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Five conditions for successful skills devolution

Our takeaways from the APPG for Skills, Careers and Employment roundtable on mayors, metro mayors and skills devolution.

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Strategy

A clear, overarching national vision

Devolution works best within a shared national framework. National guardrails support accountability and make sure qualifications are recognised wherever a learner moves, while leaving room for local variation.

Without that framework, areas without devolution deals risk being left behind.

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Flexibility

Freedom in funding allocations and delivery

Within that national framework, areas need room to shape provision around local need. This means flexibility across places, within programmes and funding rules, and over time.

Devolving funds rather than programmes is central to this. Passing down national programmes for local administration gives areas little say over where resources are best placed.

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Integration

Cohesion among local stakeholders and systems

Skills cannot be considered in isolation from employment support, health, housing, transport and childcare. Devolving separate programmes risks reproducing fragmentation locally.

Effective partnerships depend on trust as well as formal structures.

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Stability

Certainty through multi-year funding settlements

Partnerships need time to mature. In-year funding reductions and short-term initiatives disrupt planning and limit what local partners can build.

Devolved responsibilities also need capacity funding, so delivery budgets are not used to cover administration.

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Evidence

Grounding decisions in data and empirical results

Any power devolved to an area should come with the data needed to plan and run it. Providers often cannot see whether learners move into work, and tracking NEET status can mean checking several separate systems.

Earning or Learning recommended a Youth Data Duty to share participation data with local areas.

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Read the full blog post

Our full blog post sets out each condition in more detail, with links to our research.

Devolution will also be explored in our upcoming Higher Education Commission inquiry into universities and their regional connections and the Skills Commission's inquiry into apprenticeships, as well as through the APPG for Skills, Careers and Employment's events programme.

If you'd like to get involved, get in touch with Rhiannon (rhiannon.tuckett-jones@policyconnect.org.uk)