

Case Study: UK Agriculture Policy and Devolution



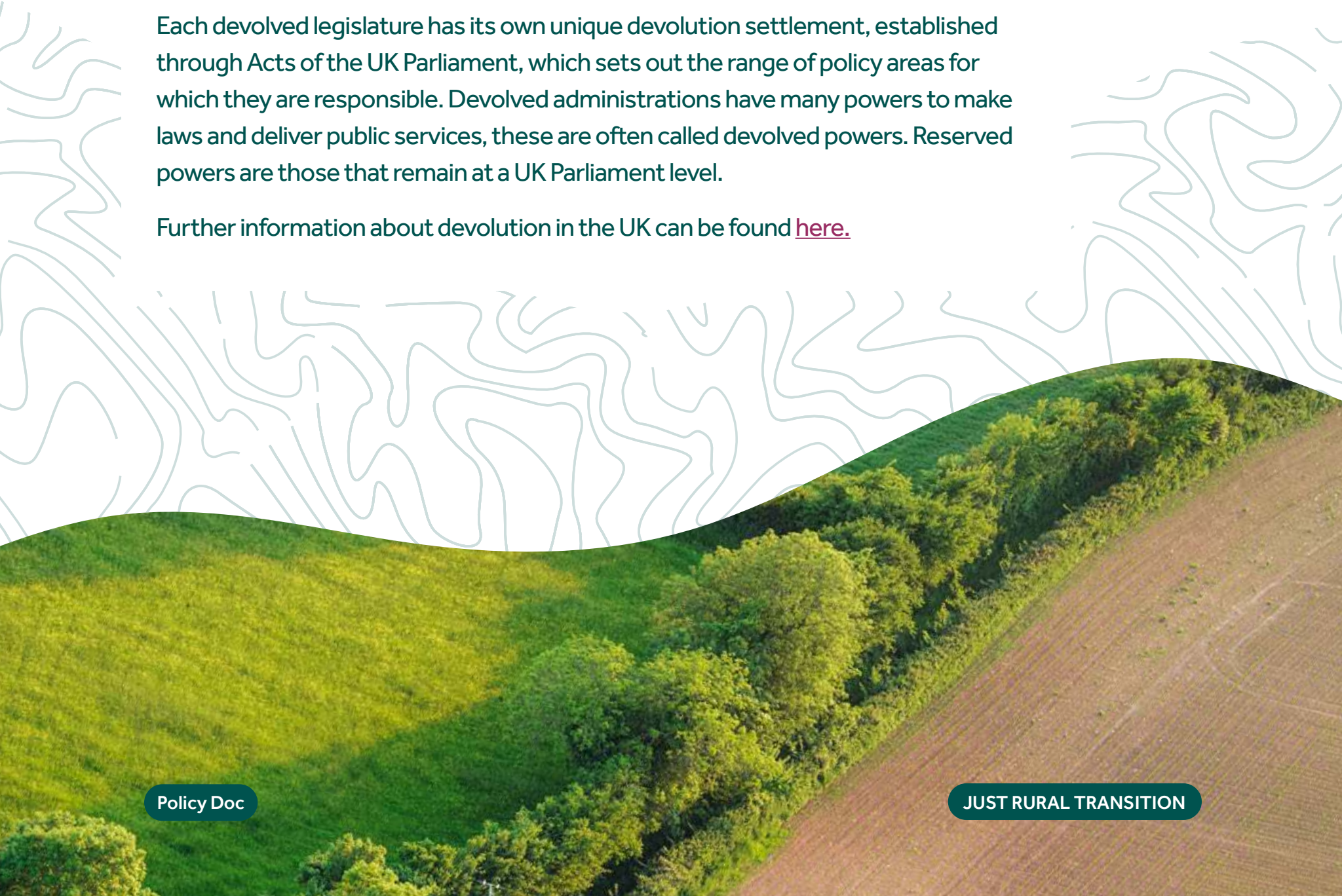
What is devolution?

Devolution is the process of decentralising government and transferring powers to local or regional administrations. In the UK, this means that some powers have been transferred from the UK Government to the four distinct legislatures and governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Legislature	Executive	Responsibility for agriculture
UK Parliament	UK Government	Defra (in England)
Scottish Parliament	Scottish Government	Scottish Government
Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru)	Welsh Government	Welsh Government
Northern Ireland Assembly	Northern Ireland Executive	DAERA

Each devolved legislature has its own unique devolution settlement, established through Acts of the UK Parliament, which sets out the range of policy areas for which they are responsible. Devolved administrations have many powers to make laws and deliver public services, these are often called devolved powers. Reserved powers are those that remain at a UK Parliament level.

Further information about devolution in the UK can be found [here](#).



Devolution and agriculture policy

Agriculture is a devolved policy area under the devolution settlements of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This means that now that the UK has left the EU, each administration can take responsibility for shaping new domestic agricultural policies to better suit their farmers. This also means that there will be differences in agricultural policy in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The UK Agriculture Act 2020 gives powers to England, Wales and Northern Ireland to amend EU retained legislation and introduces new legislative powers. Scotland introduced their own Act, The Agriculture (EU Retained Law and Data) (Scotland) Act 2020. The Act gives similar powers to Scotland to amend this retained legislation.

The Agriculture Act 2020 mostly legislates for England with some UK-wide clauses relating to fertilisers, organic products, the Livestock Information Programme and the Red Meat Levy, and reporting to the UK Parliament on food security.

The Welsh Government has published an Agriculture White Paper in advance of an Agriculture (Wales) Bill to be introduced in the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament). DAERA may similarly introduce new legislation in the future.

What impact does devolution have on the UK's agriculture sector?

The devolution of agriculture in the UK enables respective governments to work more closely with stakeholders to understand and respond to the issues they are facing, allowing for more effective and tailored agricultural policy-making.

It also gives governments the flexibility to deliver policies which better account for the particular geographical, environmental or socioeconomic needs and priorities of the individual parts of the UK. For example: the Welsh Government can deliver policy which reflects the importance of livestock farming to the Welsh economy; the Scottish Government

can deliver policy which promotes the interests of Crofting, a system of land tenure unique to parts of Scotland, as well as agriculture more generally; and the Northern Ireland Executive can deliver policy which reflects the importance of the agri-food industry to Northern Ireland's economy.

Devolution has also encouraged innovation in policy-making. Having four jurisdictions in the United Kingdom means that administrations can learn from policies launched elsewhere and then replicate or adapt them if they think they will be effective in their own jurisdiction.

Working with the devolved administrations

Following the UK's departure from the EU, Ministers from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive have agreed to establish the UK Agricultural Support Framework. The Framework provides for collaboration and cooperation on agricultural support between the four UK administrations.

The aim of the UK Agricultural Support Framework is to ensure effective co-ordination and dialogue between the devolved administrations on how any changes to legislation and policies in one part of the UK may affect other parts. It also provides a forum for each administration to share their experience and best practice, offering an opportunity for administrations to learn from each other.

The UK Agricultural Support Framework formalises existing mechanisms for officials to discuss agricultural policy plans and monitor markets in order to: enable the functioning of the UK internal market, while acknowledging policy divergence; ensure compliance with international obligations; ensure the UK can negotiate, enter into and implement new trade agreements and international treaties; enable the management of common resources; manage the particular needs of cross-border farm businesses; and (where relevant for agriculture) safeguard the security of the UK.

The Path to Sustainable Farming: England's Approach

In England, the UK Government is replacing the Common Agricultural Policy with schemes that reward farmers and land managers for delivering environmentally sustainable actions and producing public goods.

The UK Government is introducing three schemes that reward environmental land management: the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery. Together, these schemes are intended to provide a powerful vehicle for achieving the goals of the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) and the UK Government's commitment to net zero emissions by 2050, while supporting the rural economy.

The UK Government's vision for sustainable farming is for a thriving agricultural sector where the majority of farms are profitable, productive and economically sustainable without subsidy through basic payments, and all are making a significant and widespread contribution to environmental, biodiversity and climate change goals.

The [Agricultural Transition Plan](#) sets out the UK Government's path to sustainable farming and the changes they will make to agricultural policy in England from 1st January 2021.

Scotland's Approach

Scotland's vision for agricultural transformation is one of a sustainable future, with farmers and land managers continuing to produce high quality food, helping to reduce carbon emissions, delivering wider environmental benefits and improved biodiversity, and using the appropriate land to meet Scotland's world-leading emissions targets.

The Scottish Government published its [Climate Change Plan update](#) (CCPu) in December 2020 setting out a pathway to transform Scottish farming to meet Scotland's ambitious target to reach net zero by 2045. The Scottish Government is committed to taking a Just Transition approach and established five farmer-led groups, as a key initiative to bring together the people who have knowledge and expertise to propose practical workable solutions to ensure that agriculture contributes to Scotland's climate change goals. Their reports were published in March 2021.

Building on the CCPu, the Scottish Government will now establish an Implementation Board for development of new proposals for sustainable farming support. This will comprise a broad range of representatives from farming and environmental sectors who will consider a wide range of material alongside the reports of the farmer-led groups, such as resources from [Farming for 1.5](#), an independent inquiry looking at how Scottish agriculture can best contribute to keeping warming to no more than 1.5°C and the [Just Transition Commission](#), which was established to provide practical and affordable recommendations to Scottish Ministers.

To establish the future shape of rural support, primary legislation will be required and a new Agriculture Bill will be brought forward in this Parliamentary session (which runs from 2021 to 2026) to set the tone and model of support for the next decade.



Wales' Approach

The Welsh Government's policy framework for future agricultural policy and support has the aim of delivering Sustainable Land Management (SLM).

SLM is an internationally-recognised concept defined as "The use of land resources, including soils, water, animals and plants, for the production of goods to meet changing human needs, while simultaneously ensuring the long-term potential of these resources and the maintenance and enhancement of their environmental benefits".

The Welsh Government wants to maintain high food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards in Wales, underpinned by a simpler regulatory framework and improved enforcement. For their own and society's benefit, Welsh farmers will need to continue producing high quality food whilst maintaining high production standards. However, there is increasing evidence that agricultural intensification has adverse impacts upon society through reductions in air and water quality, carbon emissions and a decline in

farmland biodiversity. The Welsh Government are therefore proposing asking Welsh farmers to go further, where in-field changes to farming practice will enable sustainable food production from farms characterised by having a very low carbon footprint, increased biodiversity and minimised nutrient losses to air and water.

The Welsh Government propose rewarding farmers through a "Sustainable Farming Scheme" which will place a proper value on the environmental outcomes they deliver (improved soils, clean air, clean water, improved biodiversity, actions to reduce global warming) alongside sustainable food production. This will help create a sustainable and resilient agriculture sector in Wales for future generations. Amongst a range of actions, the Welsh Government plan to significantly reduce levels of external inputs. Business improvement advice will also be provided to enable farmers to take advantage of new market opportunities and to support the transition away from income subsidy and into the new scheme.



Northern Ireland's Approach

Northern Ireland now has a unique opportunity to redefine its agricultural policies and support schemes for the first time in over 40 years with the aim of developing an agricultural support framework portfolio better suited to local needs and one that will provide for and secure long term sustainability within the industry.

Minister Poots' vision for future agriculture in Northern Ireland is defined around four outcomes:

- An industry that pursues **increased productivity** as a measure of sustained profitability in international terms, closing the productivity gap which has been opening up with our major suppliers. This will create the basis for a profitable sector which can grow market share.
- An industry that is **environmentally sustainable** in terms of its impact on, and guardianship of, air and water quality, soil health, carbon footprint and biodiversity.
- An industry that displays **improved resilience** to external shocks (such as market volatility, extreme weather events etc.) which are ever more frequent and to which the industry has become very exposed.
- An industry which operates within an **integrated, profitable, efficient, sustainable, competitive and responsive supply chain**, with clear transmission of market signals and an overriding focus on high quality food and the end consumer.

Minister Poots has tasked officials to begin a conversation with the industry as soon as possible on all areas of future farming support that will deliver against these four outcomes. It is anticipated that the Future Agricultural Policy Framework portfolio for Northern Ireland will be launched in the coming months.