

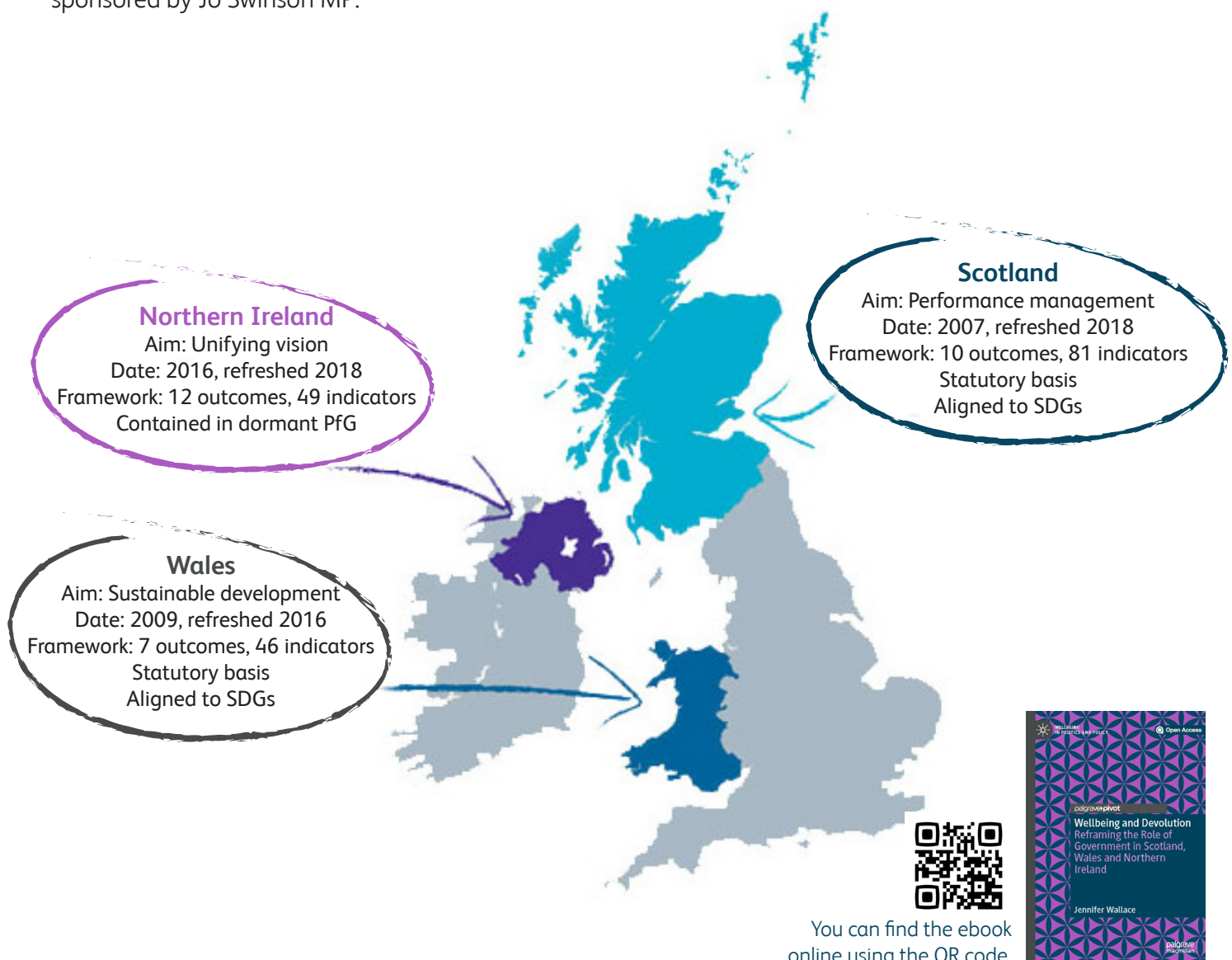
Wellbeing and Devolution: Reframing the Role of Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Background

The people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland voted for devolution over twenty years ago. Now well established, the devolved legislatures have increasingly begun to focus on wellbeing, putting it at the centre of their approach and creating wellbeing frameworks which exemplify their values and role relating to the UK state.

In [Wellbeing and Devolution: Reframing the Role of Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland](#), Jennifer Wallace, Head of Policy at the Carnegie UK Trust, explores why each of the three devolved governments set their goal as improving wellbeing and how they balance the core elements of societal wellbeing (economic, social and environmental outcomes). It asks whether the frameworks represent a genuine attempt to think differently about how devolved government can plan and organise public services. And if so, what early indications are there of the impact this is having on people's lives?

This short briefing was produced following the book launch in The House of Commons in May 2019, sponsored by Jo Swinson MP.



Understanding Wellbeing and Devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Studying devolved policy-making in the UK should start from the basis that the systems of devolution implemented in the 1990s and 2000s are asymmetric; they differ from one another in a variety of significant ways and each have a unique constitutional and political history and story of their own.

Devolution brought about a new tier of democracy, with new powers to act locally. Each new legislation required to establish itself within an existing policy community. They share elements: each was established (or re-established) in the New Labour era; each has an electoral system which favours proportional representation; each has a system of unitary local authorities; and **each has sought to negotiate and shape their approach to wellbeing over the past decades**, but similarities in origin mask differences.



Jo Swinson MP.

Scotland: Wellbeing as Performance Management



Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust

Scotland was the first of the three devolved legislatures to embark on developing a wellbeing framework. Introduced by the Scottish National Party (SNP) Government in 2007, the National Performance Framework applies to all governmental departments and public bodies and seeks to improve 11 National Outcomes. It has grown in prominence and impact since 2007 and has increasingly been linked to policy-making for inclusive growth. The latest iteration – published in June 2018 – exemplifies its development from a performance management tool to a wellbeing framework.

The origins of the National Performance Framework were firmly in outcomes-based performance management. Its development over more than a decade is a result of the continued leadership shown by the SNP cabinet and the continued involvement of a wider group of stakeholders, alongside a desire for Scotland to be seen as a leading nation in public sector reform and sustainable development.

After 10 years in operation, the Scottish experience should offer evidence on the impacts of a wellbeing framework. There are contradictory views on its success. Whilst within the civil service there is a strong belief that the framework has been transformative, for others, the scale of the change sought has not yet been realised. Encouragingly, the Scottish experience on wellbeing frameworks – notably in the justice service - provides some evidence of a link between a wellbeing framework and advocacy, policy and social change. One of the key strengths remains within the fact that it is a whole-of-government approach. However, the success of the tool for vertical integration has been hampered by the number of competing initiatives, and by ongoing austerity which has impacted on local services in unpredictable ways.



Wales: Wellbeing as Sustainable Development

Wales is considered to be at the global forefront of legislation on sustainable development and has gone further than other legislatures by requiring public bodies to safeguard the interests of future generations.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 clearly connected duties on sustainable development to public sector reform and concepts of prevention, collaboration, integration, involvement and long-term thinking. The Act places a legal duty on all public bodies to carry out sustainable development to improve and achieve economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. Due to its nature, it is not the most straightforward of frameworks to understand or implement.



Jacob Ellis, Office of the Future Generation Commission for Wales

The Act, which places equal weight on all aspects of wellbeing, directly challenges economic dominance in policy-making. In implementation, a strong culture of performance management for public services has arisen, which some might argue has detracted from its original aim of sustainable development. However, early indicators of impact can be seen, particularly in relation to the development of thinking and practice on adverse childhood experiences.

The original narrative of environmental wellbeing remains strong, particularly in the interventions of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. Early commitments to participation of citizens appear to have given way to a linked, yet not identical, need for greater third-sector involvement in service and policy planning.

Northern Ireland: Wellbeing as a Vision



Aideen McGinley, Carnegie UK Trust

Northern Ireland - the last of the three devolved legislatures in the UK to introduce a wellbeing framework – published its first working draft in 2018. The approach aimed to create a shared, unifying vision for a post-conflict society and assist the power-sharing Executive in working together for shared outcomes.

The ambitious framework aimed to create a conversation and common language that sat outwith and above the constitutional debates that create political vulnerability in Northern Ireland, whilst acknowledging that these tensions exist. The suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive in early 2017 demonstrates that this conversation has not yet taken root.


Despite the political vacuum, there is still reason to be optimistic. Current evidence points to a continuation of the wellbeing approach in any revised Programme for Government and the wellbeing duty on local government, which was established in 2014, has been vital in taking forward the approach through Community Plans. Community leadership and local government play an integral part in the outcomes approach story for Northern Ireland.

Cross-Jurisdictional Analysis

The development of three wellbeing frameworks so close in terms of geography, culture, maturity of democracy and social issues, provides an opportunity to compare and contrast to better understand why they have established a wellbeing approach to government and what it may have achieved. We see in these

three approaches the priority given to performance management (Scotland), sustainable development (Wales) and visioning (Northern Ireland). That three such difference local catalysts have resulted in very similar wellbeing approaches can tell us much about its perceived value to politicians and the policy process.

The component parts of the wellbeing framework have coalesced almost completely. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all taken an approach to use a dashboard of indicators, rather than an index or use of subjective wellbeing as the headline indicator. They have done so for a simple shared reason - they believe that this is the best way to enable the use of wellbeing data in policy development.



	Public administration	New Public Management	An emerging wellbeing approach
Aim	Welfare	Welfare	Wellbeing
Measurement	Input focus	Output focus	Outcomes focus
Structure	Silo based	Silo based	Horizontal integration (whole-of-government)
Management	Command and control	Command and control	Vertical integration (localism)
Service approach	Professional	Managerial	Participative
Interventions	Universal core services and welfare for those in need	Universal core services and welfare for those in need	Universal core services and support for those at risk (prevention)

The book argues that wellbeing frameworks are both a cause and a consequence of a new way of thinking about the role of governments. A move that continues to shift away from the top-down, one-size-fits-all approach that characterised much of the welfare state across the UK in the 20th century (see table above). Research by the Carnegie UK Trust, and others, show consistently that wellbeing frameworks sit alongside other policy development but play a vital role in communicating change and assessing progress.

Conclusions and Reflections

The devolved legislatures are involved in a complex process of learning and dissemination, both amongst themselves, and as part of wider national and international movements on wellbeing and sustainable development. The book argues that the fact that these developments occurred during the first phase of devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is not a coincidence, they are best understood as a mechanism for codifying what the governments stand for (their values) and their role in relation to the UK state. The book concludes that in communicating their values to the people, these new governments are also communicating their value to the people.

All photographs were taken at the House of Commons event to launch the book which was held on the 15.05.2019.