Policy styles and devolution

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The story of post-devolution politics in the UK is one of policy divergence. Policymakers in Scotland and Wales have responded to pent-up desires to do things differently while facing, like their counterparts in England, new challenges and policy debates. And, we argue, they solve their problems and pursue their ends by relying on already distinct, and powerful, images of what policy should be and how it should work. In other words, they have distinct policy styles.

A policy style is the repeated choice of policy tools—adoption of the same tools in different policy fields. There are many ways to approach a given set of policy problems, be they funding universities, getting an equitable an efficient health service, or manipulating local government to produce central government’s chosen outcome. When a government chooses one tool or another, over and over again, in different sectors, that makes a policy style. The concept of a policy style is a tool of forestry, not of botany; it is about patterns. Policy experts face the danger of missing the fact that most politicians and many advocates deal with multiple issues. Students of politics and political institutions—and not a few politicians—are often deaf to what their institutions actually do in policy terms. That is where the concept of a policy style comes in: a given government will often apply the same basic tools, be they competition, partnership, or networks, to a wide range of different policy areas. It is the kind of policy that political logics impose regardless of the policy issue.

POLICY STYLES IN DEVOLUTION

Literature using the concept of policy styles has not thrived recently. After some high-profile publications in the early 1980s it largely dropped out of policy analysis and

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2 This is a narrower definition than the classic one presented by Jeremy Richardson, which incorporates both political processes and policy choices Richardson JJ. 1982. Convergent Policy Styles in Europe? In Policy Styles in Western Europe, ed. JJ Richardson, pp. 197-210. London: George Allen & Unwin. We focus on policy styles as outputs— as the policy tools that are chosen over and over again. This avoids tautology.


comparative politics. More recently, though, a good number of scholars have used it to identify not just the regularities of policymaking process that many fields study, but also regularities of policy choice and baselines from which to study changes such as those caused by Europeanisation or leadership changes and, most recently, devolution in the United Kingdom.

Why should we care? Analytically, a policy style is an outcome. If a political system chooses the same options over and over again in different fields, that is a product of its internal functioning. This tells us two things. One is that we can establish a baseline. If England constantly opts for markets over networks, we can expect that it will continue to do so. The other is that it gives us an opening to better understand the decisionmakers and what they understand to be the real scope of the feasible. These two reasons are of particular interest now, when we clearly leaving behind the period of all-UK Labour dominance. Some part of the explanation of each country’s trajectory will be explicable by its particular leadership, but some part will reflect the politics, administration, and policy climate of that country.

The next sections argue, based on short reviews of policy in education, local government, and health, that there are distinct Scottish, Welsh and English policy styles with deep roots. This is because much of what affects policy remains constant from government to government.

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7 We regretfully exclude Northern Ireland for two reasons. One, it has a fairly distinct policy style, which one of us calls “permissive managerialism”, but given Northern Irish history, should anybody be surprised? Two, the mechanisms creating Northern Ireland’s highly distinctive approach to public policy have more to do with direct rule and sectarian
government. The key is the combination of powers, policies, and politics that explain policy divergence within any country:

**Powers**: What can a given government do, in terms of formal powers, financial capabilities, and access to key resources? This is mostly institutional and formal. In the UK, there are considerable powers for Scotland and Wales. Block funding through Barnett and weak central instruments make it difficult for Westminster to intervene in their core spending areas. Over time the institutional conditions of this autonomy are evolving, as policymakers privately work out solutions to their various problems while publicly competing for credit and strategically picking fights. But compared to most central governments, Westminster starts out ill-equipped to intervene in Northern Irish, Scottish, or Welsh policy.

**Policies**: What is the political agenda? What policy options are on the table? No policy idea survives unless somebody advocates for it and unless it is promoted and defended in the running discussions of policy that take place among experts in very system. Understanding who the advocates are, whether lobbyists, academics, or journalists, is key to understanding what can get and stay on the agenda and what policy tools look sensible and workable to them.

**Politics**: Party politicians do things because it enhances, or at least looks unlikely to damage, their party’s standing and electability vis-à-vis its competitors. This means that understanding party strategies and positions is crucial to understanding what politicians will do- while they have bases, and resource dependencies, to satisfy, they must also seek voters who might change their minds. And often what politicians seek is simple- the votes of distinct blocs of voters whose loyalty they contest with other parties.

Note that all three factors change slowly, and often scarcely change at all. Devolution clearly changed the powers; its effects on party systems were less striking (it increased the importance of the SNP, but did not create it), and its effects on policy communities politics than with the democratic mechanisms at work in the other jurisdictions. Among other things, that might mean that it will change significantly with established devolution.

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were diluted by other influences as diverse as university hiring and the organization of local government associations.

Two of the three key factors do not automatically change with a change of government such as happened between May and July 2007. We will know when powers change—when the Scotland Act is rewritten in a major way, or the Barnett formula publicly changed, or a new precedent established, or major physical resources transferred, then powers will have changed. Policy communities change at the margin, as obstinate purveyors of policies the government does not like lose influence and the more labile start to speak the government’s language. But the basic infrastructure of a policy community is generally sturdy. And while party politics obviously change—the SNP is in office in Scotland, not Labour—party competition and the issues that win and lose elections in given places changes much more slowly. And other forms of politics change, less, differently, and sometimes not at all.

DEVOLUTION'S ANCESTORS: THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF POLICY STYLES

The fact that policy communities, party systems, and many other social institutions survive constitutional changes and elections means that the policy styles of today were often the policy styles of yesterday. Policy styles are responses to the political and administrative structures in a place. They are ways to deal with political and policy problems that worked before and will probably work again because they fit with the political logic of the system. Remembering they are deeply rooted, and slow to change when they change, depends on remembering that the political logics of England, Scotland, and Wales, have long differed in ways that had real policy consequences. That point depends on remembering the distinction between administrative and political devolution— a distinction that is receding into history with remarkable speed and very little justification as the doings of “territorial offices” during their heyday recede into the realm of academic historians and nostalgics. The former refers to the structure of politics and administration in Scotland and Wales before the 1999 establishment of elected bodies (the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament). In administrative devolution, “territorial offices,” the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office, combined in their respective territories the functions that were carried out in England by line departments such as those responsible for education, agriculture or health.

The exact extent of divergence under administrative devolution can be both over- and under-stated; on one hand, the UK did have one government whose writ ran across Great Britain, but on the other hand the interaction of distinctive administrations and societies in Scotland and Wales left distinctive policy communities, and often a more consensual,

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insider approach to politics. Furthermore, there was also some substantive policy divergence in fields as diverse as Welsh national curricula, Scottish water, Welsh mental health policy and Scottish schools testing. Even if the power of the territorial offices and their associated communities lay mostly in implementation, much can happen in implementation\textsuperscript{11}.

Political devolution did not just create elected governments where there had only been the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales; it also gave Scotland and Wales much more autonomy. One of us, giving talks in Scotland about devolution and health, is often asked whether devolution influenced health policy at all- whether the change from a Conservative UK government to a Labour-led Scottish government really influenced policy. This question, dumbfounding to a student of politics, reflects the extent to which Scottish institutions had always preserved an aura of autonomy and sense of themselves- and to which they had understood their ability to implement and advise as a question of Scottishness rather than implementation \textsuperscript{12}.

Political devolution- just plain devolution, now- increases the autonomy of devolved governments, places them under new political influences, and gives them new electoral reasons to diverge but it by no means wipes out the influence of inherited institutions\textsuperscript{13}. It therefore gives us an opportunity to test for the existence and impact of policy styles. Policy styles should be entrenched in policy communities. Scottish and Welsh policy communities existed before devolution and influenced the details and implementation of policy. So did party systems, and part of the job of a territorial Secretary of State was to be sensitive to the distinctive political problems UK parties faced in the Scottish and Welsh party systems. If the policy after political devolution- when powers radically changed- uses the same tools as policy in the limited space for divergence before devolution, then that is evidence of the existence of a policy style. Every political system affords us the test of being able to see whether policies span different sectors; the UK also gives us a longitudinal study of the importance of ideas, independent of electoral politics. The following sections apply both tests. In each case the policies are similar across different fields, and were foreshadowed before political devolution.

ENGLAND: MARKETS AND MANAGERIALISM


The English policy style can be described as the routine preference for “managerialism”\(^{14}\) (use of managerial techniques rather than reliance on professionals) and “welfare pluralism-” the use of public and private providers and efforts to increase consumer influences on public services\(^{15}\). It has for over two decades emphasized the public choice kind of logics that stress the virtues of contracting and competition. Its characteristic policy tools are diversity of providers, contracts and “contestability”. While this style, often associated with New Public Management, is new since the 1980s, it fits in with long traditions of English institutional differentiation and fragmentation (especially in local government and education). This is combined with a strong tendency to top-down policymaking, with consultation limited in many important decisions\(^{16}\). The approach is made coherent by suspicion of “vested interests,” above all public-sector employees who enjoy much less elite political support in England than elsewhere.

It amounts to an English policy style characterized by institutional differentiation, top-down policy and audit, low trust in providers and a faith in market mechanisms such as contracting and competitive tendering (if not necessarily markets). It is often characterized now as a sequence, with Tory privatization giving way to top-down control in the first years of the Blair governments and a later shift to markets\(^{17}\). But what stands out in devolved comparison is the constant combination of top-down and market-based mechanisms in pursuit of a technical, self-sustaining system that will do what the centre wants without making the central government actually do it. Many tools have changed-from state-run firms and civil service circulars to quangos, autonomous regulators, and elaborate and highly regulated “mimic markets”\(^{18}\). A few remain the same- inspection regimes and technocratic commissions. But what they have in common is the English difficulties balancing central power and central autonomy- finding ways to produce central government’s desired outcomes without forcing central government to try to do everything. And that is hardly new\(^{19}\).


\(^{17}\) Barber, M., *Instruction to Deliver: Tony Blair, the Public Services, and the Challenge of Delivery* (London: Politico’s, 2007).


Education

English education policy has for many years relied on diversity, competition and standards. England has often established new types of school while maintaining old styles, incorporating educational diversity and stratification as a key part of the system. Private (“public”) schools have survived the spread of publicly funded comprehensive schools, and the selective element of the tripartite system (via testing at age 11) still persists in some regions. The Callaghan government sought greater central control of the education system and the Thatcher and Major governments won it. They combined this search for control with a strong belief in introducing market forces into the education system. A new category of ‘grant maintained’ schools could ‘opt-out’ of local authority control to be maintained by central government and managed by their own boards of governors.

Labour has built upon this with a multitude of initiatives: Specialist Schools, able to attract additional public and private funding, Beacon Schools to spread best practice, Foundation Schools with greater financial autonomy, privately-sponsored ‘City Academies’ in deprived areas (now spreading to other sites as just ‘Academies’), and increasing numbers of faith schools. Voluntary and private sector providers can step in to run failing schools on short-term contracts, while local authorities have a duty to advertise requirements for new schools. The result is an extraordinary degree of differentiation among schools- that is, a wide range of categories created by the centre.

Differentiation comes with competition. England retains statutory testing at ages 7, 11 and 14, and the only school "league tables" (performance rankings) in the UK, combined with a slimmed down national curriculum that focuses on key skills such as literacy and numeracy. After extended arguments over the continuing validity of A Levels, in the Curriculum 2000 reforms, A Levels and GCSEs will be supplemented by vocational diplomas by 2008. All these policies have soured relations with teachers unions. The highly controversial 2005 White Paper on education gives a taste of the thinking: it sets out plans to "improve the system by putting parents and the needs of their children at the heart of our school system, freeing up schools to innovate and succeed, bringing in new dynamism and new providers, ensuring that coasting- let alone failure- is not an option for any school". The Blair governments held this policy area close to the Prime

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21 Chitty, C., Education Policy in Great Britain (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004). P. 75

Minister, which is predictable. Number Ten viewed “education, education, education” as the key to electoral success, and that they had a tight grip on policy initiation within the party. It was sometimes difficult for Department for Education and Skills officials to learn about policies such as school autonomy. The result of these efforts to make schools like diverse firms in a mimic market was the effective nationalization of English school funding in 2006- with the expected increase in the differentiation of schools, their closeness to central government, and yet another reduction in the importance of local government.

In higher education and research policy, English policymakers have also opted for policies that differentiate their universities and set them to compete. In terms of student finance, this means allowing each university to set fees subject to a £3,000 p/a cap. The Higher Education Act 2004 allowed universities to charge such variable fees for the first time, in return for negotiating Access Agreements aimed at widening participation through bursaries for low-income students; students will repay the money after graduation. This is expected to drive universities to offer differentiated services and quality, in keeping with their fees-- and transfer more responsibility for student finance onto students and their families, in direct opposition to the universalistic goals Scotland would pursue. In research funding, the government has similarly sought to differentiate universities, with money increasingly targeted at a few major institutions that are thought to be internationally competitive and decreasing research support for the institutions deemed to be focused on teaching. In contrast to Scotland and Wales it has shown little interest in promoting networks of universities that would allow them to pool resources.

**Local government**

Territorial equity- and the potential loss of Westminster seats in areas with bad local government- forecloses competition between local government. No recent government has truly sought to discipline local governments via the exit option; rather than encouraging people to leave badly run local authorities as they do with schools or hospitals, they combine top-down policy and an affection for differentiation. Historically, English local government policy is deeply marked not just by a history of institutional differentiation, but also by the traumatic experiences of the 1980s and 1990s. During those years, headlines were often dominated by rebellious, questionably competent, and possibly corrupt local governments and their conflicts with the Conservative Governments. Conservative governments tried to control them through legislation and judicial enforcement; local governments tried to wiggle through gaps in the new laws, and the main result was local government constraint, ill will, widely distributed contempt, and a remarkably complicated legal situation. Efforts by the government to control local government, which led so far as the “poll tax’ that brought

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down Thatcher\textsuperscript{24}, gave Thatcher’s Conservatives an even deeper distrust of local government. Labour, entering office, also distrusted local government, partly because of the same experiences with embarrassing governments in places such as Lambeth and Liverpool and partly because of a sense that good (local) public services would be decisive in establishing voters’ faith in Labour.

Both parties consequently were interested in reducing local government’s ability to check central government policy, and obliging it to provide the services and priorities sought by central government. These battles, and a shared central government frustration with local government, created a demand for novel policy that would make local government want to behave as central government wished. That demand eventually was met by a policy community versed in central-local control techniques and which has been encouraged to think of radical local government reform ideas such as elected regions and elected mayors. This produces a constant flow of ingenuity, such as plans for elected mayors of various sorts, or the late Blairite bagatelle of “double devolution”, which includes devolution of powers to sub-local-government-governments.

Labour, drawing on those ideas, has been keen to promote diverse local solutions and forms of representation to local councils. But it has done this from the centre. Vertical central-local links remain very hierarchical, with the centre expressing conflicting desires for both strong local leadership and enhanced democracy and local conformity with central policy. Unlike in Scotland and Wales, concepts of ‘partnership’ in English local government are usually horizontal, a means of local working rather than a device to enhance relations with higher tiers of government. Local Strategic Partnerships, established in deprived areas to coordinate service provision between authorities and the private and voluntary sectors\textsuperscript{25} are a generalized form of the many types of partnership that involve local government such as Action Zones, the New Deal for Communities, Learning, Sure Start, Youth Offending Teams, and Crime and Disorder partnerships\textsuperscript{26}.

A policy of creating differentiation by offering a menu of institutional forms comes with a policy of tough, centrally driven standards and a level of scrutiny that easily exceeds what Whitehall applies to itself. The National Framework for Audit and Inspection allows the government to compare performance across the board. Better performing councils are given more freedoms. Failing councils, however, could see key responsibilities handed over to the private or voluntary sectors. Councils are in general extensively audited and tracked by Whitehall officials. Central enforcement of councils’ Best Value (outsourcing and competitive tendering) obligations is also tough compared to


\textsuperscript{26} Wilson, D. and Game, C., \textit{Local Government in the United Kingdom} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). P. 124
Scotland and Wales. Under the Local Government Act 2000, councils were given the opportunity to raise standards, transparency and scrutiny through new political structures, but only by choosing from a set of fixed options including a cabinet system or a directly elected mayor.

The 2005 White Paper on local government reinforced many of these ideas with a call to local government institutional reform. Its approach to organization and interorganisational relations had the same themes: another call to organizational reform with stronger leadership and elected mayors (3.19), a focus on working with and spinning off functions to private or non-profit organizations (ch.2), a call to greater partnership between local governments, an extensive range of targets agreed with central government for local governments to hit (ch.6) as well as efforts to create new mechanisms such as a Community Call for Action that will make local governments more responsive (2.29-30)\(^27\). These are all top-down reforms that expect, and appear to build, little trust between central and local government. They also, of course, increase differentiation. Gordon Brown’s first statement to Westminster as Prime Minister, on 3 July, called for a concordat between central and local government. Blair was also emollient when he came to power. And, during the centralizing 1980s and 1990s most Conservatives kept their vaguely Burkean, largely rhetorical affection for localism even as their government mooted the abolition of the local authorities it was so fiercely opposing\(^28\). The political logic of England will probably continue to be stronger than any policy logic that would point to cooperation.

**Health**

The tidal-wave of money that hit the English NHS from 2001 onward made possible a great deal of policy experimentation- and also created a rising frustration among policymakers who found that the improvement found in their statistics and press reports came nowhere near to matching the extra money spent. Again, the answer was a combination of diversity, efforts to harness competition, and a mixture of standards and targets set at the top.

Alan Milburn’s accession as Secretary of State began the large-scale project of NHS reform that would preoccupy the Blair government for the rest of its time in office. These involved both strengthening command and control and putting in place the mechanisms that would produce a market, which would in turn produce responsiveness, efficiency, and quality. That began with the 2001 *Shifting the Balance of Power*\(^29\) which stripped out

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intermediate territorial levels, pushing responsibilities to the centre and to “front-line” organizations such as hospital trusts. Then came patient choice of hospital and the “treatment centres” program in which the government signed (fixed-volume!) contracts with private firms to supply simple operations on an industrial basis. The justification for treatment centres or patient choice of hospital was never voter or patient demand. They were to break the monopoly of NHS provision, allowing service “commissioners” to play hospitals off against each other. This, in turn, would erode the power of hospitals and their doctors. The special advisor to Blair who is credited with formulating this set of policies, Simon Stevens, called it “constructive discomfort” before leaving government to work with a large American company that was interested in entering the lucrative English market30.

The focus on competition and fragmentation also gives us a distinctive English approach to the problems of reconfiguration. Reconfiguration means closing existing facilities, often centralizing services in larger facilities, and replacing local hospitals with clinics and various outpatient facilities. While it is possible to argue about the clinical desirability of this approach, the strength of elite clinical lobbies and the appeal of budget cuts to managers and ministers mean that it is common to all the systems. It is also politically explosive, since it means asking communities to exchange much-loved hospitals and A&E services for the promise of something better, different, and generally in the future. Activists opposed to reconfigurations typically have no trouble pointing out that this means jam tomorrow.

How does England reconfigure? English policy often tries to make a machine that will go of its own- that will carry out the tasks of resource allocation, closures, and changes in services without burdening the centre31. In principle, the competitive disciplines of “choice,” the tariff for services and increased local pricing, the purchaser-provider split between Primary Care Trusts and other trusts, the strict fiscal monitoring of foundation hospitals, the presence of competition from Treatment Centres, and the rise of practice-based commissioning will do the trick, and when a hospital closes it will be because it lacked demand. In reality, it is still difficult and politically contentious to close hospitals, and major reconfigurations have been held off on more or less explicit orders from ministers.

SCOTLAND: PROFESSIONALISM AND CONSISTENCY

The key word of post-1999 Scottish policy, according to policymakers, is usually “partnership.” Before political devolution there was no such code term, but it was well-documented that the Scottish elites had a more consensual, if distinctly insiderish, way of

implementing policy\textsuperscript{32}. The established policy communities in education, health and local
government remained in existence, such that post-devolution Scottish policy largely
resembles pre-devolution Scottish implementation. This has meant that the Scottish
Executive has formed partnerships with incumbent public-sector providers, seeking to
use their existing resources and advice, using rather than trying to reform inherited
professional hierarchies and roles, good relations with provider groups, efforts to
democratize local decisionmaking, networks, shared resources, and administrative
simplification (and no aversion to public-private partnerships). In short, the Scottish
public policy style since devolution, one deeply rooted in the history of Scottish politics
and social policy, is based on universalistic, directly provided, undifferentiated public
services that use networks rather than competition and are governed based on a high
degree of trust in the professionalism of providers\textsuperscript{33}.

Education

Scotland’s educational system has been distinctive for a very long time, reflecting first its
different religious history and the politics of Union, and later because of its own
institutional momentum and distinctiveness\textsuperscript{34}. Since devolution, policy has presumed the
existence of a partnership between schools, local government, and the Executive and then
tried to build on it. Local government is a key partner in the 3-18 curriculum review, even
if the Scottish Executive has given it a support rather than policymaking role. The
Scottish Executive has largely dismantled the formal testing and oversight regime
inherited from before devolution. The devolved government continued, abolishing school
league tables and promoting greater local accountability for schools. The first education
legislation to pass the Scottish Parliament placed new duties on councils to raise
standards (rather than doing it directly, as in England)(Scotland monitoring report
November 1999\textsuperscript{35}). The powerful schools inspectorate, long the mainstay of Scottish

\textsuperscript{32} McCrone, D., \textit{Understanding Scotland: the sociology of a stateless nation} (London:
Corporatism, Pluralism, and the Negotiated Order in Scotland} (Oxford: Clarendon,
1989).

\textsuperscript{33} Keating, M., \textit{The Government of Scotland} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,

\textsuperscript{34} McPherson, A. and Raab, C.D., \textit{Governing Education: A Sociology of Policy since
the Twentieth Century} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{35} Scotland monitoring report November 1999. \url{http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-
unit/research/devolution/devo-monitoring-programme.html}
educational standards, remains in place, but the top-down performance management regime is otherwise gone.

In finance, respect for professions is also visible. Scotland has decided to pay teachers better than in England and offer them shorter hours, additional staff support and better pay in the wake of the 2001 McCrone review36). This professionalist approach has its limits, principally in its refusal to abandon Scotland’s use of public-private partnership for schools infrastructure despite the objections of unions37.

The most polemical issue has been higher education funding, where Scotland’s Labour-led governments (and its Liberal Democrat party) differentiated itself from England by eliminating up-front fees and replacing them with an “endowment” repayable after graduation. The SNP, on 13 June 2007, then differentiated Scotland further by abolishing the repayable endowment. England would later adopt a similar repayment scheme but would not follow Scotland in subsidizing students’ maintenance costs with loans and generous means-tested grants38. The UK-wide introduction of tuition fees, driven by the UK (English) Department for Education and Skills and the Prime Minister himself, did not recognize that Scottish degrees (unlike English or Welsh ones) last four years, so the Scottish Executive and UK Government had to negotiate a waiver for their fourth-year students.

This Scottish refusal to embrace tuition fees left the problem of how to maintain and improve the quality of university research without the additional autonomy of variable tuition fees. The Scottish policy response was to change interorganisational relationships: to more closely integrate funding streams (especially between higher and further education) and to try to organize research into wide networks. This meant pooling resources and staff that belong to different institutions39. It ultimately led to the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, which unifies further and higher education funders, and allows Scottish ministers to introduce variable tuition fees- justified by a concern that English students would study medicine in Scotland and then leave40.


Local Government

Scottish local government traditionally has been both a pillar of the Scottish Labour Party and a recognized force in Scottish politics and public administration. Even when it did not win battles with the Conservative governments, it was consulted more than its English counterparts. Against much Scottish opposition, the Major government restructured local government into a single-tier of 32 unitary authorities in 1996, revising the two-tiered structure created by the Local Government (Scotland) Act in 1973 and transferring some of the functions of the second tier of regional councils to the Executive. This change thickened central-local connections. They were formalized with devolution in the first ever written protocol between two levels of government in Scotland, the Scottish Partnership Framework of May 2001. Although Councillors still perceive the Executive as a centralising force, they generally see it as less so than its predecessor, the Scottish Office.

Compared to England or the pre-devolution system, value for money standards and audits of councils are more appreciative of local government autonomy, more appreciative of different starting points, particularly levels of deprivation) and less inclined to hold them to particular standards of behaviour than in England. In a nice touch of symmetry, Best Value is less tough- and applied to the Scottish Executive as well as local government. In other words, while partnership in English local government is horizontal, in Scotland it is also supposed to be vertical.

In finance, the Executive has substantially increased its direct funding of local government. But the Executive has as much power over local government as Westminster. So when the council tax began to be a political problem, the Executive was also able and willing to state that there should be no council tax increases above 2.5% in 2006-7. This statement caused tensions in the partnership between the Executive and

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local government. It also presaged major future conflict over the council tax, which came to a head when the SNP called for its abolition and replacement with a local income tax.

The Scottish Executive will shift the funding base in accord with SNP promises, which may cause strife, but the real rifts seem likely to be a result of policies on local government structure. This is an area in which Scotland’s one really activist local government policy should have significant effects. The Scottish Executive has been fairly consistent in its treatment of local government organization: it respects local government autonomy much more than England. First of all, it has done less. It rejected the prescriptive reform options offered to councils in England, opting instead to allow each authority to conduct its own review (Scottish local government after 1996 was much less diverse anyway). Only a few authorities came out in favour of English-style strong executives or elected mayors (provosts). The major change, and the one that will reshape central-local relations was the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, driven by Liberal and a few Labour reformers. This cleared a path for the introduction of STV in the 2007 local elections, despite opposition from COSLA. This new electoral system produced coalition governments and is sure to alter local-devolved relations and parties (and has prompted a wave of retirements by councillors). The new councils will have to work out their new relationship with the central government, both sides learning anew. They will do this, however, in conditions that are likely to produce more comity and talk of partnership- coalition governments increase the likelihood of SNP representation in council leadership.

Health

If foundation hospitals, as well as many other English health policy innovations, are about fragmenting the system in order to introduce competition, Scottish health policy has been about unification. Rather than develop markets, NHS Scotland has

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consistently unified organizations in a way that precludes competition, and instead focused on partnership working as the most efficient way to run a health service. This meant unifying all the various health trusts into large territorial boards, and running some services (especially in cancer) on the basis of three large “clinical networks.” It also meant some very tangible demonstrations of faith in professionals such as quicker introduction of pay increases for nurses in 2007 (to the irritation of UK ministers preoccupied with balancing the books of the English NHS).

In other words, Scotland’s organizational strategy focused on integration within the NHS. Rather than differentiation and competition, it opted for integration and centralized priority-setting. Along with the elimination of the trusts came the reduction in managerial power- the larger health boards gained strategic capacity but lost managerial control over the front lines- management came to mean distant health boards rather than the Chief Executive in the next building over. The new SNP government, insofar as its health promises focused on policy rather than reconfiguration, promised more of what Labour had claimed to do: reduce the role of the private sector; create and extend partnership rather than competition; and focus on public health and the determinants of a healthy society.50 A perfectly typical 21 June 2007 statement by new health minister Nicola Sturgeon combined the themes that Scottish parties share: “We believe it is sensible to deliver healthcare on the basis of collaboration and cooperation, rather than division and competition. We oppose the use of public money to help the private sector compete with the NHS.” And the distinctive addition of the SNP was to internationalize an interest shared by the Scottish parties; she concluded the statement by inviting other health ministers (regional, or even member state) to a conference on the reduction of health inequalities in Europe.

How does this system deal with reconfiguration? In 2001, a Scottish interviewee, high-level then and higher-level now, commented in an interview that a reconfiguration will always be political, so (in contrast to England), it makes no sense to design a health system around periodic reconfigurations. Rather, systems should be designed to run efficiently on a day to day basis and ministers should brace themselves to sign off on reconfigurations. This interviewee captured the logic of Scottish health policy- the actions of a Health Board stick to a minister just as much in Scotland as elsewhere, and very little about policymaking shields the minister. After being tested once in the reconfiguration of Greater Glasgow services the centralized politics of reconfiguration got a larger outing in 2006-7. The “Kerr report” which mapped out a future for Scottish health services after extensive consultation, promised an attractive destination but


included a number of closures\textsuperscript{52}. Simultaneously, unrelated reconfigurations (including one in Lanarkshire, John Reid’s territory) became politically contentious. Local communities organized, and in mid-2006 Scottish interviewees were worried that hospital closures would cost Labour the election. They arguably did. In 2003 this produced a number of strong independent candidacies; in 2007 the SNP seems to have successfully brought anti-reconfiguration campaigns under its wing. It also promised “to keep health local”, which means no further closures.

WALES: CARROTS AND COMMUNITARIANISM

If Scottish medical audiences can ask whether devolution affected Scottish public policy, nobody studying Wales could fail to notice the difference with devolution. The basic repeated style of Welsh policymaking is the use of inherited mechanisms such as contracting in health services or the basic local government style while bending them to reflect a strikingly Welsh focus on partnership with local government, communities and employees. It is manifest in efforts to work closely with local government (such as through the Partnership Council that links ministers and councils, or by tightening its relationships with NHS Wales) and in broader partnerships to achieve policy ends as well as in a well-articulated unwillingness to pursue confrontational English policies towards the public sector. Welsh policies share with Scotland a trust in partnership with providers and professionals, but differs in its relative lack of willingness to construct or reinforce quality control and discipline through professional leaders\textsuperscript{53}. These differences are, in technical terms, often about things like the structuring of public services commissioning-but in political terms, the communitarian background rhetoric of Welsh politics makes them sound, and potentially are, very different.

What happens in practice is that Welsh policy style is focused on inducing partnership behavior, with carrots and efforts to design communitarianism and cooperation into policy. The NAW and WAG are hampered by a lack of both money and executive authority, but when they have an option, they typically opt for the carrots that they have available over the sticks that they have available. The result is a system designed to promote joint working across sectors and local responsiveness, but without much use of the tougher coercive tools that are the focus of, for example, English policy.

This is likely to continue even despite the fact that the scale of political change in Wales is impressive and impressively quick. The single corporate body structure of the National Assembly for Wales, when it was created, was half utopia and half local government. Institutions were designed to promote unity and consensus rather than the politics of government and opposition. The next eight years of Welsh history were then spent untangling this arrangement and creating distinction to provide greater accountability for

\textsuperscript{52} Scottish Executive, \textit{A National Framework for Service Change in the NHS in Scotland: Building a Health Service Fit for the Future} (Edinburgh: TSO, 2005).

policy. But as the National Assembly and the Welsh Assembly Government have become disentangled, electoral politics has built pressure for increased consensus. That is because minority and coalition governments demand compromise. The voters and the electoral system are imposing the kind of bargained policymaking that the single corporate body was supposed to generate. It helps that the Welsh parties, which all need to get elected in Wales, share many policy ideas. The tortured negotiations over a possible “rainbow coalition,” as well as the Plaid Cymru-Labour talks, highlighted a considerable amount of consensus on policy issues. It proved surprisingly easy to identify a coherent common platform between the different Welsh parties—far easier than their differing ideological families, activists, or social bases might suggest.

**Education**

Welsh medium schools have long been the most distinct feature of education in Wales, with other policy tracking England for a long time. This is partly because the modern Welsh education was split from a homogeneous England and Wales system rather than developing in parallel as happened in Scotland; the first major difference that anglophone students would have noticed was the different Welsh National Curriculum, introduced with the National Curriculum in 1986. Since devolution, though, Wales has diverged prominently in the organization of education and use of testing as an instrument the centre uses to control schools. Compared to the English emphasis on raising standards through testing, Wales has used less ‘stick’ and more ‘carrot’: replacing tests at 7, 11 and 14 with teacher assessments, abolishing government-organized league tables, and focusing on the reduction of junior class sizes. Diversity and markets are also absent, with the Assembly Government pledging no new private sector schools and no specialist schools. Wales is increasingly breaking away from its historic tendency to follow England with policies such as a new 14-19 program with a wider range of vocational options, an early years agenda including integrated childcare centres, or developing the Welsh Baccalaureate; a consultation on “The Learning Country 2: Delivering the Promise”, conducted in 2006, should lead to more such policies, including the creation of a 3-7 Foundation Phase.

This distinct agenda took time to emerge, because Welsh political debate had further to travel from its pre-devolved state. The first Assembly spent much of its time in protracted legal arguments over its ability to make decisions on performance related pay, attempted to function with different ministers responsible for pre- and post- 16 education, and chose

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a non-Welsh speaker with little background in education as one of those ministers. The turning point came in 2001, with the publication of Wales: the Learning Country, which set out partnerships between local education authorities, schools, and the Assembly, made possible by Wales’ small size. It emphasized raising standards by ‘valuing and supporting the teaching system’ within a ‘fully comprehensive system of learning that serves all our local communities well’.

A broad review of higher education followed in 2002. Assembly Learning Grants were introduced to provide up to £1,500 per person per year for home students in vehemently resisted the introduction of variable fees. Finding itself in the unenviable position of controlling Welsh higher education spending but not student support, the Assembly Government successfully lobbied Westminster to extend its powers, then announced that there would be no top-up fees in Wales until at least 2007. This still left a funding gap between Welsh and major English universities, one that opposition parties claimed would damage Welsh higher education and led to the Welsh Assembly Government having great difficulty passing its budget in December 2006.

Local Government

In local government, Wales is particularly distinctive for the good relations between central and local; there is nothing like the Scottish Executive’s arguments about rates, let alone the kinds of policy disputes found in England. Although legislation has tended to parcel Wales with England, a distinct Welsh local government policy community existed before devolution, as did separate Welsh branches of London-based local government organizations. A 1996 reorganization that merged all Welsh local government into 22 unitary authorities enhanced Welsh distinctiveness. The relationship between the Welsh Office and local government was informal and consultative. This partly reflected the small size of the policy community; the Welsh Office officials, far fewer than their equivalents in the UK departments responsible for local government, tended to develop better relationships (and possibly weaker oversight) as part of their adaptation to Welsh administrative conditions.

After devolution, the relative strength and professionalism of local government, and its connections with the Welsh Labour Party, made it a power. Relationships between local


government and ministers in the Welsh office and the embeddedness of Welsh Labour within local councils all created fertile ground for future networks. Local government could supply policies that were distinctively Welsh-by virtue of being localist-and could fit with a political narrative of distinctive Welsh communitarianism. This gave it influence even beyond its unquestionable importance in the Welsh Labour party. Devolution increased the access and influence of local interests. In interorganisational relationships, the Welsh Assembly Government relies heavily on local authorities to deliver services and provide information. Local government in Wales has therefore developed extensive collaborative partnerships with the Assembly which are less codified than their counterparts in Scotland. This ‘closeness’ has been most clearly expressed in the ‘Welsh Way’ as espoused by the former Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities, Edwina Hart.

‘Freedom and Responsibility in Local Government,’ published on St David’s Day, 2002 emphasized clear national priorities, but expressed a wish to determine these through local-regional partnerships. The Local Government Partnership Council established in 1998 and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) have been the main facilitators of this ideal. The result is a preference for softer regulation combined with reluctance to use more formal hypothecation. “Policy Agreements” link local priorities with the national level since 2001, allowing for small variations across Local Authorities, while “Community Strategies” provide a Welsh slant to the horizontal provider networks found in England. The process of evaluating and inspecting councils, compared to the English version, is also conciliatory and Wales has the lowest total capital stock of local government PFI schemes in Great Britain. Northern Ireland, with a smaller population, has slightly fewer- and Scotland, by contrast, has the largest PFI local government stock.

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in the UK\textsuperscript{66}. In 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government bid for Westminster to pass a Local Government (Town and Community Councils) (Wales) Bill that would, among other changes, increase the partnership working abilities of Welsh local authorities\textsuperscript{67}.

**Health**

Welsh health policy after devolution showed that politics abhors a vacuum\textsuperscript{68}. Without the medical elites found in Scotland, or the management and economics infrastructure of English health policy, groups excluded from health policy in the rest of the UK came to the fore in Wales. This meant, above all, public health activists, local government, and the more communitarian, egalitarian parts of the Labour party. Their health policy has had two major pillars. One was a shift of priorities towards public health and the reduction of health inequalities; the currency of such a commitment is the difficult to count one of budgets and policy initiatives such as, most recently, Health Challenge Wales\textsuperscript{69}. The other was a reorganization intended to make NHS Wales operate in partnership with local government, addressing community needs and working in a joined-up way. That reorganization put the core of commissioning in local health boards, which were made coterminous with local governments. The councils and the LHBs were then given a variety of joint statutory responsibilities. This remains the form, although the inadequacies of LHBs mean there is constant talk of something different. Welsh policymakers interviewed in 2002 agreed that 22 local health boards is too many, but argued that the goals of localism, partnership- and coterminosity- were worth putting up with the problems of overly small commissioning organisations.

Assembly and Assembly Government faith in local partnership has been fairly consistent, even if to policies are plagued by problems. The Welsh health plan\textsuperscript{70} was striking in its rhetoric- unlike the Scottish and English plans, it spoke not of the NHS but of health, and ways that the NHS and others could contribute. This is still the push of policy; while the alternative Welsh parties all called for better management of the NHS itself, none of their

\textsuperscript{66} Hockridge, M., *Powering ahead? A critique of the impact that the new freedoms and responsibilities available to local authorities are having on improved local service provision in Wales* (London: SOLACE Foundation Imprint, 2006). P. 20


\textsuperscript{69} Greer, S.L., *Territorial Politics and Health Policy: UK Health Policy in Comparative Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{70} National Assembly for Wales, *Improving Health in Wales: A Plan for the NHS with its Partners* (Cardiff: National Assembly of Wales, 2001).
manifestos disagreed with the argument that better health comes from a broad range of strategies.

Localism was supposed to provide the means for identifying and carrying out service reconfiguration. In theory, local needs identification through the LHBs would do the trick. It did not; LHBs for many reasons proved incapable of creating consensual reconfiguration. The system came under fire for inefficiency and poor quality. Eventually, finances, bad media, and poor quality scores meant that Labour put forth a strategy\textsuperscript{71} with conclusions that meant closures. Shortly afterwards came the announcements of closure or downgrading for several hospitals- and local resistance. Other parties immediately pounced on Labour, opposing the local hospital closure plans in the run-up to the May 2007 elections. This probably contributed to the erosion of Labour seats- especially in the west. It also highlighted the extent to which localism can frustrate locals as much as the centre.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE

[Policy areas] are like the different windows of a house. Each window provides us with a different glimpse of the inside. Those who argue that the political logic of the problem is more important than the political logic of the country would expect the furnishings of each room to differ drastically in shape and color; after all, the living room serves a different purpose than the dining room or bedroom. Those who argue that the political logic of the country is more important than the political logic of the problem, on the other hand, would expect a uniform style throughout the house because the same people live, eat and sleep in different rooms. Some, finally, might agree [that] even though the political logic of the country is more compelling than the political logic of the problem, that political logic does not explain all policy cases equally well; deviations and exceptions do exist...Although each house has a distinctive style, it also has a couple of rooms filled with odd pieces and comfortable junk. Needless to say, these are not the first rooms shown to guests when they arrive.

- Peter Katzenstein\textsuperscript{72}

Devolution in the UK is about difference as much as anything else. In its origins and in the mindsets of many policymakers, it is about doing things differently in different places\textsuperscript{73}. It is, at a minimum, about putting barriers in that will preserve Scotland and


Wales from future English policies. Institutional structures, meanwhile, promote difference- with distinctive party systems and policy communities pushing policies apart and a nebulous system of intergovernmental relations permitting their divergence 74.

The UK’s four systems were always different on some level; administrative devolution created, if not much real autonomy, at least autonchtonous elites who gave policy formulation and implementation a very different feel. The interaction of those elites with Westminster and nationalist parties created many of the distinctive policies of administrative devolution. And those elites, and the distinctive parties of the different jurisdictions, matter because they remained when political devolution came.

Foreshadowed by administrative devolution, entrenched in the generally unspoken assumptions of policy elites, and often remarkably immune to party competition, these styles are distinctive and strong models of public administration. The governors of England, a large country with a small elite, have long focused on what Bulpitt called “the autonomy of the centre”. This means a powerful central government trying to sculpt the system that will make subordinate units such as the NHS or local governments do what it wants. Since Thatcher, the chosen technique has been of delegation to quangos, top-down orders, and the development of markets within and across the public sector. Immune to paradox and irony, English policymakers gather public sector organizations closer to them and exert ever greater control over their organization in an effort to make them innovative and autonomous. Scotland, by contrast, a small country with an impressively dense growth of elites, has opted for partnership between the major institutions. Above all, this means a more egalitarian relationship between the Executive and local government then law (or the attitudes found in England) would demand and a respect for the teaching and health professions. It also works out, given the constraints of size and a lack of faith in competition between hospitals or universities, to a distinctive and promising Scottish reliance on networks of shared resources in fields as disparate as cancer care and university science research. Wales, meanwhile, has with surprising speed filled in a policy style of its own as policymakers work out the policy approaches that will “work” in the particular politics and administration of Wales- with a focus on partnership and communities, in rhetoric and efforts to appeal to producers and communities alike through joint working, consultation, and efforts to increase democracy into the public services.

Policy styles can change, of course, because they are reflections of and adaptations to politics. Whether quickly or glacially, party cleavages freeze and melt and policy communities change. Those changes will change the policies that can work politically and administratively, as well as the makeup and power of policy communities 75; the

greater balance between legislature and executive in Scotland and Wales should make it slightly harder. The consensus about Britain in the 1970s, including among the inventors of the concept of a “policy style,” was that Britain was bound to constant negotiations and consensus among interest groups. Twenty years later, the policy style in England, the nearest inheritor of “British” politics, is one of imposition, markets, and management-and we seek the ancestry of Thatcher and Blair in the once-repressed figures of Bentham and Gradgrind. Party politics and changes in the structure of policymaking explain the transition; the changing policy style captures the depth and nature of the change.

Devolution brought about such changes, with, for example, Wales becoming much more friendly to local government and localism once freed of the influence Whitehall once exerted over the Welsh Office.

What could change them now? The structures of party competition and policy advice are difficult to change; the transformation of London’s policy communities under Thatcher, and the shift by the Labour party that consolidated the new English policy style, took around twenty years. The early years of devolution are likely to prove to be a “critical juncture,” a moment in which politics and policy styles took the form that they will retain for a long time. The policy styles that evolved in England, Scotland, and Wales are policymakers’ adaptations to their realities— their established ways of making policy that fit with the politics and administrative constraints that they face. Over and over again, networks and professionalism work for policymakers as a way to produce Scottish policy, as do the various forms of technocratic disengagement that English policymakers choose. The policy styles, as tools to deal with the characteristic issues in policymaking, reflect their politics today as well as their administrative and political histories. They are good and well-adapted tools for the real political problems of policymakers, however obnoxious the tools may be to policy analysts, and however self-inflicted the problems.

The question of whether they will change, then, requires identifying what might change the politics and policies of the three systems. What could force change or convergence? The striking thing about party political competition is the extent to which it does not change policy styles. Nobody could mistake the SNP’s policy choices for those of the Conservatives, or even UK Labour, but it would be easy to confuse many of them with Scottish Labour’s policies. The same holds for England and Wales. The major UK parties are more like each other than they are like the major Welsh or Scottish parties. In addition, it is difficult to change policy communities; while the rise of managerialist, pro-market, policy communities in England is a striking case of change, it was also a highly contested twenty-year evolution from 1979 to the first years of the Blair government.


What, then, are the prospects for change in policy styles from outside? There are forces for convergence. The principal one at present is the European Union, which is increasingly regulating policy choices by governments. EU law demands that member state and regional governments, in their policy choices, comply with the requirements of EU law (most easily summarized as the freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and people). It might rule out some options by imposing EU competition and state aid law (which, crudely, ban discrimination in favor of public providers such as public schools when they are in competition with private providers). It might rule out others by, for example, regulating health services under the law of the single European internal market. And it is striving mightily to produce coordination thorough “soft law” mechanisms such as the Open Method of Coordination. This is a thinly-veiled effort to produce EU-wide harmonization, and the differences between Scotland and Wales (mere regions) are even harder to protect than the differences between member states like France and Finland.

A second source of potential change would be changes in intergovernmental relations- in the permissive structure that allows the devolved administrations such latitude to adopt their own welfare state policies within the limits of a block grant. Their autonomy is vulnerable because the Barnett formula is vulnerable and because a UK government, with more or less ingenuity and determination, could circumscribe the autonomy of the devolved governments. Such efforts by central governments to impose policy priorities on other governments are the stuff of intergovernmental relations elsewhere, and as the other chapters of this book make clear they could easily happen in the UK. So people who care about the distinctive policy trajectories of the UK should care about the technical and oddly cloudy area of intergovernmental relations.

But for now: any intelligent observer can note the different “feel” of politics in Cardiff, Edinburgh, and London. Not just the size, manners, and personalities change, but the issues taken seriously, the people taken seriously, and the arguments taken seriously change. Contempt for local government is loud in SW1 and quiet, or loud but private, in Cardiff Bay. McKinsey staff have passes to Whitehall buildings, not ones in Cathays or St Andrew’s House- and that is not because of the relatively greater contracts available in Whitehall. Respect for private providers of health care is de rigeur at London health policy events- and hard to gauge at events elsewhere because Humana or UnitedHealth are not invited. Almost everybody but the ministerial special advisors and private consultancies can be seen in London as “vested interests;” policymakers in Scotland and Wales are much less free with that term, and far more prone to talk of “stakeholders”. These differences do not just add up to different ways of working; they are also the markers of different political processes that give us what we see today: different policy styles.

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