ministers from the regional governments conducted by the Institute for Government. In conclusion, it is said that devolution reform slowly but consequently changed the political and administrative structure of the UK, however, it has not resolved the problem of the fact that the UK remains the most centralized country in Europe in terms of local and regional governance as well as continuous tensions within intergovernmental relations.

Keywords: meta-governance; devolution; intergovernmental reform; UK constitution

INTRODUCTION

The existence of regional governments is one of the most unique features of the British political system and territorial governance. The varied organization of regional governments in the UK has a long history which dates back to the 18th century. However, the devolution reforms introduced by the Labour government at the end of the last century were a new beginning in this matter and created four different and asymmetrical governmental organisations, each of them differing in terms of institutional setting, legal powers, and legislative autonomy. As part of Prime Minister Tony Blair's 'modernisation agenda', the idea was to address the issue of the over-centralization of British public administration, and to create new circumstances in delivering public services.¹ However, as M Kenny stated, it was a radical reform that had put the UK's constitutional order on a new footing and marked the most radical shift in the British constitution.² The most important question which arose is about the supremacy of the central government versus the historical understanding that the UK is a Union state underpinned by the voluntary consent of the nations.³

This gives us a good excuse to evaluate the travel of change that each region has experienced in the 25 years of devolution reform. The reason for doing this is not only the time-lapse but also the very turbulent political period during the last years, caused by both the Brexit referendum and the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper aims to analyze the evolution of regional governments in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland by implementing a meta-governance approach. In order to do that, the following questions have been asked: how has the autonomy in each region changed during the given time?

The paper proceeds as follows: first, it discusses the meta-governance approach and the way it is understood in this paper. Second, the research design is presented. Third, the focus is put on each region – Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and, last but not least, England. The conclusion summarizes the research and draws some questions and predictions for future developments in terms of devolution.

META-GOVERNANCE

Discussion about governance and its failure have existed in scientific discussion for decades. In this context, one of the most important questions is how, and to what extent, it is possible for governors to regulate self-regulating networks because governance

¹ Ch. Jeffery, D. Wincott, "Devolution in the United Kingdom: Statehood and Citizenship in Transition," *Publius*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2006), p. 4.

² M. Kenny, *Fractured Union: Politics, Sovereignty and the Fight to Save the UK*, London 2023, p. 8.

³ Ph. Norton, *Governing Britain: Parliament, Ministers and Our Ambiguous Constitution*, Manchester 2020, p. 22.

networks must be regulated if they are to contribute to the efficient governing of society.⁴ The governance of governance, how it is frequently defined,⁵ is a subject of extensive research from different perspectives such as political science, public administration, and public management, as well as different theoretical traditions.⁶ More specifically, it provides guidance and practices to public authorities in coordinating different modes of governance and gives some level of control over various arenas, namely collaborative arrangements, partnerships, markets, or hierarchy.⁷ This is why it may be described as a set of strategies that together cover a range of governing activities and interventions: from institutional design to active participation in interactive arenas.⁸ Thus, sometimes it is pointed out that it risks becoming a catch-all phrase and fails to provide a precise explanation of the network regulation process. However, meta-governance can be perceived also as a synthesis of 'government plus governance' and in this way combines control and facilitation.⁹

According to the existing research, there are various ways that meta-governance can be carried out. E. Sørensen and J. Torfing introduce two forms: hands-on network participation, or network management, and hands-off, based on the theoretical understanding of how meta-governance is exercised given interdependency, governability, integration and governmentality theories.¹⁰ Gjaltema et al. in their literature review of meta-governance stated that there is a long and diverse list of means that a meta-governor can use, and it may be classified in several ways. Most misgovernance is fulfilled by such means as: authority instruments, economic instruments, and/ or informational instruments. Another way is to look at meta governance through a form of process design in which networks are institutionalized. Last but not least, meta-governance refers to the coordination of network, market and hierarchical governance.¹¹ Lastly, March and Olsen¹² and Kickert, Klijn and Koppejan¹³ present their three-types of meta-governance strategies in which they distinguish: (1) network design which means

⁴ E. Sørensen, J. Torfing, "Theoretical Approaches to Democratic Network Governance," in E. Sørensen, J. Torfing (eds), *Theories of Democratic Network Governance*, London 2009, p. 169.

⁵ Look at B. Jessop (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Governance*, Thousand Oaks 2016; J. Kooiman and S. Jentoft, "Meta-Governance: Values, Norms and Principles, and the Making of Hard Choices," *Public Administration*, vol. 87, no. 4 (2009), pp. 818-836.

⁶ J. Gjaltema, R. Biesbroek, K. Termeer, "From Government to Governance... to Meta-Governance: A Systematic Literature Review," *Public Management Review*, vol. 22, no. 12 (2020), pp. 1760-1780.

⁷ B.G. Peters, "Meta-Governance and Public Management," in S.P. Osborne (ed.), *The New Public Governance? Emerging Perspectives on the Theory and Practice of Public Governance*, London, pp. 46-59.

⁸ E. Ek Österberg, M. Qvist, "Meta-Governance as Partial Organization," *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2023), pp. 192-210.

⁹ B. Damgaard, J. Torfing, "Network Governance of Active Employment Policy: The Danish Experience," *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2010), p. 260.

¹⁰ E. Sørensen, J. Torfing, "Theoretical Approaches...", p. 181.

¹¹ J. Gjaltema, R. Biesbroek, K. Termeer, "From Government to Governance...", pp. 1770-1771.

¹² J.G. March, J.P. Olsen, *Democratic Governance*, New York 1995.

¹³ W.J.M. Kickert, E.-H. Klijn, J. Koppenjan, *Managing Complex Networks*, London 1997.

an attempt to shape and structure a network; (2) network framing strategies which focus on the formulation of goals and objectives; (3) resourcing strategies, which look at providing actors with funding, legitimization and knowledge. Based on this, and many other classifications of means in meta-governance, Österberg and Qvist point out that meta-governance can be understood as a process of balancing discretion with control where an interactive arena implies the creation of a 'governance space' where market or network actors are given room to manoeuvre within regulative, normative, and discursive frames.¹⁴

For the present paper's purposes, meta-governance refers to the structures and practices involved in regulating and coordinating relations between the center of government and territorial governments in order to explore how interactions between institutions and actors have been (re)designed to overcome tensions between them. An important caveat is that meta-governance not only involves institutional design but also the transformation of subjects and cultures.¹⁵ The first actor is understood as the British government and the latter the Scottish, Welsh, Northern Ireland, and English governments.

RESEARCH DESIGN

After discussing previous conceptual work on meta-governance, it illustrates how this approach is used to present the evolution of the devolution process in the UK. In this paper, special attention is put on such areas of devolution as: (1) administration – the practice of transferring central government responsibilities to regions; (2) executive – where power of the UK government ministers is transferred to devolved governments and (3) legislative – where law-creation is transferred from Westminster to the regional legislatures. In terms of meta-governance strategies, focus is on institutional tools and how regional government has been institutionalized during the given time.

This research is conducted on an institutional approach because it gives the best opportunity to observe the direction of British devolution. In this context, what has been taken into consideration is legislative acts in statute books, parliamentary reports and official statements and comments of those who were engaged in devolution process reform. This scope of legally binding documents presents an institutional perspective of the devolution reform, thus political documents and non-legally binding documents have been omitted due to the lack of space in this paper. On the flip side, to track how the practices involved in regulating and cording relations between the center of government and territorial governments have changed the author analyzes a series of interviews conducted by the Institute for Government. The Ministers Reflect¹⁶ database

¹⁴ E. Ek Österberg, M. Qvist, "Meta-Governance as...".

¹⁵ B. Jessop (ed.), *The Sage Handbook...*

¹⁶ The Ministers Reflect series of interviews is an open source data base at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect>, 10 September 2024.

includes more than 150 conversations with former ministers from the UK and devolved governments. However, given this paper's scope, 23 interviews were chosen, and the interviewees were limited to those interviewees who had experience in working in regional government.

DEVOLUTION IN SCOTLAND

As noted above, devolution is not a last-decade idea. Scottish attempts to differentiate its legal and administrative status within the UK have a long history. A good exemplification of that is the experience of a Scottish Home Rule Association formed in 1885, a Royal Commission on the Constitution that ended up in the Scotland Act 1978, and then an unsuccessful Scottish Referendum in 1979.

In terms of legal perspective, the process of Scottish devolution in the 90s began from a referendum that was held in September 1997. A strong majority for the creation of a Scottish Parliament was concluded in The Government's White Paper – Scotland's Parliament and then The Scotland Act 1998. In the context of administrative devolution, the most important was the creation of two different sets of powers. The first one was general a legislative power which means that only the Crown, Westminster or Whitehall could decide about such aspects as: constitution, registration of political parties, international relations, Home Civil Service and defence. The second set of legislative powers – called specific reservations – were listed under 11 heads named from A to L. It particularly covers areas of social and economic policy such as: home affairs (misuse of drugs, data protection); trade and industry; transport, or media and culture.¹⁷ It means that all matters that are not directly reserved to Westminster are within the competence of the Scottish devolved government. In this case, Scotland Act 1998 introduces a single list of reserved matters included in Section 5 of the Act. Implementation and functioning of this model went quite smoothly due to the fact that Scotland had had separate legal jurisdiction.

Looking at the legislative devolution's context, the most important change was the creation of single-chamber Scottish Parliament with the right to pass primary legislation. It has been created, for the first time, a unique opportunity to decide who to manage in all given areas and make laws in devolved matters. As a result, Scottish regulations in terms of certain areas may be and very often are different to those in England. Moreover, as an example, we can say that the power of secretary of state for education does not cover Scotland. Similar consequences are presented also in other areas. The only scrutiny that is being introduced over the Scottish Parliament legislation is conducted in reference to the Scotland Act 1998 by the Advocate General for Scotland. Special power is given to the Secretary of State for Scotland to prevent Royal Assent to a Bill in certain circumstances such as collision with the British law. An example of

¹⁷ Specific list of detailed general and specific reservations is given in Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998.

when this power has been used is the Gender Recognition Bill 2022, and it has caused a serious constitutional crisis.

Based on the growing willingness to orchestrate an independent referendum in Scotland shown by the opposition parties, the government in London decided to establish The Commission on Scottish Devolution called, 'The Calman Commission', in August 2007. The aim was to review the Scotland Act 1998 and present proposals for new legal arrangements that allow to better serve the people of Scotland. Among 63 prepared recommendations, it includes: (1) more borrowing powers to capital projects; (2) new power to set responsibility for setting income tax; (3) better inter-parliamentary communication between Edinburgh and London; (4) strengthen the devolution settlement in under all heads of power and two more, and last but not least, (5) strengthening the Scottish Parliament in terms of the legislation process and scrutinizing legislation.¹⁸ In response to the final report both Scottish and UK government published their White Papers¹⁹ and started working on new legal amendment over the Scotland Act. Ultimately, the new Scotland Act 2012 introduced new tax powers, amended some of the reserved matters in the previous Act, and changed the name of the Scottish Executive to Scottish Government.

The Implementation of the Calman Commission did not stop the independence attempts made by the independence movement. The main reason for this was the victory of the Scottish National Party in 2011 and the formation of a regional government. It gave a public mandate to expect the next concessions from governors which is Westminster. Having said that, Prime Minister David Cameron offered a constitutional referendum about the future of Scotland. It was concluded in the Edinburgh Agreement where all political actors set up a framework and principles for next referendum. In light of the meta-governance approach, it was not about looking for a new balance between central and regional government. By answering the question – Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country? – voters were deciding if they were eager to become governors as such. The prominent position of the independence movement was a result of the ineffectiveness of intergovernmental relations. As Jim Murphy (former Secretary of State for Scotland) mentioned: *There were intergovernmental institutions created but there wasn't enough time, effort or care given to them. And quite often the intergovernmental arrangements were then resolved informally (...) So I don't think the machinery of government had made a sufficient enough switch. And we possibly hadn't resourced it successfully enough.*²⁰

¹⁸ The Commission on Scottish Devolution published *The Future of Scottish Devolution Within the Union: A First Report* (Edinburgh 2008) and the second publication was *Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century: Final Report* (Edinburgh 2009).

¹⁹ The Scottish Government published a White Paper *Your Scotland Your Voice: A National Conversation* (Edinburgh 2009) while the UK government published a White Paper *Scotland's Future in the United Kingdom: building on ten years of Scottish devolution Scotland's Future in the United Kingdom: Building on Ten Years of Scottish Devolution* (2009).

²⁰ "Interview with Jim Murphy," *Institute for Government*, 7 October 2022, p. 8, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jim-murphy>, 31 May 2025.

Despite the negative final response to the above-mentioned question, asked in September 2014, the UK government agreed to set up the next Commission chaired by Lord Smith of Kelvin to introduce further devolution of powers. The conclusions published in the final report²¹ were to: increase borrowing powers, devolve power over the elections, introduce additional powers in terms of payments in welfare services, and secure new sources of income alongside new powers transferred to the region. Like the previous situation, the Scotland Act was amended. This legal initiative was not only about change of power and extension to new heads. Scotland Act 2016 guarantees the permanence of the Scottish Parliament despite the lack of a written constitution in the UK.

The last, but surely not the least, opening in the discussion over the relationship between London and Edinburgh was the European Union referendum. The reason for that was the strong support to remain in the EU – 62% voted to remain, while the final result of the referendum gave a different outcome – 51.9% voted to leave. This showed a profound difference in opinion and gave an assumption to the SNP government to come back to the constitutional question about the future of Scotland. Needless to say, the poor intergovernmental relations between London and all regional capitals during the negotiations gave independent supporters additional arguments. On top of that, the UK government passed the Internal Market Act 2020 which gives legislative powers to bypass regulations introduced by regional governments, not only in Scotland but also in other parts of the country. From a practical point of view, intergovernmental relations differed as a result of changes in the Prime Minister's office occurred. As Michael Russell (former Scottish Minister responsible for UE-UK relations during Brexit) mentioned: *There was a recognition under May, no matter how limited and grudging, of the legitimate interests of the devolved governments and their rights, whereas there was nothing but contempt for devolution from the Johnson government, expressed at every level even by the territorial secretaries of state.*²² In a later part of the interview, he added that the Joint Ministerial Committee meetings (institutional setting invented for coordination of intergovernmental relations) were dominated by a confrontational tone and full of rivalry between central and regional governments. The only way to normalize relations between London and all regional capitals, according to M. Russell, is *to accept that the principle of Westminster sovereignty is no longer valid (...). And Mark Drakeford has argued this as well, that sovereignty should really in the modern world [be] retain within each of the four nations who can choose what they do with it. (...) If the notion of Westminster sovereignty continues as it is, then there is no long-term or even short-term solution to this, because whatever you do can be gainsaid (...) And that is an impossible basis on which to establish a relationship.*²³ According to Jeane Freeman (former Scottish minister for social security) intergovernmental relations depend a lot on the approach of the individuals and some UK government ministers used to fight ideological battles with the Scottish

²¹ HM Government, *Scotland in the United Kingdom: An Enduring Settlement*, Cm 8990, London 2015.

²² "Interview with Michael Russell," *Institute for Government*, 26 January 2022, p. 18, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/event/michael-russell>, 31 May 2025.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

government while other presented a very constructive approach.²⁴ This statement is very similar to those mentioned by the Lord Wallace – former Deputy First Minister from 1999 to 2005.²⁵ Relations between Edinburgh and London differ in terms of certain powers. Kenny MacAskill (former Cabinet Secretary for Justice from 2007 to 2014) highlights that: *With the relationship with the Home Office, I never really had any issues there. The legal system in Scotland is distinct and different, so you tended to operate separately (...) What you forget is, frankly nobody in Home Office cares about Scotland. They would actually say: 'We didn't know it was reserved, and if that's what you want to do, on you go.'*²⁶ Similarly, relations were very fruitful when both sides worked on project that brought mutual benefits, for instance the Commonwealth Games. As Shona Robison (former Secretary for Health in the Scottish Government) stated: *We had quite a lot of interaction around things like the Olympic lessons learned and security, because we were calling on the armed forces to give support.*²⁷ On the other hand, the situation looked much worse in treasury relations. Andy Kerr (former Minister for Finance from 2001-2004 and then Minister for Health from 2004-2007) pointed out that: *No, the relationship was zero. I didn't feel as though we had any decent relationship with the Treasury. I don't think they treated us with any respect whatsoever. I don't think I had a meaningful conversation with Gordon Brown about money in all the time I was there. When we were looking for help, we really get it (...) Just 'you get your share of the money and get on with it.'*²⁸ Lord McConnell (former First Minister of Scotland from 2001 to 2007) said: *It was occasionally it was sometimes very productive (...) There were ups and downs in the whole thing.*²⁹

To conclude, the Scottish devolution from a meta-governance perspective has been evolution-driven in one direction. All three elements of devolution (administrative, legislative, and executive) have been extended and it has not helped in improving relations as well as setting a solid balance between actors.

DEVOLUTION IN WALES

The starting point of devolution in Wales was quite different when compared to that in Scotland. Although there were some endeavours to introduce Welsh autonomy at the

²⁴ "Interview with Jeane Freeman," *Institute for Government*, 5 October 2021, p. 9, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jeane-freeman>, 31 May 2025.

²⁵ "Interview with Lord Wallace," *Institute for Government*, 17 July 2015, p. 14, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/lord-wallace>, 31 May 2025.

²⁶ "Interview with Kenny MacAskill," *Institute for Government*, 5 December 2018, p. 13, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/kenny-macaskill>, 31 May 2025.

²⁷ "Interview with Shona Robison," *Institute for Government*, 17 October 2017, p. 14, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/shona-robison>, 31 May 2025.

²⁸ "Interview with Andy Kerr," *Institute for Government*, 27 September 2018, p. 8, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/andy-kerr>, 31 May 2025.

²⁹ "Interview with Lord McConnell," *Institute for Government*, 10 September 2018, p. 21, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/lord-mcconnell>, 31 May 2025.

end of the 19th century, the final result in 1997 was much more limited. The UK government published a White Paper in July 1997³⁰ and then organised a referendum in which only a small majority (50.3%) voted for a devolution settlement.

In the beginning, devolution in Wales made much more limited changes. The Government of Wales Act 1998 created the Welsh Assembly which did not have the power to pass primary legislation, it remained the responsibility of Westminster. The role of the Assembly was only secondary legislation such as orders and regulations. Areas that they were allowed to work on were precisely described in the Wales Act 1998. Like the Scotland Act, it was divided into two groups: (1) general reservations, largely the same as in Scotland, and (2) specific reservations which were built around several areas.³¹ As an example, it was such areas as: energy, trade and industry, health and safety, or media and culture.

However, it is not the only difference when it comes to the model of devolution in Scotland and Wales. The reform did not introduce the executive as a separate public administration organ responsible for the daily running and representation of devolved government. The only representation of the regional community was provided by the Secretary of States for Wales, which is a part of the UK administration. Partly, this function had been fulfilled by the executive committee comprising the chairs of several subject committees. For this reason, devolution in Wales was defined as an executive devolution and seemed to be more like a tool of the reconcentration of public administration, rather than of a proper devolution that secures a certain level of autonomy.

Such a narrow scale of devolution was very quickly the subject of criticism. The first years' experiences showed that the institutional setting implemented in Wales by devolution reforms was very complicated and hard to understand by the public. In 2002, the First Minister Rhodri Morgan established the Commission on Powers and Electoral Arrangements of the National Assembly for Wales which was called the Richard Commission thanks to the name of their chairman. The final report showed a wide range of possible amendments starting from the role and structure of the Assembly, the Wales-Whitehall relationship, and ending up with the financial issues and cost of devolution.³² This publication was a fertile ground for reforming a devolved government in Wales. The UK government presented it in the White Paper "The Better Governance of Wales".³³ It did not go as far as the previous document, but nevertheless, it proposed to introduce a formal separation between the National Assembly and Welsh Assembly Government, guarantee the power to pass primary legislation and extend the areas of responsibility. The Government of Wales Act 2006 fulfilled the UK government commitments and pushed the devolution process forward. As a result, there were less

³⁰ *White Paper: A Voice for Wales: The Government's Proposals for a Welsh Assembly*, 1997.

³¹ Schedule 7A *The Government of Wales Act 1998* gives a detailed list of general and specific reservations.

³² I. White, *Report on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements of the National Assembly for Wales*, 2004.

³³ Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, *Better Governance for Wales*, Cm. 6582, 2005.

differences between Scottish and Welsh devolved institutions. However, it remained an asymmetrical model of organisation.

The knowledge and experience gathered through The Richards Commission created a precedence which was extended in the following years. Based on that new coalition, the Labour and Plaid Cymru government established a commission to review the work of the National Assembly. The aim was to work on issues linked with the legislative part of devolution. The Holtham Commission published two reports.

Lasting a few years, the discussion had been concluded in a referendum on law-making powers that was held in 2011. It was possible because a 'super-majority; in the National Assembly had been achieved in favour of the referendum. The Welsh voters were asked if they wanted to be able to make laws on all matters in the 20 subject areas it has power for. The solid majority (63%) voted for this solution. Based on that, the Welsh Government introduced the first piece of primary legislation, which was approved by the Queen Elizabeth II in December 2011.

The discussion about the future of devolution in Wales was also initiated by the UK government. A good example of that is The Silk Commission which was introduced in 2011 and was working for a few years. The main point of interest was mostly the financial condition of the regional government,³⁴ but also during these debates some institutional issues were raised. Finally, two more amendments were introduced to the Wales Act. In 2014 new powers were transferred to the National Assembly in such areas as: stamp duty, changing the name of Welsh Assembly Government to Welsh Government, or extending the term of the Assembly from four to five years. The next amendment was introduced in 2017 and made the Welsh government more similar to the Scottish one. The Wales Act 2017 included such changes as: the permanence of The National Assembly and establishing a 'reserved' model of devolution. Lastly, in 2020 the National Assembly for Wales changed their name to the Senedd Cymru/ Welsh Parliament.

The evolving institutional setting in terms of the Welsh devolution has a double nature. As Alun Davies (former deputy minister for agriculture, food, fisheries and European programmes in the Welsh government) stated: *for most of the time, we had a very good relationship with the UK government. I think one of the things we forget today, in the disaster that is intergovernmental relations in the UK, is how good the relationship could be and has been (...) And when the door is closed and when the cameras are switched off and when there's no microphones around, you have a good and rich interaction with UK ministers.*³⁵ Moreover, politics dominated the mutual relations after the Brexit referendum when *It wasn't a disaster, but it was a disaster in terms of delivering policy. It shows that you can't deliver something unless you're got the machinery available to deliver on it (...) when one government sees itself as the judge and jury, and as a consequence, no matter*

³⁴ Commission on Devolution in Wales, *Empowerment and Responsibility: Legislative Powers to Strengthen Wales*, Cardiff 2014.

³⁵ "Interview with Alun Davies," *Institute for Government*, 12 October 2021, p. 5, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/alun-davies>, 31 May 2025.

*what we try to do, you can't get them to work together. And that's a real, real failing for us.*³⁶ For Kirsty Williams (former Minister for Education) the relations with UK government were very complicated despite the fact that education is an almost entirely devolved issue. As she mentioned: *I wouldn't describe it as a good information sharing. In some ways, I think, information sharing got a little bit better as things went on, but no, it wasn't great. It was sometimes really difficult to understand what England were going to do.*³⁷ A more constructive approach was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when even controversial issues and disagreements were not used for political advantage. As Ken Skates (former Welsh Minister for the Economy, Transport and North Wales) mentioned: *I can only really talk for myself, but I found that the engagement that I had with UK government ministers and ministers in the other devolved administrations improved quite incredibly during the pandemic. I've always placed great value on developing personal relationships in order to influence policy.*³⁸

Looking at the slow but consequential evolution process of devolution in Wales, it is reasonable to say that the Welsh government has changed substantially. As it started from the administrative devolution it ended up in proper legislative model with reserved powers. Regional government is not an implementation actor in a sense that it is responsible for secondary legislation, but has gained a great amount of autonomy in all aspects which is: administrative, executive and legislative devolution. These changes have occurred in parallel with the understanding of devolution in the United Kingdom. Carwyn Jones (former First Minister of Wales from 2009 to 2018) said during the interview that *We've tended to look at devolution as 'Oh, it's for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, let's give them that and give them that' (...) But we have to start looking at devolution that is something that's part of the constitutional settlement for the whole of the UK, and not a series of bilateral 'handing over' of power, which is what it's been so far.*³⁹ Moreover, as C. Jones stated: *My fear is that it [devolution process] depends on personalities involved. So, from the Westminster perspective, it does involve David Lidington (Minister for the Cabinet Office) being there, because he's the one who made the difference.*⁴⁰ All in all, it seems to be obvious for the former First Minister in Wales that the UK need to have a constitutional convention in order to improve its own constitution as *it fell on deaf ears, honestly, in Whitehall, they couldn't see what the problem was.*⁴¹ The point of the role of personal relations is mentioned by Ieuan Wyn Jones (former Deputy First Minister from 2007-2011) in the following passage: *A lot of it [relations between Cardiff and London] when I look back, depended on personal relationships to be honest. If you*

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Interview with Kirsty Williams," *Institute for Government*, 28 August 2021, p. 13, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/kirsty-williams>, 31 May 2025.

³⁸ "Interview with Ken Skates," *Institute for Government*, 27 August 2021, p. 12, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/ken-skates>, 31 May 2025.

³⁹ "Interview with Carwyn Jones," *Institute for Government*, 18 January 2019, p. 18, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/carwyn-jones>, 31 May 2025.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

*had a good relationship with your opposite number as a minister, then things happened, and they could see benefit of some things happening. If they were agnostic at best or hostile to devolution then it was always difficult.*⁴² The same tone we can find in Jane Hutt's (former Chief Whip in the Welsh Government) interview when she says: *Sometimes it was a matter of just having a relationship. With the Labour Government, it was about making sure we had good working relationships, making sure in times when we were diverging that there could be some recognition of where we are.*⁴³ Westminster's lack of knowledge about devolution process on operational level is quite obvious for Leighton Andrews (former Minister for Education from 2009-2013 in the Welsh government), who said: *from rather more practical day-to-day operation issues, which amounted to Whitehall still not having taken on board what devolution meant. In the areas of social security, work and pensions and welfare reform, it was pretty clear that they were working on the basis of a default England system. And I think that just reflected a lack of imagination and sensitivity. But I don't think there was a deliberate plot to say we should follow what they were doing.*⁴⁴ As a result, L. Andrews suggests that more steps must be taken to establish an internal programme of understanding devolution. His way of thinking has been echoed by Alun Michael (former the First Minister of Wales from 1999-2000 and then Minister of State for Rural Affairs from 2001-2005) who pointed out that: *officials in Whitehall didn't get the fact that devolution had now happened, and that in doing this piece of legislation you will need to allow for separate subsidiary legislation for Wales, you will need to respect the decisions of the Welsh Government, rather than creating requirements that jar...*⁴⁵ Moreover, from a practical point of view there is also an issue of capacity. As Andrew Davies (former Minister for Economic Development from 2002-2007) mentioned: *you would have an individual civil servant in Wales doing a whole policy area and you'd go for negotiations and discussions with colleagues in Whitehall and have a whole team of people, whereas the Welsh civil servant was on their own.*⁴⁶ On the top of that, formal mechanism of consultations between governments have not worked smoothly enough. From Lord German perspective: *The Joint Ministerial Committee worked okay, but it was so infrequent and people didn't come to the table to make decisions. They came to the table to have the discussion.*⁴⁷

⁴² "Interview with Ieuan Wyn Jones," *Institute for Government*, 16 October 2018, p. 12, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/ieuan-wyn-jones>, 31 May 2025.

⁴³ "Interview with Jane Hutt," *Institute for Government*, 13 September 2018, p. 11, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jane-hutt>, 31 May 2025.

⁴⁴ "Interview with Leighton Andrews," *Institute for Government*, 17 December 2018, p. 16, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/leighton-andrews>, 31 May 2025.

⁴⁵ "Interview with Alun Michael," *Institute for Government*, 14 September 2018, p. 9, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/alun-michael>, 31 May 2025.

⁴⁶ "Interview with Andrew Davies," *Institute for Government*, 13 September 2018, p. 12, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/david-davis>, 31 May 2025.

⁴⁷ "Interview with Lord German," *Institute for Government*, 11 September 2018, pp. 16-17, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/lord-german>, 31 May 2025.

DEVOLUTION IN ENGLAND

The English case has rarely been discussed in the debate of devolution reform as a comprehensive concept. A governor perspective is a dominant region in the UK, and it is hard to imagine a certain set of rules and institutions devoted only to this part of the country. Needless to say, it seems to be completely impossible for political reasons to draw a line between the government in London and the rest of England. Of course, it does not mean that there has been a lack of discussion about regional assemblies in England, or even regional tiers of government.

During the 1997-98 devolution reform, the only part of England which was taken into consideration was Greater London. The capital of the UK, due to Margaret Thatcher's abolition of the Greater London Council, had no integrated metropolitan governance. As time passed, it became obvious to all that this situation had to change. Thus, the New Labour government published a Green Paper – New Leadership for London – and organised a winning referendum that gave a strong public support to pass the Greater London Authority Act 1999. However, this very welcome change in metropolitan governance in London was not accompanied by a new institutional framework for the rest of England. The situation was becoming more and more urgent when, in the coming years, new powers were consequently introduced in Scotland and Wales. One such attempt was the North East England devolution referendum in 2004. The voters were asked whether they were for or against the creation of a newly elected regional government with their competencies and they rejected this option, almost 78% voted against it. This overwhelming defeat of government initiative in the Labour-dominated part of the UK a bleak picture of any prospect for regional government in England. For vast majority of voters the idea of regional assembly was seen as *just another expensive talking shop*.⁴⁸

Based on the legislative initiatives prepared by the government⁴⁹ new types of local institutions were allowed to be created. In this case, the meta-governance governor's strategy was to create new institutions on financial incentives. The way to achieve that was a devolution deal. All of them were privately negotiated between individual cities and the central government in London. Thus, it was not a straightforward creation of new institutions, but one-by-one, tailor-made deals between eligible actors. This is why it is fair to say that this kind of devolution almost entirely relies on the goodwill between all the partners and is vastly concentrated on economic purposes. This is why it is possible to say that combined authorities are more a coordination vehicle than solid organisations. Leaders of such institutions need primarily negotiation and leadership

⁴⁸ C. Rallings & M. Thrasher, "Just Another Expensive Talking Shop': Public Attitudes and the 2004 Regional Assembly Referendum in the North East of England," *Regional Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8 (2006), pp. 927-936.

⁴⁹ It was the "Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009," (*Legislation.gov.uk*, at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents>, 10 September 2024) which legally granted the new institutional and power framework for the English cities.

skills to arrange and execute combined projects that were agreed upon during the negotiation with the government in London.

The situation changed after the result of the Brexit referendum. Some local governments in the North of England relied on EU structural funds, and after the successful exit from the organisation, these opportunities ended. Moreover, as many communities from the northern part of England supported the decision to leave the EU, expectations for decisive actions were very high. In this context, subsequent British governments have extended the financial and institutional engagement to support the devolution process reform in this region. Exemplifications of that were The White Paper on Levelling-up⁵⁰, the establishment of new funds devoted to northern England communities, and, finally, the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

England has been set aside in terms of devolution reform. For a long time, Labour and Conservative ideas to improve public governance of this region have been limited in terms of institutional and economic scale. Until exiting the EU, it was rather one step forward and another one back. Over the last three years, the new meta-governance strategy has been settled, and it is much more transactional in nature in comparison to the other regions. However, it seems to receive cross-party support and has a chance to be continued in the next years. The best example of that is the UK government's announcement on the English Devolution white paper.⁵¹ It aims to initiate a transfer of power from Westminster to England's region, widening devolution across England, and introducing unitary councils where two-tier areas have still existed. As Minister for Local Government and English Devolution Jim McMahon said during the parliamentary debate presenting the document: *The White Paper (...) will finally redress the imbalance of power between this place [House of Commons] and communities up and down the country.*⁵² This document opens a new chapter in the public debate about devolution in England which might end up with a new legislative framework for this region and more broadly intergovernmental relations. Interestingly, a lot of propositions published in the White Paper are very similar to those included in the Draft Regional Assemblies Bill during the North East England devolution referendum.

DEVOLUTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The political situation in Northern Ireland has always been incomparable to other regions. The complicated past of the partition of the island, as well as The Troubles, make it much more difficult to find a workable solution with the support of all conflicting sides on the board. For this reason, The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is not only

⁵⁰ Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, CP 604, 2022.

⁵¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *English Devolution White Paper: Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth*, 2024.

⁵² UK Parliament, *English Devolution: Volume 779: Debated on Monday 16 December 2024*.

a part of Labour devolution reform agenda, but also a result of long and unpredictable peace negotiations. The Agreement was reached on 10 April 1998 and provided extended institutional framework in order to finally establish a constant and peaceful process of co-working and negotiations between all sides of the conflict.

The institutional setting was organised based on three strands: (1) Civil Forum – strand 1; (2) North-South Ministerial Council – strand 2 and (3) British Irish Council – strand 3. The uniqueness of this situation is that the governance network is orchestrated by the state and international actors (such as Ireland, the USA, and the European Union); it covers public, private and non-governmental organisations. Thus, the governor in this context shapes the governance processes in cooperation with different governors which makes this situation unique.

To establish a regional government, Westminster passed the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It created The Northern Ireland Assembly and the positions of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. In terms of power, the same logic was implemented as in Scotland and later on in Wales. Sections 2 and 3 precisely describe reserved, excepted and transferred matters. This distinction is a result of a complicated past that goes back to the 1920s. Firstly, reserved matters are included in the Schedule 3 Northern Ireland Act and could be transferred by Orders in Council to the Assembly when cross-community consent had been reached. Secondly, the excepted matters presented in Schedule 2 specified subjects that are reserved to Westminster. Lastly, the transfer matters are such issues as health and social services, agriculture, education, and, last but not least, local government, meaning that they are all matters not listed in Schedule 2 or 3.

This makes the political situation in Northern Ireland calmer and more predictable, and at the same time prone to frequent institutional collapses. The reason for this is a general principle of consent made by two dominant communities to make regional institutions work. The problem is when one of the sides decides not to take part in governing due to some points of concern. Unfortunately, it has happened quite often due to various reasons. During the last 25 years, the Executive did not work 6 times and the longest break lasted almost 3 years. In this kind of situation, two possible scenarios are possible to implement. The first one is to wait until a political agreement is reached and involve the government in London in the negotiations process. During this time no one is in charge in regional government. Civil servants could only secure daily operation of public institutions without the power to make any decision. The second option could be to use the governing right and introduce direct rule. It would mean that the government in London could directly manage the situation in the region. Even though it is legally an entirely possible solution, in terms of politics it would diminish a very fragile agreement reached during the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. On top of that, a real threat to the stability of the peace process has been caused by the Brexit referendum. Overall, the regional community decided to vote for remaining in the EU. But it was not the only reason for concern. Unionist leadership directly supported the decision to leave, while on the other hand, republicans presented a completely different view about EU membership. However, the most straight-forward aspect of the whole process was how to secure the open border between Ireland and Northern Ireland when at the same

time the UK government decided to implement a so-called hard Brexit. Moreover, as M. Russell and L. James stated; Brexit has put serious strains on the UK's territorial constitution, and the Union itself. The fact that majorities in both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted Remain in 2016 fuelled pre-existing separatist pressures.⁵³ From a meta-governance approach, a lot of effort must be put into re-designing governance processes and bringing back stability.

Given this, several political agreements have been needed to restore regional institutions during the whole peaceful period in Northern Ireland. The list of these agreements precisely shows how difficult of a process it has been: (1) St Andrews Agreement 2006; (2) Hillsborough Castle Agreement, 2010; (3) Stormont House Agreement, 2014; (4) Fresh Start Agreement; (5) New Decade, New Approach; (6) Northern Ireland devolution: Safeguarding the Union 2024. The last one was the consequence of implementation of Northern Ireland Protocol which substantively complicated economic and administrative cooperation between Northern Ireland and the British Isles. In this context, intergovernmental relations have been important part in order to find an agreement. Based on practical perspective, it hasn't been particularly effective. Claire Sugden (former Minister for Justice in the Northern Ireland Executive) recalled it as: *That's not to say we didn't work together and I found myself going back and forth to London on a number of occasions. But again, some of meetings felt very shallow in so far as was: [Here's your brief, minister, tick, tick, tick agenda, photo opportunity, move on] (...) Sometimes you do feel like they are a level above, which I suppose in a way they are because they're the sovereign parliament and [as a devolved administration] we're below that. But that's not to say we shouldn't have an interest.*⁵⁴

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement successfully ended a dark period in the regional history of Northern Ireland. However, a new political agreement has created processes and frameworks of constant discussions and negotiations rather than a stable regional government. During the whole time the UK government must be open and flexible to insert different meta-governance strategies to find the whole-community consensus and keep regional institutions working. It seems to be an obvious point not only in terms of stability of institutional settings but also in terms of relations between Belfast and London. Máirtín Ó Muilleoir (Minister of Finance in the Northern Ireland Executive from 2016-2017) stated that *Going to Westminster, dealing with the chancellor or his deputy, was enervating, wasteful of my time (...) the way they dealt with you (...) We never got round to negotiation on that. So the main negotiations with the British government, the main interface with the London government, was in conjunction with our colleagues in Scotland and Wales.*⁵⁵ Mark Durkan (Northern Ireland's former Minister for Finance from 1999 to 2001) presented a very similar experience in negotiations

⁵³ M. Russell, L. James, *The Parliamentary Battle over Brexit*, Oxford 2023, p. 330.

⁵⁴ "Interview with Claire Sugden," *Institute for Government*, 15 September 2021, p. 13, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/claude-sugden>, 31 May 2025.

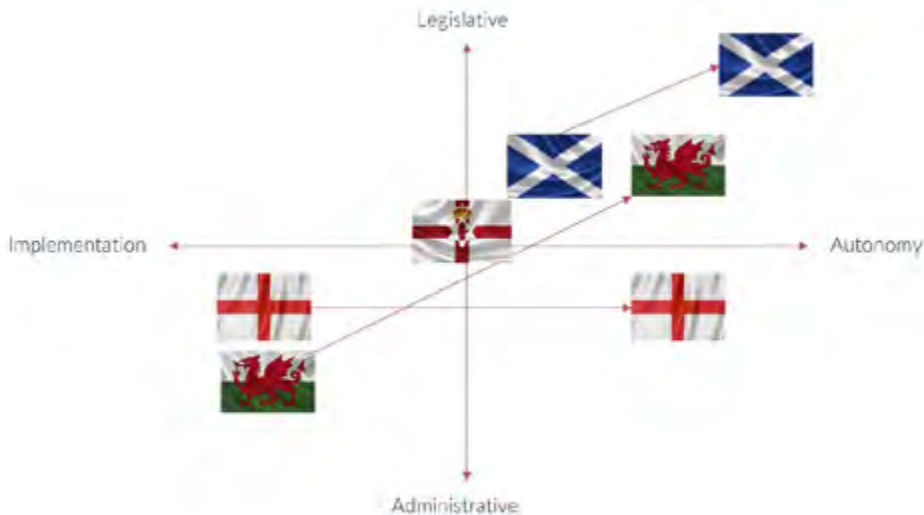
⁵⁵ "Interview with Máirtín Ó Muilleoir," *Institute for Government*, 10 September 2021, p. 13, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/mairtin-o-muilleoir>, 31 May 2025.

with London when he recalled hearing during one of his discussions with the representatives from the Treasury: *That's your Barnett consequential, and if you ask for detail about that or challenge it, we're the Treasury and we don't need to give you a reason.*⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

During the first quarter after the implementation of the reform, it is fair to say that devolution has been a problem to solve rather than a solution. In each regional case, the direction of change has been substantial and must be regularly amended. Moreover, as we can see below, it is becoming less and less an asymmetrical model of devolution. Nowadays it is much easier to say that it is getting more and more similar when it comes to current institutional frameworks.

Figure 1. The direction of change of the British devolution



Source: own

From the meta-governance perspective, it seems to be evident that strategies implemented in last year's struggle to find the balance between London and other regional capitals. As shown below, sometimes it was caused by growing tension coming from the bottom (region). However, the tensions were also created by the UK government itself. Despite the evolving devolution process in the whole UK, the British government has maintained a dominant role in the country. As interviews have shown, London has used a whole range of tools to be dominant in these relations, such as authority, economic and informational instruments. Thus, in most cases devolution has not been

⁵⁶ "Interview with Mark Durkan," *Institute for Government*, 23 May 2018, p. 21, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/mark-durkan>, 31 May 2025.

a process of balancing discretion that implies the creation of 'governance space' but a process dominated by tensions and hard negotiations between London and regional capitals. In this context, an interesting question is to what extent it has been a conscious strategy or a mix of politics and/or unawareness of the new institutional setting. Needless to say, the lack of knowledge about the devolution in the centre of government is the most common phrase repeated in the interviews conducted by the Institute for Government. It means that institutional reforms have not been transferred into practice on a working level and this has been a new source of tension in intergovernmental relations.

In the light of a meta-governance perspective, it is very important to address the question about the unifying idea of the union. Which of the three options: unionism, intergovernmentalism or federalism should be the leading one. There is no doubt that there is an urgent need to find out the answer to the question about the future of the union. Lack of serious tensions at the time being cannot be an excuse, because as M. Kenny said: *Half a century ago hardly anybody would have taken seriously an argument that the territorial unity of the UK state might be in danger. Now it is hard to find anyone who thinks that it isn't.*⁵⁷ After the latest general elections in July 2024 the new government seems to understand the seriousness of this situation. From the beginning of exercising the power new formats of cooperation between central, regional and even local governments have emerged. The Council of Nation and Regions or the Mayoral Council have been created to ease the tension within intergovernmental relations and establish a new channel of discussions between all partners. It is a good illustration of governmental intentions but reveals nothing about the already known formats such as the Joint Ministerial Committee.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Commission on Devolution in Wales, *Empowerment and Responsibility: Legislative Powers to Strengthen Wales*, Cardiff 2014.
- Commission on Scottish Devolution, *Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century: Final Report*, Edinburgh 2009.
- Commission on Scottish Devolution, *The Future of Scottish Devolution within the Union: A First Report*, Edinburgh 2008.
- Dambaard B., Tofring J., "Network Governance of Active Employment Policy: The Danish Experience," *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2010), pp. 248-262, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928710364435>.
- Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, CP 604, 2022.

⁵⁷ M. Kenny, *Fractured Union...*, p. 30.

- Ek Österberg E., Qvist M., "Meta-Governance as Partial Organization," *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2023), pp. 192-210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2022.2025737>.
- Gjaltema J., Biesbroek R., Termeer K., "From Government to Governance... to Meta-Governance: A Systematic Literature Review," *Public Management Review*, vol. 22, no. 12 (2020), pp. 1760-1780, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1648697>.
- The Government of Wales Act 1998*.
- HM Government, *Scotland in the United Kingdom: An Enduring Settlement*, Cm 8990, London 2015.
- "Interview with Alun Michael," *Institute for Government*, 14 September 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/alun-michael>.
- "Interview with Alun Davies," *Institute for Government*, 12 October 2021, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/alun-davies>.
- "Interview with Andrew Davies," *Institute for Government*, 13 September 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/david-davis>.
- "Interview with Andy Kerr," *Institute for Government*, 27 September 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/andy-kerr>.
- "Interview with Carwyn Jones," *Institute for Government*, 18 January 2019, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/carwyn-jones>.
- "Interview with Claire Sugden," *Institute for Government*, 15 September 2021, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/claire-sugden>.
- "Interview with Ieuan Wyn Jones," *Institute for Government*, 16 October 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/ieuan-wyn-jones>.
- "Interview with Jane Hutt," *Institute for Government*, 13 September 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jane-hutt>.
- "Interview with Jeane Freeman," *Institute for Government*, 5 October 2021, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jeane-freeman>.
- "Interview with Jim Murphy," *Institute for Government*, 7 October 2022, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jim-murphy>.
- "Interview with Ken Skates," *Institute for Government*, 27 August 2021, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/ken-skates>.
- "Interview with Kenny MacAskill," *Institute for Government*, 5 December 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/kenny-macaskill>.
- "Interview with Kirsty Williams," *Institute for Government*, 28 August 2021, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/kirsty-williams>.
- "Interview with Leighton Andrews," *Institute for Government*, 17 December 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/leighton-andrews>.
- "Interview with Lord German," *Institute for Government*, 11 September 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/lord-german>.
- "Interview with Lord McConnell," *Institute for Government*, 10 September 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/lord-mcconnell>.
- "Interview with Lord Wallace," *Institute for Government*, 17 July 2015, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/lord-wallace>.

- “Interview with Máirtín Ó Muilleoir,” *Institute for Government*, 10 September 2021, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/mairtin-o-muilleoir>.
- “Interview with Mark Durkan,” *Institute for Government*, 23 May 2018, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/mark-durkan>.
- “Interview with Michael Russell,” *Institute for Government*, 26 January 2022, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/event/michael-russell>.
- “Interview with Shona Robison,” *Institute for Government*, 17 October 2017, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/shona-robison>.
- Jeffery Ch., Wincott D., “Devolution in the United Kingdom: Statehood and Citizenship in Transition,” *Publius*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2006), pp. 3-18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjj014>.
- Jessop B., “The Rise of Governance and the Risks of Failure: The Case of Economic Development,” *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 50, no. 155 (1998), pp. 29-46.
- Jessop B. (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Governance*, Thousand Oaks 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200964>.
- Kenny M., *Fractured Union: Politics, Sovereignty and the Fight to Save the UK*, London 2023.
- Kickert W.J.M., Klijn E.-H., Koppenjan J., *Managing Complex Networks*, London 1997.
- Kooiman J., Jentoft S., “Meta-Governance: Values, Norms and Principles, and the Making of Hard Choices,” *Public Administration*, vol. 87, no. 4 (2009), pp. 818-836, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01780.x>.
- “Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009,” *Legislation.gov.uk*, at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents>.
- “Localism Act 2011,” *Legislation.gov.uk*, at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>.
- March J.G., Olsen J.P., *Democratic Governance*, New York 1995.
- “Ministers Reflect,” *Institute for Government*, at <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect>.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *English Devolution White Paper: Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth*, 2024.
- Norton Ph., *Governing Britain: Parliament, Ministers and Our Ambiguous Constitution*, Manchester 2020.
- Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, *Scotland's Future in the United Kingdom: Building on Ten Years of Scottish Devolution*, 2009.
- Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, *Better Governance for Wales*, Cm. 6582, 2005.
- Peters B.G., “Meta-Governance and Public Management,” in S.P. Osborne (ed.) *The New Public Governance? Emerging Perspectives on the Theory and Practice of Public Governance*, London, pp. 46-59.
- Rallings C., Thrasher M., “‘Just Another Expensive Talking Shop’: Public Attitudes and the 2004 Regional Assembly Referendum in the North East of England,” *Regional Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8 (2006), pp. 927-936, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400600929069>.
- Russell M., James L., *The Parliamentary Battle over Brexit*, Oxford 2023.
- The Scottish Government, *Your Scotland Your Voice: A National Conversation*, Edinburgh 2009.

Sørensen E., Torfing J., "Theoretical Approaches to Democratic Network Governance," in E. Sørensen, J. Torfing (eds), *Theories of Democratic Network Governance*, London 2009, pp. 233-246, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230625006_14.

UK Parliament, *English Devolution: Volume 779: Debated on Monday 16 December 2024*.

White I., *Report on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements of the National Assembly for Wales*, 2004.

White Paper: A Voice for Wales: The Government's Proposals for a Welsh Assembly, 1997.

Robert GAWŁOWSKI – Professor of the WSB Merito University in Toruń Political scientist and public administration expert. His research focuses on public administration (both governmental and local), metropolitan governance systems, central government-local government relations, and British politics. ResearchGate profile: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert-Gawlowski/publications>.