

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b>	University of Northumbria at Newcastle
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b>	22 – Social Work and Social Policy
<b>Title of case study:</b> Developing New Approaches to Sub-National Governance in ‘Post-Regionalist’ England: The Creation of the Cross-Government Group.	
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>	
<p>This case study captures the aftermath of the abolition of Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices in England after 2010. The research underpinning this case study analysed the shift from ‘regionalism’ to ‘localism’ in the North East of England and found that the abolition of the regional tier of governance in England did not invalidate the continuing need for multi-level policy coordination, networking and ‘voice’ at the regional level. These findings, characterised as ‘Common-Sense Regionalism’, directly led to the creation (by Central Government) of a Cross-Government Group of national and sub-national civil servants, representatives from local government and from the voluntary sector.</p>	
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>	
<p>The research of <b>Professor Keith Shaw</b> (employed at Northumbria from April 1983), developed at Northumbria University after 1997, has focused on issues of accountability, democracy and representation within sub-national governance, which includes research on deliberative democracy and inclusive governance developed both prior to, and after, the 2004 referendum on a directly-elected assembly for the North East of England (Shaw et al, 2004; 2006; 2007).</p> <p>The specific research underpinning this case study was funded by a grant from the Millfield House Foundation in 2011. It examined how both sub-national and national decision-makers responded to the abolition of English regional structures in the context of maintaining an effective voice for the North East, particularly in light of the scale of public expenditure cuts in the region, the range of economic and social problems facing the region and the potential impact of a more independent Scotland.</p> <p>The research methodology - based on a co-production research model - draws upon data from both semi-structured individual interviews and four round table meetings (three in the North East and one in London) that took place between January and May 2011. Through this approach, the views and opinions of over 60 stakeholders were captured. They included: former regional officials; local government politicians and officers; MPs; academics; representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and business sectors; Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); representatives from policy areas including economic development, culture, tourism, housing, youth and children’s services, and health; and senior Whitehall civil servants from six different government departments, including those with departmental responsibilities specifically for the North of England.</p> <p>Based on the detailed analysis of the extensive qualitative data, and on how key stakeholders interpreted the changes, the key research findings were that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The end of regional structures meant the loss of an effective voice to present the region’s case and insufficient channels of communication to get messages to Whitehall and Westminster. There were also concerns relating to the loss of resources, strategic thinking and analytical capacity.</li> <li>• Nostalgia should be avoided at all costs. It was important to look for opportunities within the new sub-national arrangements and not forget that the ‘old’ system of governance was itself flawed.</li> <li>• While some interventions are best done at the local level, the research concluded that there is still a need to retain cooperation and collaboration on a ‘larger than local’ basis for functions including skills, economic development, housing, transport, public health, tourism and culture.</li> </ul>	

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- The nature of the relationship between the local level and Whitehall under the new arrangements is still evolving. Whitehall wants to have a supporting role, providing advice and feedback rather than top-down guidance or direction. In particular, the research argued that there are clear advantages for organisations based in the regions to develop more *direct* links with government departments rather than having to work *through* the regional tier.
- Finally, the research found that there are a number of opportunities for innovation at the sub-regional level and potentially fewer constraints under the new arrangements. LEPs provide an opportunity for economic and labour market development and should develop according to local needs. There are also opportunities for the North of England to configure new relationships across existing boundaries, such as on a pan-northern basis or, more importantly, through collaborative approaches with a reinvigorated Scotland.

In terms of understanding sub-national change, the key finding of the research was that the abolition of regional development *bodies* in the North did not invalidate the *concept* of regional development or its significance as a level of *policy co-ordination*. The research also found clear evidence of the emergence of a *Common-Sense Regionalism* – which recognised that, while the North East needed to respond to the new environment by taking advantage of any new opportunities and innovative ways of working, some form of co-ordination and integration at the regional level is still required. Such a response confirmed the continuing importance of flexible decentralised ‘networks’ within a system of multi-level governance, despite the intentions of central government structural changes.

### 3. References to the research

The key outputs that underpinned the impact include:

- Shaw,K.and Humphrey,L. (2004) ‘Regional devolution and the development of “empowered deliberative democracy”’: emerging patterns of stakeholder involvement in the North East of England’ *Environment and Planning: A* **36** (12): 2183-2202– available from HEI on request
- Shaw,K.and Humphrey,L. (2006) ‘Developing inclusive approaches to regional governance in the post-referendum North East’ *Regional and Federal Studies* **16** (2): 197-220 DOI: 10.1080/13597560600652080
- Shaw,K.and Robinson,F. (2007) ‘The End of the Beginning? Taking Forward Local Democratic Renewal in the Post-Referendum North East’ *Local Economy* **22** (3): 243-260 DOI: 10.1080/02690940701584862
- Shaw,K.and Robinson,F. (2011) ‘Don’t mention the R word: the end of regionalism in the North East’, in *Town and Country Planning*, **80** (12) – available from HEI on request
- Shaw,K.and Robinson,F. (2012) ‘From Regionalism to Localism: Opportunities and Challenges for the North East’, in *Local Economy*, **27** (3): 232-250 DOI: 10.1177/0269094211434468

Key parts of the underpinning research were supported by the following grants:

- 2003-4: the North East Assembly commissioned Shaw to develop a model for Citizen Engagement in a Directly Elected Regional Assembly (**£10,000**)
- 2006/2007: Shaw was a consultant to the North East Assembly on their Scrutiny of One North East’s Regional Economic Strategy (**£5,000**)
- 2011: Shaw received a grant of **£30,500** from the Millfield House Foundation, a leading charitable trust ([http://www.mhfdn.org.uk/grants\\_approved\\_before\\_november\\_2012/northumbria\\_university\\_and\\_durham\\_university](http://www.mhfdn.org.uk/grants_approved_before_november_2012/northumbria_university_and_durham_university)).
- 2012: the Association of North East Councils awarded Shaw a grant of **£15,000** to examine the impact of greater Scottish autonomy on the North of England.

### 4. Details of the impact

The impact achieved by this research covers local, regional and national levels of governance, a

range of UK government departments and a variety of public and voluntary sector bodies. It can also be situated within Northumbria University's strong regional mission to: 'collaborate with universities and other organisations in the North East to improve the reputation and sustainability of the Region'. The impact was underpinned by three important factors:

- The case study author's extensive research expertise in local and regional governance, his reputation for engaging with policy-makers and his long-term involvement in regional partnerships ensured that a range of sub-national and national decision-makers were open to the implementation of new ideas. The impact of the work, and **Shaw's** role within this, was noted in the letter sent by the Administrator of the Millfield House Foundation to the Vice Chancellor of Northumbria University: '*The Trustees were particularly impressed with the impact on (the Department of) Communities and Local Government and Civil Servants from other departments, which must be a first for anyone in the North East*' (**Source 1**).
- The timeliness of the research was also important, as it was aimed to influence the shape and character of the post-regionalist framework by bringing forward practical proposals before new arrangements were 'set in stone'. Given this chronology, the research was the first in-depth empirical study of the implications of this major change in English governance after 2010. Its policy importance was in capturing a wide range of stakeholder views in a single authoritative source. The former Director of The Government Office for the North East offers the view that: '*You and colleagues accurately described the changes that took place arising from the election of the Coalition Government in 2010. You also summarised the various shades of opinion that could be found amongst the public, private and voluntary sectors*' (**Source 2**).
- The research adopted a 'co-production' model which aimed to engage policy makers and practitioners from the outset in identifying and framing the questions that need to be addressed. This approach provided a discursive space for discussion, an explicitly practical focus to the work and ensured that the research findings were of direct relevance to policy development.

The research underpinned and made a distinct and material contribution to public policy, particularly in relation to how a range of national and sub-national decision-makers responded to the changes in regional governance after 2010:

- The finding that **there was a need to develop a new flexible network that linked Whitehall and the region** was accepted and taken forward by senior national civil servants to the extent that a new, Cross-Governmental group was set up, chaired by the Director of Finance at CLG. As he notes in his corroborative evidence: '*One of the recommendations of your work was that Government set up a forum for the departments with a presence in the North East. I took this up as DCLG director for the North East. This forum was established in mid-2011 and has met every quarter since, with increasing attendance. It now has members from a wide range of departments, ANEC and voluntary organisations (VONNE). It has proved a very useful way of sharing information and ensuring that the different departments and agencies in the North East are up to speed with what other organisations are doing*' (**Source 3**).
- **Recent meetings of the Cross-Government Group** have included a focus on education policy (including academies), innovation and changes in welfare benefits (Cross-Government Group agenda and minutes: **Source 4**). For one BIS civil servant: '*The research influenced the development of emerging regional engagement strategy within government departments. The meetings continue on a quarterly basis, bringing together representatives from over 15 central Government departments and agencies with a footprint or activity within the North East. It provides a useful forum to share updates on policy developments and shared agendas, as well as an informal opportunity to develop closer working arrangements on office locations, civil service employment, the take up of apprenticeships and future policy initiatives*' (**Source 5**).
- The research finding that **the localism agenda offered new creative ways of directly bringing together civil servants and key regional stakeholders** was accepted and taken forward by both civil servants and regional organisations in the North East. This can be seen in the fact that the Director of the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) and of Voluntary

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Organisations North East (VONNE) are both members of the Cross-Government Group. The Director of VONNE commented that *'it is rare in my experience to see real tangible results stemming from policy funded projects. I wish that I could have videoed the Cross Government meeting that I went to on Friday. It was an extremely valuable use of three hours. Most of the major Government departments were represented at a senior level. It was clear that they were informing each other and joining things up. This group was brought about as a result of the Millfield House funded work. It is valuable and it is making a difference'*. (Source 6)

The research finding **that there is still a need for regional 'voice' and for developing new more creative and flexible approaches to regional collaboration in period of rapid change** was accepted by a wide range of individuals and organisations involved in the original research. As a result of this, the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) directly commissioned Keith Shaw, in late 2012, to examine the potential impacts of greater Scottish autonomy on the wider North (both the North East and Cumbria). The research adopted a similar co-production model to the initial research in examining similar opportunities for flexible networking outside formal structures and was particularly focused on assessing greater opportunities for business collaboration and joint-approaches by local economic development bodies on both sides of the border. The research report, *Borderlands: can the North East and Cumbria benefit from greater Scottish autonomy?* was published in June 2013 and advocated the creation of new collaborative cross-border structures and networks, including a new 'Border Visions' Partnership bringing together the five local authorities and other public bodies on each side of the border.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. Testimony on impact of research on national policy-makers (Chief Administrator of the Millfield House Foundation)
2. Testimony on the scale and extent of the research in capturing a range of stakeholders views (Former Director, Government Office for the North East).
3. Testimony on role of Cross-Government Group (Finance Director, CLG)
4. Role of Cross-Government Group: Minutes and Agenda of North East Area Cross-Governmental Group Meetings 2012 -2013 – available from HEI on request
5. Testimony on role of Cross-Government Group: (Head of Office, BIS Local.)
6. Testimony on the role and Importance of the research in achieving impact: (Director, VONNE).