

Devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

In September 1997, referendums were held in Scotland and Wales, and a majority of voters chose to establish a Scottish Parliament and a National Assembly for Wales. In Northern Ireland, devolution was a key part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement supported by voters in a referendum in May 1998.

5 Following this public endorsement, the UK Parliament passed three devolution Acts: the Scotland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and the Government of Wales Act 1998 (which was later effectively superseded by the Government of Wales Act 2006). These acts established the three devolved legislatures, which were given some powers previously held at Westminster. Further powers have been devolved since these original acts, most recently through the Scotland Act 2016 and Wales Act 2017.

10 The UK Parliament remains sovereign, and retains the power to amend the devolution Acts or to legislate on anything that has been devolved. That said, the UK government has made clear it will not normally legislate on a devolved matter without the consent of the devolved legislature, which requires a Legislative Consent Motion.

15 One of the main differences between Parliament and the devolved legislatures is in the way members are elected. Whilst all Members of Parliament are elected using first-past-the-post, elections to the devolved legislatures involve an element of proportional representation.

In a similar way to how the government is formed from members from the two Houses of Parliament, members of the devolved legislatures nominate ministers from among themselves to comprise an executive, known as the devolved administrations, as follows:

20 the Scottish Government

the Welsh Government

the Northern Ireland Executive: a power-sharing executive, as established in the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

25 Officials in the devolved administrations do not serve the same ministers as HM Government - that is they do not report to the Prime Minister or to Secretaries of State who form the Cabinet, but to their own ministers with their own political priorities and mandates.

The responsibilities of the territorial Secretaries of State are:

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- handling legislation as it affects the territory
 - representing the territory's interests in cabinet and cabinet committees
 - responding to parliamentary interests in territorial affairs
 - transmitting the block grant to the devolved administration
 - supporting collaboration between HM Government and the devolved administration
 - promoting the interests of the territory
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- Each devolved territory has its own department, responsible for liaising between the UK government and the relevant territory.