



Newcastle Business School

Experts from Northumbria University outline what we know so far about "levelling up".

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On the level: Northumbria academics outline what to expect from the government's levelling up White Paper

With dramatic variances in wealth, health, life chances and wellbeing across the UK, a government White Paper on the subject of "levelling up" is expected to be published this Autumn.

The phrase levelling up was central to the current Conservative government's election manifesto in 2019 and has since been described as the government's "defining mission" to address regional inequalities.

Expert academics at Northumbria University have been commissioned to edit a special edition of the prestigious peer-reviewed *Local Economy* journal on the Levelling Up policy, which has been emphasised in many speeches by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and now has a government department renamed after it – the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

[Joyce Liddle](#), Professor of Public Leadership and Enterprise and [John Shutt](#), Professor of Public Policy and Management – both of the University's Newcastle Business School – have already led roundtable discussions at the House of Commons on the future of the Northern Powerhouse and edited books on *The North East After Brexit: Impact and Policy*.

They are also undertaking research on devolution and the new Mayoral Combined Authorities, such as the North of Tyne Combined Authority, which is a partnership between Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland councils.

Here, they provide analysis on what we know so far about the Levelling Up agenda and how it may be delivered.

- **Clarity – what is levelling up and what could it mean for our day-to-day lives?**

Levelling up is the government's main policy mantra and now we have a renamed central government department and a big hitting Cabinet Minister, Michael Gove, appointed to drive devolution further. We are expecting to hear more about county devolution deals and to hear about more Levelling Up funds and replacements for European regional funds.

- **Scope – will it help to tackle key issues such as struggling town and city centres, health inequalities, homelessness, and poverty?**

We still do not know what levelling up is trying to achieve where. Is it just for the North or is it also delivering to the Midlands and London, in urban and rural areas? What targets and outcomes are government seeking to achieve through to 2025? Is it about the economy and jobs? Or health? Or wealth? Or tackling poverty? These are all different and complex and inter-related issues which we hope the White Paper will clarify.

- **Transparency – how can government ensure initiatives focused on the areas most in need are equitable and deliverable, particularly with the varied structures of local governance which exist?**

We need to understand what levelling up means for different places and who is delivering the levelling up programmes. Is it local authorities or new partnerships?

- **Accountability and governance – what kind of clear objectives are needed and what timescales are realistic?**

We are assuming that the Autumn Spending Review on 27 October will set out three-year spending targets but levelling up is a long-term programme and we need a clear view to 2030 and beyond.

Professor Shutt explained: “The Levelling Up policy is complex and requires coordinated and integrated action but there is a danger that there will be no clear strategy and plan and too many individual projects with no real plan for the United Kingdom as a whole.

“The role of local government and the NHS is central to this strategy and we need a clear view of how they should work together and build Place partnerships which will focus their work and bring stakeholders together to deliver targeted outcomes which can really build back better.”

Professor Liddle added: “Michael Gove’s speech at the Conservative Party Conference gave little clarity on implementation. In it he said Levelling Up meant strengthening local leadership, raising living standards, improving public services, and enhancing people’s pride in the places they live.

“Nothing on *how* these would be achieved, or whether resources would be sufficient to achieve this. Until the Chancellor outlines his plans, local authorities will not know how any of these things could be implemented.”

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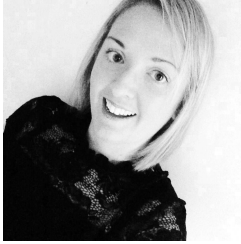


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