

# In Focus:

## Influencing devolved governments



## Why is it important?

**Government powers do not reside exclusively within Westminster. Engaging with and influencing devolved governments therefore forms a critical part of any UK-wide campaign or advocacy influencing strategy.**

Devolution is the process of devolving power from central government to regional or sub-regional government. In the UK, the current devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were initiated in 1997 by the Labour government.

Devolution can be seen as part of wider efforts to decentralise government powers in recent years. The rationale for this development has been to bring democratic processes closer to the people, to improve the transparency of decision-making, and to increase the accountability of elected representatives.

## What does it involve?

**Voluntary and community organisations may engage with and seek to influence devolved governments either as part of a UK-wide campaign or as part of a country-specific campaign.**

Effective engagement with devolved governments is dependent upon the following:

- Knowing what powers and policy areas are devolved to each government and the processes through which decisions are made
- Knowing what approaches voluntary and community organisations can use to engage with and lobby the devolved governments
- Understanding the social, political and economic context within which each devolved government operates
- Ensuring your beneficiaries, partners and other stakeholders within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are involved in the planning and delivery of your campaign.

The devolved governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each hold different powers and responsibilities and have different decision-making processes and organisational structures. As a result, a 'one size fits all' approach to engaging with each of the devolved governments will not work; each requires a separate engagement strategy.

When planning your campaign, it is important to consider the following issues:

<b>CAMPAIGN/ ADVOCACY ISSUE</b>	Is this a UK-wide or country-specific issue? Are there variations in the scale or nature of the issue in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland? Should the campaign focus on all or some of the nations? Is this issue currently a priority for any of the devolved governments?
<b>DEVOLVED POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	What powers does each of the devolved governments have on this issue? Where does the issue sit within their current policy agenda? What powers does the UK Parliament retain on this issue?
<b>TARGET AUDIENCES</b>	Who will be the target audiences within each of the devolved contexts? What will be the pathways to influence?
<b>MESSAGES, APPROACH AND TACTICS</b>	What will be the specific campaign objectives and key campaign messages within each of the devolved contexts? Do you have statistics and case studies for each nation? What implications does this have for campaign materials and resources? How might campaign tactics and approaches need to be different?
<b>PARTNERS AND ALLIES</b>	What partners or allies do you have within each of the devolved contexts? How will you mobilise popular support for the issue in each nation?
<b>COORDINATION</b>	How will you coordinate campaign activities across the four nations? How will campaigning in the devolved contexts complement lobbying efforts in Westminster?

# Influencing in Scotland

## Devolution in Scotland since 1997

### 1997

A referendum on devolution in Scotland secures a 'yes' vote for a Scottish Parliament and a 'yes' vote for this Parliament to have tax-raising powers.

### 1998

The Scotland Act 1998 is passed, outlining the devolution settlement for Scotland. A consultative steering group, including civil society representation, is established to develop, through wide consultation, proposals how the new Parliament will operate.

### 1999

The first elections are held. The Scottish Parliament is established with a Labour-LibDem coalition forming the first Scottish Executive. Donald Dewar (Labour) becomes First Minister.

### 2003

The second elections are held. Again the Labour/ LibDem coalition win the majority of seats.

### 2004

The new Scottish Parliament building is completed and opens in Holyrood, Edinburgh.

### 2007

The third elections are held. The SNP form a minority government and Alex Salmond becomes First Minister. The Scottish Government opens a "National Conversation" considering future constitutional options. The Calman Commission is established by the main opposition parties to review the provisions of the Scotland Act 1998.

## Key institutions and individuals

The **Scottish Government** (formerly known as the Scottish Executive) comprises the First Minister, and the Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers (chosen by the First Minister, with the agreement of the Parliament), and civil servants. Each Cabinet Secretary, with the aid of the Ministers or Minister leads a directorate, which are staffed by civil servants.

The **Scottish Parliament** is responsible for scrutinising the work of the Scottish Government and making laws for Scotland. It is housed at Holyrood in Edinburgh.

The Parliament is made up of 129 elected **Members of Scottish Parliament** (MSPs), of which there are 73 constituency MSPs and 56 regional MSPs. Elections are held every four years, on the first Thursday in May.

The **Presiding Officer** is elected at the first meeting after a general election and, along with two Deputies, is responsible for chairing all the meetings of the Parliament.

There is no second chamber within the Scottish Parliament i.e. an equivalent to the House of Lords. This gives the Scottish Parliament Committees a particularly powerful scrutiny role. The mandatory committees deal with areas such as equal opportunities, public petitions, parliamentary procedures and finance, and their remits are established in the rules of the Parliament. The subject committees deal with specific policy areas, such as health, education and transport, and are established at the start of each parliamentary session.

All Scottish Parliament Committees have powers to introduce their own bills, unlike Westminster committees which do not. The Parliament usually has around 15 committees and most backbencher MSPs are members of at least one committee.

The main political parties in Scotland are the Scottish National Party, the Scottish Labour Party, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

## Devolved powers

Scotland has powers to make primary legislation. Devolved policy areas include the following: health, education and training, local government, social work, voluntary sector, housing, area regeneration and planning, economic development, trade and exports, tourism, passenger and aspects of transport, Scottish criminal and civil law, judicial appointments, criminal justice and prosecution, prisons, police and fire services, civil defence and emergency planning, the environment, agriculture and food standards, forestry and fisheries, renewables and energy efficiency, sport and the arts, statistics and public registers.

The Scottish Parliament also has the power to alter the basic rate of income tax by up to three pence. However, it has not used this power to date.

A number of powers are reserved to Westminster. They include: social security and employment, UK foreign policy (including EU policy), UK defence and national security, the UK fiscal, economic and monetary system, company law, immigration and nationality, equality rights legislation and consumer protection.

## Ways to influence

**Public petitions** are an important gateway into parliamentary processes. They can be used to encourage the Scottish Government to act, whether this is through debating an issue, holding an inquiry or introducing legislation. Only one signature is needed for a petition to be considered by the Public Petitions Committee and the committee clerks will be able to support you to develop your petition. They can be contacted via the Public Petitions Committee webpages:

[www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/index.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/index.htm)

**Parliamentary questions** provide an opportunity to obtain information or highlight an issue. As with Westminster, there are written questions and oral questions and they are submitted by an MSP.

**Motions** can be used to ask the Parliament to agree to something. They are submitted by an MSP. Other MSPs can then sign up to the motion to show their support or suggest amendments. A backbencher motion may go on to be debated in a Members' Business debate, which does not have a vote. Motions submitted by the Scottish Government, or a party or committee, are usually amended and voted on by other MSPs.

# Influencing in Wales

One way to influence MSP's who are interested in your issue is to join or set up a **Cross-Party Group**. As the name suggests, Cross Party Groups comprise MSP's from different political parties. They also comprise non-MSP members such as voluntary sector representatives. You can access rules and registration requirements from the Scottish Parliament website.

**Scottish Parliament committees** have an important role to play in scrutinising legislation, and a commitment to work with external organisations such as voluntary organisations. You can work with the committees by proposing legislation or amendments to bills, responding to consultations, suggesting topics for inquiries, or submitting evidence to an inquiry. They may also be involved in considering petitions you have put forward.

## Top Tips

- Due to the electoral arrangements in Scotland, any one political party is unlikely to ever have a majority. In some cases a party will form a minority government, at other times parties will come together to form a coalition with a majority. It is important therefore to ensure that you work across all the political parties, and cross party support is particularly critical to pass legislation under a minority government.
- Offering to host a consultation event on the government's behalf is an effective way of enabling your beneficiaries to take part in the consultation process. It can also help you develop relations with civil servants. Scottish Parliament committee meetings are held in public (although they may consider certain issues, such as draft reports, in private). Free tickets for a committee meeting can be obtained directly from the Scottish Parliament. Seating is limited, but the public meetings are recorded verbatim (word by word, exactly) and can often be viewed over the internet.
- Regional MSPs, as well as constituency MSPs are keen to work on local issues. Make sure you therefore work with regional MSPs as much as constituency MSPs.

## Devolution in Wales since 1997

1997

A referendum on devolution in Wales secures a majority 'yes' vote.

1998

The Government of Wales Act 1998 is passed, creating the Welsh Assembly.

1999

The first elections are held. A Labour minority government is formed under the leadership of Alun Michael.

2000

Rhodri Morgan becomes First Minister and a Labour–Liberal Democrat coalition is formed.

2002

The Richard Commission is established to review the powers and electoral arrangements of the National Assembly for Wales.

2003

The second elections are held. Labour government retains power.

2004

The Richard Commission publishes its report calling for more Assembly powers.

2006

The Government of Wales Act 2006 is passed, creating a formal legal separation between the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

2007

The third elections are held. Labour and Plaid Cymru form a coalition government.

2009

The All Wales Convention, established by the coalition Government to assess the appetite in Wales for further law making powers, presents its report to the Welsh Assembly Government. The report recommends more powers and says that a referendum on the issue could be won, although victory is by no means a certainty.

### Key institutions and individuals

The **Welsh Assembly Government** is comprised of a First Minister, 12 Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers and the Counsel General, who is the chief legal adviser to the government. They are supported by civil servants who work across the devolved areas.

The **National Assembly for Wales** is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh government to account. It is housed at the Senedd in Cardiff.

The Assembly is made up of 60 **Assembly Members (AMs)** who represent 40 constituencies and five regions across Wales. They are elected every four years.

The **Presiding Officer** is elected by the Assembly to chair all plenary meetings.

Most of the work of the Assembly is done through committees. There are 5 legislation committees, five scrutiny committees (covering areas such as Sustainability and Health, Well-being and Local Government) and a number of other committees dealing with issues such as finance, equality of opportunity and Assembly business. There is also a petitions committee (see opposite for more information).

The main political parties in Wales are Labour, Plaid Cymru, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

### Devolved powers

Twenty policy areas are devolved to Wales. These are: agriculture, fisheries forestry and rural development, ancient monuments and historic buildings, culture, economic development, education and training, environment, fire and rescue, food, health, highways and transport, housing, local government, National Assembly for Wales, public administration, social welfare, sport and recreation, tourism, town and country planning, water and flood defence and Welsh language. Welsh Ministers can make policy decisions and subordinate legislation in these areas.

Following the **Government of Wales Act 2006**, ministers can now request the power to make primary legislation within these areas. (Prior to this, the Assembly did not have the power to make its own laws). However, permission to pass legislation must first of all be granted by the both Houses of Parliament. Powers are granted on a case by case basis via a Legislative Competence Order (LCO). The power to make legislation can also be granted within a UK Act of Parliament.

Once the power has been transferred to Wales, laws can then be made. These are called **Assembly Measures**.

### Ways to influence

The Welsh Assembly Government has a statutory duty to consult with the voluntary and community sector through the **Third Sector Scheme**. The Third Sector Partnership Council provides a forum for maintaining dialogue between the Welsh Government and the sector and as part of the scheme each Minister meets with sector representatives twice a year. To find out more about the Scheme or how you can get involved contact Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

The **Petitions System** is a simple way of raising an issue within the Assembly. Only ten signatures are needed for the petition to be considered by the Petitions Committee and the petitions clerks will be able to support you in drafting your petition. Petitions can be dealt with by the Committee or passed on to other Assembly committees for further investigation. New legislation can also be proposed via a petition.

You can work with AMs to propose ideas for new legislation via the **Assembly Members Ballot**. Ballots take place three-four times a year. You can also work with the AMs to scrutinise the Welsh Assembly Government. Routes to influence here include Assembly questions and short debates, as well as through their committee membership.

### Top Tips

- Regional AMs are generally less well known than the local AMs, but they have the same powers. Make sure you work with them as much as the local AMs.
- Confused by Legislative Competence Orders (LCOs)? Read the Voices for Change Guide to LCOs to find out more about how they work:
- If you are producing campaign materials, think about whether it needs to be bi-lingual. If you do decide to translate your materials into Welsh, allow plenty of time for translation. Also make sure you include translation costs in your budget.

# Influencing in Northern Ireland

## Devolution in Northern Ireland since 1997

1998

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement establishes a power sharing devolved assembly and executive. The first elections are held for the Northern Ireland Assembly

1999

The Assembly meets and nominates its Executive Ministers. Ulster Unionist David Trimble becomes first minister; Seamus Mallon of the SDLP becomes Deputy Minister.

2000

The Assembly is suspended by Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson over arms decommissioning.

2002

Northern Ireland Secretary John Reid suspends devolution as power sharing unravels.

2003

Assembly Elections take place. The DUP and Sinn Fein emerge as winners.

2006

The Assembly sits for first time following suspension in 2002. Multi-party talks to restore devolution result in the St Andrews Agreement. A Transitional Assembly is installed in Stormont.

2007

The Transitional Assembly is dissolved as a new Assembly is elected. Devolved government returns to Northern Ireland following agreement between DUP and Sinn Fein.

## Key institutions and individuals

The **Northern Ireland Executive** is a multi-party, consociational executive, which means it is a form of government involving guaranteed group representation. It is headed jointly by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Although they hold different titles, they have equal powers. There are ten further ministers and two Junior Ministers who hold responsibility over the devolved issues. They are appointed rather than selected, with positions shared across the political parties according to their share of the vote.

The **Northern Ireland Assembly** is responsible for making and enacting laws on transferred matters in Northern Ireland. It is housed at Parliament Buildings on the Stormont estate in Belfast.

There are 108 elected **Members of the Legislative Assembly** (MLAs) that represent 18 constituencies. They are elected every four years.

**The Speaker** is elected by the Assembly to preside over meetings. There are also three Deputy Speakers from other political parties.

The Assembly conducts its work through 11 **Statutory Committees**, which deal with specific departments, and six **Standing Committees**, which deal with MLA standards and privileges and Assembly business and procedures.

The four biggest political parties in Northern Ireland are the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP).

## Devolved powers

Northern Ireland holds powers to make primary legislation. Policy areas that are transferred to Northern Ireland include: education, health, housing, transport, road safety, environment, sports, arts and leisure, wildlife protection, agriculture, forestry and fishing, economic development, employment and training, fire and ambulance services, and tourism.

Westminster retains responsibility for defence, foreign policy, raising taxes, security, policing and justice.

## Ways to influence

**Adjournment debates** are a good way to raise awareness about a particular issue and the minister responsible is usually present. Work with MLAs to propose the debates.

It is important to build relationships with the **Policy Advisors**. They are often your first entry point to ministers.

Hosting **committee meetings** is one way to build up relationships with assembly members (MLAs). There is very limited space at Stormont, so you will be doing them a favour!

## Top tips

- Know your history, know your politics. Think about how you frame your issues and the language you use so that you do not alienate any of the parties. Always talk to people who have experience of working in Northern Ireland as they will be able to provide specific advice and guidance.
- Use written questions sparingly. Only use them if you actually need the information you are asking for. The civil service in Northern Ireland is relatively small so the civil servants have limited resources to respond to Assembly questions. If they feel their time is being needlessly diverted by unnecessary questions, they may become obstructive to your work further down the line.
- If using oral questions, think carefully about who is asking the question and to whom. Issues may become unnecessarily politicised if the question is being asked by an opposition party.

## What next?

**As Ron Davis, Secretary of State for Wales (1997-98), has frequently been quoted, 'Devolution is a process, not an event.' The current devolution settlements in the UK should not be seen as fixed and timeless structures, but rather processes that are subject to ongoing debate and negotiation. It is important therefore to keep abreast of current and anticipated developments within each of the devolved administrations, considering the implications for your organisation's agenda.**

### Putting it into practice

If you have five minutes...

- Join the 'influencing devolved governments' discussion group on the Forum for Change website. Post a question to other members or read previous discussions. [www.forumforchange.org.uk/group/influencingdevolvedgovernment](http://www.forumforchange.org.uk/group/influencingdevolvedgovernment)
- Contact the main voluntary sector umbrella bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and join their mailing lists. If you work in Northern Ireland, join the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action's online community [www.communityni.org](http://www.communityni.org). For work in Wales visit [www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk](http://www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk) and join the "voices database" to receive regular updates on opportunities to make your voice heard. For work in Scotland contact SCVO about their Policy Officer Network.

If you have one-two hours...

- Read the useful factsheets and online guides produced by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Wales Council for Voluntary Action and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action.
- Research the priorities of devolved governments. They should all have government programmes available on their websites.

If you have one day...

- If you work with colleagues who are based in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, arrange an away day together. You could use this time to plan a specific campaign together, review campaign priorities for the year ahead or look more generally at processes for planning and coordinating your work.
- Arrange a day to shadow one of your colleagues or partner organisations in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. See if you can observe Assembly or Parliament in session.

**TIP:** The BBC's Democracy Live website provides live and recorded video coverage of all of UK's national political institutions. It also includes its own guides to the devolved governments and allows you to review the powers of different institutions by policy area, as well as search for elected representatives.

## Further reading

### Toolkits and guides

#### Democracy Live

Hosted by the BBC news website  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/default.stm>

#### Introduction to Welsh devolution and the Government of Wales Act 2006

Published by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, 2009  
[www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1463](http://www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1463)

#### What is the difference between the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government?

Published by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, 2009  
[www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1464](http://www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1464)

#### The National Assembly for Wales – basic facts and glossary

Published by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, 2009  
[www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1470](http://www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1470)

A range of other information sheets on all aspects of devolution in Wales can be found at [www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk/information-resources/information-sheets](http://www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk/information-resources/information-sheets)

#### Northern Ireland Assembly Monitor

Hosted by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action  
[www.nicva.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/ni\\_assembly\\_monitor\\_2007](http://www.nicva.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/ni_assembly_monitor_2007)

#### How to Lobby the Scottish Parliament

Published by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations  
[www.scvo.org.uk/scvo/PolicyAndParliament/PDisplayResults.aspx?al=t&PageName=Lobbying&TCID=73&CatID=11](http://www.scvo.org.uk/scvo/PolicyAndParliament/PDisplayResults.aspx?al=t&PageName=Lobbying&TCID=73&CatID=11)

#### How the UK Parliament works

[www.parliament.uk/about/how.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/about/how.cfm)

#### An Introduction to Devolution in the UK

Published by House of Commons Library, 2003  
[www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2003/rp03-084.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2003/rp03-084.pdf)  
(NB. Some content is now out-of-date. It was written before the 2006 Government of Wales Act.)

### Websites

Scottish Parliament  
[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)

Scottish Executive  
[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

National Assembly for Wales  
[www.assemblywales.org](http://www.assemblywales.org)

Welsh Assembly Government  
[www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland Assembly  
[www.niassembly.gov.uk/](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/)

Northern Ireland Executive  
[www.northernireland.gov.uk/](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/)

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister  
[www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/)

### Organisations

#### Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

[www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)  
[www.communityni.org](http://www.communityni.org)  
T: 028 9087 7777

#### Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

[www.scvo.org.uk/](http://www.scvo.org.uk/)  
T: 0131 556 3882

#### Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)

[www.wcva.org.uk/](http://www.wcva.org.uk/)  
T: 0800 2888 329

For specific information on Welsh politics and campaigning visit:

[www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk](http://www.voicesforchangecymru.org.uk)

#### UK Parliamentary Outreach Service

[www.parliament.uk/getinvolved/outreach.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/getinvolved/outreach.cfm)

### About Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO

#### Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO

supports and empowers people and organisations to change their world through campaigning and influencing policy. We bring together experience and expertise and drive excellence in campaigning and policy work across civil society by providing support, knowledge, tools and resources. For further information about our work go to [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness)

#### About Forum for Change

The Forum for Change is a network for people influencing policy and campaigning for change across the voluntary and community sector. Membership is free and open to everyone. To join or for further information go to [www.forumforchange.org.uk](http://www.forumforchange.org.uk) or email [forumforchange@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:forumforchange@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

#### About In Focus

In Focus guide are produced for Forum for Change members as part of the Policy Skills Development Programme. They accompany the Getting You Started factsheet series and In Practice case study series, all of which can be found at: [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/resources](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/resources)



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