

Towards 'shared rule'? UK intergovernmental relations and the Council of the Nations and Regions



What is the Council of the Nations and Regions?

The UK government's flagship intergovernmental innovation to facilitate partnership working and collaboration through top-level biannual engagement

Mayor of London, Combined Authority Mayors

Heads of devolved governments

UK Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

Background

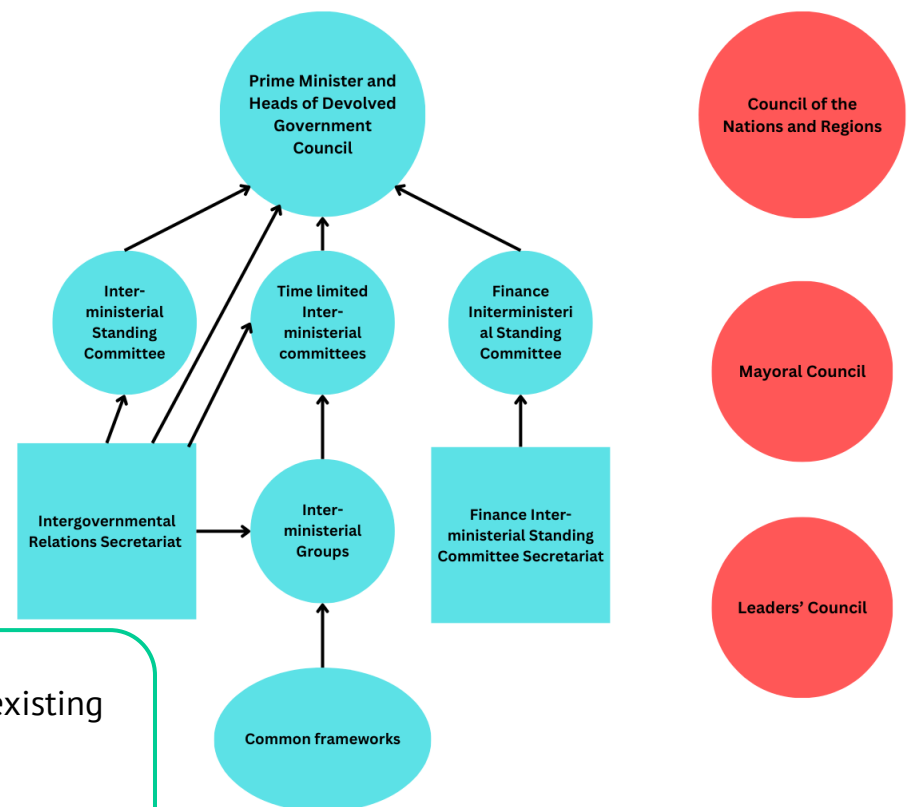
- Devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland focused primarily on 'self-rule' over 'shared rule'.
- The Joint Ministerial Committee system of central-devolved interaction was irregular and insufficient.
- Brexit and Covid-19 damaged trust and highlighted the weakness of existing coordination mechanisms.
- A new, more expansive system of intergovernmental relations (IGR) was agreed in 2022 but its impact has so far been variable.
- Labour plans to 'reset' IGR, expand English devolution.

Findings

- There is an administrative need for the key figures in the territorial government of the UK, including the growing number of English mayors, to work through areas of policy overlap and develop better mutual understanding.
- Policymakers across the UK believe that the Council has the potential to be a useful innovation.
- In other countries, top-level forums play a crucial role in multi-level governance and can perform a range of important functions including policy shaping, decision-making, information sharing, and dispute resolution.
- By contrast, **the UK has lacked structures that facilitate collaborative governance** among leaders.

Intergovernmental relations review

Labour government



Challenges and implications

- Lack of detail on: purpose, policy focus, where it fits into pre-existing structures of UK IGR (see right hand diagram).
- Questions around: membership, administration, constitutional asymmetry, how to manage a more conflictual political context.
- Consensus that it **should not be a "talking shop"**; it should address issues of substance and have a demonstrable impact.
- Potential collaborative **activity**: information exchange and policy learning; mutual policy influencing; joint work and coordination.
- Potential **focus**: cross-cutting issues of shared concern and strategic importance e.g. economic growth, net zero, AI, international security.
- Shared rule: **"orders of government' deal together with common concerns affecting the state as a whole"** (Keating, 2021).
- **Will the UK's territorial government step out of its comfort zone?**
- Requires: UK government to loosen grip, embrace partnership; devolved governments to be less transactional, grievance focused.

Project details

The Bennett Institute is collaborating with PolicyWISE on this project.

It draws on:

- Interviews with key policymakers involved in the initiative across the UK.
- A review of existing intergovernmental structures and research, as well as international case studies.

A forthcoming report will set out findings and recommendations.

