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# Is Levelling up working for the North East?

**Academics from Northumbria University have published a research paper questioning whether the Government's flagship Levelling Up policy is working for the North East.**

Levelling Up was introduced as a flagship policy of the Boris Johnson Conservative government to address the north-south divide and focus on deep-seated inequalities in regions like the North-East.

Using data collected from central and local government and available published information, Research Assistant Cameron Forbes, along with Professors Joyce Liddle and John Shutt from Northumbria's Newcastle Business School have now produced a working paper entitled: [\*Levelling Up in the North East Region: What Has Been Achieved in the Last Three Years? An Assessment.\*](#)

The 68-page working paper has been prepared for a Northern Powerhouse conference on levelling up to be held in London on October 6. It makes a number of recommendations aimed at addressing what the authors suggest is an increasing inequity between the North-East and the rest of the UK. They argue that the North/South gap is widening, and that the region is in danger of slipping further behind as economic and social conditions continue to deteriorate. When it was introduced, the Government allocated £4.8 billion to the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to be spent by 31 March 2025. But according to evidence gathered for the working paper, it has spent less than 3% of it in 2021-2022- only £107 million in total. In the North-East region, only 6% of the national allocation for LUF Round 1 was approved, totalling £100 million, with much remaining still to be spent.

Commenting on the findings, Professor Shutt said: “Despite the policy being a focal point of the Conservative party’s 2019 election campaign, it is evident that Levelling Up has only just reached the stage of moving beyond a slogan. The Truss administration must deliver desperately required policy coordination that targets those areas most in need and should continue to uphold the promise of the Johnson Government to the North -East region, but progress does not seem assured. Worryingly, the Local Government Chronicle has reported on Prime Minister Truss’s possible abandonment of the Levelling Up Flagship Policy.”

The working paper was produced by the [Public Policy and Management research group](#) at Northumbria’s Newcastle Business School. Led by Professor Joyce Liddle and Professor John Shutt, the group has over 30 academics working on public sector management and public services research. In this Levelling Up working paper they recommend a major review in 2023 and new actions to ensure the fulfilment of the levelling up promise within the region, including:

- • Supporting the new [Insights North East](#) to connect research and knowledge with regional policy makers and plans for Health, Net Zero and Inclusive Growth and fostering stronger collaboration between stakeholders and organisations across the city region. The researchers suggest more detailed debate is required of key larger projects which can make a real difference.
- • Revisiting employment and sector plans and priorities and the promise of the delivery of renewables in the region with a new revised skills plan for the region following clarification of the devolution deal arrangements for 2024. With a revised focus on adult skills and the Colleges and the role of the five Universities in the region on higher level and appropriate skills training and pathways into work.
- • Better central- local debate within the region and externally with Whitehall and Parliament about the region’s direction and future plans for Levelling Up. The researchers ask if an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the North-East be helpful in the current climate to examine central government spending and plans for the region? They say there is a serious problem with short-termism and fragmentation and policy shifts and drift, and they detect a serious lack of discussion and evaluation of programmes for the North-East region and specifically the North-South divide and which programmes are working or not.

- They suggest that the idea of a Learning region needs a much higher profile together with What Works. Where is the region heading to 2030 if current trends continue? A focus on economic growth alone and new inward investment will not solve the deep-seated problems in the region without a stronger focus on social and environmental policies. The new Investment Zones along with enterprise zone and freeport policies announced as part of the 'Growth Plan 2022' will produce limited impacts and take years to trickle down, if at all.
- A better review of the economic, social, and environmental plans for the region in the light of Covid 19 and a clearer set of priorities for development to 2030 which encompasses priorities for Round 3 bidding for LUF and CRF and dovetails with UKSPF plans would allow a focus on building back better.
- A resolution of the devolution deal and city region governance is required for the North- East region to ensure levelling up plans can be better coordinated in collaboration with the Combined Authorities, local authorities, health trusts, cross boundary actors like Nexus and NELEP and quangos such as the Newcastle Gateshead initiative NGI and the regional purchasing organisation- NEPO. There is still too much fragmentation, confusion and lack of strategic leadership governance which is holding the region back.
- The authors propose the establishment of a Regional Summit to be held in 2023 to further develop collaboration across the region and assess investment plans

To read the report in full please visit the [Public Policy Management](#) research page of the Northumbria University website.

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