The Constitution Unit

The Cornish Question: Devolution in the South-West Region

by Mark Sandford

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Mark Sandford
5 July 2002

Executive Summary

- The South-West Region is diverse and contains a wide range of economic, social and cultural variety. There are no pre-set or 'obvious' boundaries which a regional assembly in the South-West Region must follow.
- There is a need for more research into the economy of the South-West Region, and greater detailed exploration into how it inter-relates with possible new democratic structures and what exists in the way of regional identity.
- The proposals made in the Government's White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, allow for elected regional bodies which will have only limited influence whatever regional boundaries are used. It is therefore unlikely that assemblies covering any geographical area will be able to undertake high-profile capital-spending projects. A small population size should not be an insurmountable hindrance to regional government under these plans.
- The South-West Region has little in the way of regional identity: however, it appears that a stronger identity exists in Cornwall. Territorial identities need not automatically map directly on to government structures, but can be advantageous when creating new political institutions.
- Three models are suggested for elected regional government in the South-West Region. Model 1 is a single elected assembly for the entire region, as implied under the Government's proposals. Model 2 proposes one elected assembly for Cornwall and another elected assembly for the remainder of the South-West Region. Model 3 proposes a single elected assembly with a variety of special arrangements for Cornwall.
- A Cornish assembly, with the powers and functions proposed under the White Paper, would be administratively feasible. However, since very few government departments locate any staff in Cornwall at present, much governmental reorganisation would be required to achieve it. Under current Government plans its initial budget runs the risk of being very small, possibly in the region of £40 million.
- A unitary authority for Cornwall beneath a South-West regional assembly might strengthen Cornwall's voice in negotiations with that assembly, but would represent only a small difference from the current structure of local government. It is unlikely that a South-West regional assembly would be able to devolve responsibilities to Cornish local government under a Regional Assemblies Act.
- Model 3 suggests a variety of special arrangements for Cornwall within the context of a single South-West regional assembly. These include an executive office for Cornwall, a Cornish scrutiny committee (potentially with members co-opted from Cornish local government), a joint Strategy for Cornwall, and over-representation for Cornwall in the South-West regional assembly.
- This model would require further thought with regard to how a separate Cornish Office would contribute to the strategies and high-level targets that assemblies will have to meet. These could limit the Cornish Office's room for manoeuvre. The Cornish Office would be subject to similar budgetary pressures to those of a Cornish assembly.

- The decision to establish a Cornish assembly, if taken, should be subject to a referendum in Cornwall only.
- The claim that a Cornish assembly would not have enough 'clout' to make a difference is not clearly articulated. It is open to debate whether population size would be critical in attracting investment or negotiating with central government. Moreover, inter-regional redistribution through public funds will continue after any elected regional assemblies are created in England.
- Politically, the Government is very unlikely to create regional assemblies on any other lines than those set out in the White Paper. A Cornish assembly would be an anomaly in the overall light of English regional policy; this is likely to deter the Government from engaging in complex debate on the fundamental issues involved.

Introduction

The 1997 Labour Government took steps to devolve power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The three devolved bodies received strong powers: legislative in the case of the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly, and secondary legislative in the case of the National Assembly for Wales. Though all three bodies have undergone a rough ride in their early years, they have established their democratic and organisational credentials.

Devolution to those parts of the United Kingdom which are outside of England had been a long-standing concern of the Labour Party. The first attempt to introduce a devolved Scottish Assembly and Welsh Assembly occurred under a Labour government in 1978. This had occurred in the light of a run of political success for the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru, and an apparent increase in national consciousness in Scotland and Wales.

The Labour opposition of the mid-1990s was motivated by different concerns. Broadly, they were disquieted at the ease with which the Thatcher and Major governments had been able to impose their will on large swathes of the UK which had not voted for the Conservative Party. The most potent symbol of national and regional resentment of this was the trialling of the Community Charge (the "poll tax") in Scotland, earlier than its introduction across the UK. The Labour Party began to draw on previously specialised constitutional concerns about the historical centralism of the United Kingdom's state apparatus. This was supplemented by discontent with an apparent lessening of democratic accountability due to the increase in the number of 'quangos', executive agencies which were not subject to direct democratic accountability. These elements of concern were particularly emphasised by the Liberal Democrats, potential coalition partners for Labour in the run-up to the 1997 General Election.

These concerns led to pressure for further devolution, or decentralisation, to the regions of England as well as Scotland and Wales. There had long been debate within Labour and the Liberal Democrats on the merits and possible functions and status of English regional governments. Proposals had been made by Labour in their manifesto for the 1992 General Election. These were sharpened up in 1995 by the publication of *A Choice for England*. This was a Labour Party consultation document, which proposed a framework of voluntary regional groupings in the standard regions of England, with an option available to create elected assemblies in those regions where the public demonstrated support. The proposals, which were the genesis of the existing structures of 'regional chambers', were firmed up by the publication of *A New Voice for England's Regions* in 1996.

At the same time, Labour created a Regional Policy Commission. It produced a report entitled *Renewing the Regions* (also known as the Millan Report), which made further specific proposals for the shape of the regional chambers. When introduced through the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, these bodies had been significantly watered down from the Millan proposals. But their existence, and their prompt formation of partnerships with many

regional offices of government agencies, has boosted calls for further devolution to elected assemblies in England's regions.

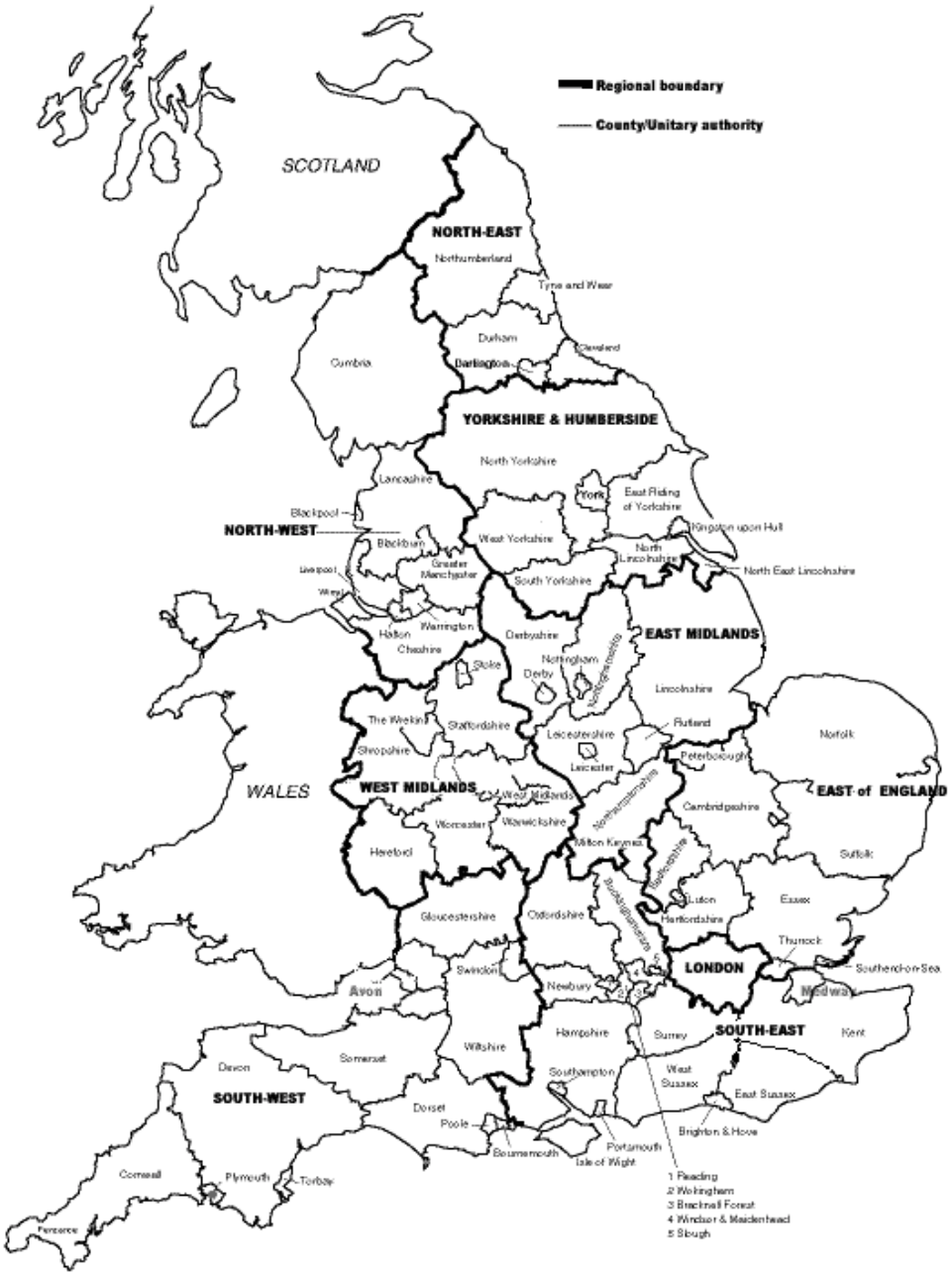
The Government committed itself, in its manifesto for the 2001 General Election, to introducing elected regional assemblies where the electorate of any given region voted for one in a referendum. This commitment was kept by the publication, in May 2002, of *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*.[1] This White Paper set out in full detail the purpose, functions, budgets and constitutional structures of proposed regional assemblies.

Campaigning organisations

The Campaign for the English Regions (CFER) was formed in 2000 to make the case for devolution to the English regions. Five regional Constitutional Conventions are members: North-East, North-West, Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands, and South-West. These bodies were set up in 1999 and 2000: their purpose is to provide an open forum to discuss moves towards regional government in their respective region. A sixth is being set up in the East of England region.

[1] Published by DTLR, 2002. See the Constitution Unit's commentary, written by the present author, for a detailed analysis of the White Paper.

Map 1
Standard regional boundaries and local authorities in England



Also in existence, though not members of CFER, is the Cornish Constitutional Convention (CCC). Cornwall is, administratively, an English county and not a standard regional area: the CCC is the only one of the Constitutional Conventions which does not represent a standard region. The South-West Region is the only one of the Government standard regions so far where the existing regional boundaries have become a strongly contentious issue: other disagreements occur, but not with the force that is present in Cornwall.

The report

This report was commissioned jointly by the South-West Constitutional Convention (SWCC) and the Cornish Constitutional Convention (CCC) as a result of fundamental disagreements between the two Conventions over the appropriate form of devolution within their respective 'territories'. The Cornish Constitutional Convention supports a regional assembly for Cornwall alone. The South-West Constitutional Convention supports a single regional assembly for the standard South-West Region, with Cornwall remaining a constituent part of the region.

The report was commissioned to "address issues of contention" between the two Conventions. To that end, it will address the following issues:

- Chapter 2 gives an overview of, and maps the current structures of government in, the standard South-West Region and Cornwall.
- Chapter 3 examines the cultural background of both Cornwall and the South-West region, including comparison with European regions.
- Chapter 4 presents three models of devolution for the South-West Region. The use of the three models were agreed when the report was commissioned. For each, electoral structures, powers, functions, and modes of operation are discussed. For the purposes of the report, the powers and functions of proposed regional government as set out in *Your Region, Your Choice* is used.
- Chapter 5 examines the administrative and financial viability of each model.
- Chapter 6 examines the political issues surrounding each of the models, and the evidence available from opinion polls.

Terminology

Terminology is a sensitive subject in this debate. A strong effort has been made to use neutral language which does not give offence to either the SWCC or the CCC. Besides this, in a report which suggests various models for, and makes predictions about, future developments there are inevitably many references to documents not yet in existence and events which have yet to happen. For ease of reading these have been given invented names. All of the 'terminology' used in the report is explained in Appendix 1.

The Conventions themselves are taken to represent the divergent positions on the issues. It would not be correct to speak of "the Cornish view" or "the South-West view", as there

exists support within Cornwall for a regional assembly on the standard Government boundaries, and there is support from outside Cornwall for a Cornish assembly.

This report does not aim to make the case for elected regional assemblies in England. It is assumed, for the purposes of the report, that that case has been made. Also, the current division of powers and functions between regional-level bodies and local government is not challenged: for the purposes of the report that division is taken as appropriate.

A final word of caution relates to the space devoted to either side of the debate by the report. The question of Cornwall is given a substantial amount of space. This does not mean that it is more important than, or favoured in relation to, the South-West Region. Rather, it reflects the distinct and sometimes complex issues surrounding the possibility of a regional government covering an area which would be, by British standards, unusually small.

Chapter 1: Principles of regional government

What are regions?

Questions of what regional government is for, what it should do, and what the rationale is behind regional boundaries, go to the heart of the issues examined by this paper. It would be difficult to come to any conclusions about the options open to the standard South-West Region without at least some basis in principle. That is difficult to find, because authoritative discussions of the purpose and function of regional government have been few and far between.

The word 'region' means different things in different contexts. Keating and Loughlin state that "spatially, it exists somewhere between the national and the local."[2] This statement sounds banal, but it reflects the fact that the definition of 'regional', in any given context, depends upon the definitions of 'national' and 'local'. In the English context, it normally refers to an area, consisting of multiple local authorities, which is used for administrative purposes for the organisation of particular functions which are not part of local government responsibilities. By this definition, England typically consists of between 4 and 15 regions. In recent years, government bodies have increasingly created separate divisions for Scotland and Wales alongside several English regions.

The viability of the possible regional structures discussed in this report rest in large part on the range of competences proposed for regional assemblies. As we argue below, the Government proposes regional assemblies which merely take over administrative functions without having the resources to assume a wider co-ordinating role.

Boundaries

> "The key to understanding the role of regional structures in British public administration to date [1995] is that they are primarily concerned not with the management of *territory* but the delivery of *functions*."[3]

Hogwood's exhaustive study, *Mapping the Regions*, demonstrates that there has never been a standard set of regional boundaries within the UK. Over the last 20 years, some regional boundaries have been more commonly maintained than others—for instance, Scotland and Wales, and the (standard) West Midlands, were used far more commonly than the boundaries now used for the South-East or the East Midlands. But otherwise the boundaries of departmental or organisational regions vary enormously.

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[2] Michael Keating, *The Political Economy of Regionalism*, ed. Michael Keating and John Loughlin, Frank Cass, London, 1997, p.17

[3] Brian Hogwood, *Mapping the Regions: boundaries, co-ordination and government*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995, p.1

The implication of elected regional government in England is that the management of a territory will begin to take precedence over the delivery of functions. This leads to the question of how the territory in question should be defined. The South-West Region does not form a 'natural', unchallengeable region. Cornwall is not the only part of the standard region where disputes over the standard boundaries have taken place. Bournemouth and Poole have much in common with Southampton and Portsmouth, similar-sized cities just along the coast in the South-East region. Dorset, and possibly South Wiltshire, has stronger transport and economic links with Hampshire than with Devon and the Greater Bristol area. Swindon looks towards Oxfordshire and London: Cheltenham and Gloucester look towards Birmingham.

The results of Hogwood's research reflect this uncertainty. Though the South-West Region is more likely than most other standard regions to be used in its standard form by Government departments, it is not universally used.

The standard regional boundaries in England derive from the emergency planning regions used during the Second World War.[4] There has never been public debate over their shape, because they have never played any significant role in English politics. Their occasional conformity to the weak regional identities to be found in some parts of England is more a matter of chance than planning.

The present Government has been unwilling to engage in debate about the appropriateness of the standard regional boundaries:

> "Regions significantly smaller than the Government Office [standard] regions would raise major questions about the distinction between regional and local government. On the other hand, regions based on these boundaries are large enough to take a strategic view between the national and local levels and to add real value without undermining the role of local government."[5]

Intellectually, this is not a convincing statement because the terms 'regional' and 'local' government are dependent upon one another for their meaning: it is, in the end, assertion and precedent, not impartial analysis, that calls areas of one size 'regions' and areas of another size 'local'. But the statement demonstrates the Government's determination not to open the debate. And it is not unreasonable for the Government to fear potentially long and loud debates over the issue of boundaries, which would in many cases likely generate more heat than light.

The question of appropriateness of boundaries will be examined in more detail in chapter 3. However, there are inevitably many conflicting arguments over the exact shape of regional boundaries. Administrative boundaries are a fluid concept, and they cannot be drawn so as

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[4] It is often incorrectly asserted that the standard English regional boundaries were imposed by the European Union. In fact the EU originally adopted the UK's own map of standard planning regions.

[5] DTLR / Cabinet Office, *Your Region, Your Choice,* 2002, paragraph 6.2

to make perfect sense to everyone. Many geographical boundaries invite those close to one side of them to claim they should be on the other. For example, similarities can be identified between parts of North Cornwall and North Devon, but this does not prove that there should be no boundary between the two: nor, indeed, do claims of Cornish separateness *prove* that there should be one.

What is regional government for?

The White Paper indicates the Government's ideas on the purposes of regional government on several occasions:

> "It is vital to give real economic power to the regions to enable them to improve regional prosperity."[6]
>
> "We are…offering people living in England the chance to choose whether to establish an elected assembly for their region, to provide greater accountability for the decisions that affect them."[7]

Any model of regional government for the standard South-West Region will need to match these aspirations.

It is a feature of the White Paper that its bold rhetoric was not matched by the powers and budgets on offer to elected regional assemblies. The functions that are proposed for decentralisation are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. For the present chapter it is noted that the functions proposed are of a specific type. Regional assemblies will take over administration functions of other bodies, rather than having extra funds and capacity to drive forward innovative projects or schemes. The Government's proposed model of regional assembly amounts primarily to a reform of administrative structures. For many campaigners the democratic accountability achieved thereby is a gain in itself. But very little new money will be on offer to regional assemblies, and most of their inherited budgets will inevitably be spent on their inherited responsibilities. They will not, under the model set out in the White Paper, have the flexibility or clout to engineer substantial visible change in the short to medium term.

The resulting small quantity of budget can become a gap in quality of what the regional assembly can achieve. It is unrealistic to expect the proposed English regional assemblies to undertake the capital spend and large-scale economic co-ordination roles that are available to some of their European counterparts. They will be primarily administrative bodies, rarely having the budgetary flexibility to stray outside their core responsibilities.

This is an important point for the debate in the South-West. It does not make sense to say that any English region, on the model proposed, would be too poor or backward to survive

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[6] DTLR/Cabinet Office, *Your Region, Your Choice,* 2002, p. 9

[7] Ibid., p.10

after the introduction of an elected assembly. Devolution to an elected assembly is sometimes represented as casting the relevant territory adrift economically—implying that the territory must have an essentially sound economy in order to become autonomous. However, the Government's proposals cannot be represented in this way. They propose control over administrative apparatus. And even if a wider set of powers was proposed, regions which vote for elected assemblies will still benefit from direct central government activity—such as capital spending projects—and from national redistribution of public funds.[8] Establishing regional government does not mean erecting economic iron curtains between regions: the large European states all use redistribution mechanisms to distribute funds between their regional governments. This reflects the truism that successful regional policy requires partnership between the regional governments and the central government, not isolation of one from another.

At the same time, it is vital to distinguish between structures of regional government and the policies that assemblies, once elected, choose to pursue. Campaigners claim that regional government can join up different strands of government policy—economic development aid, business advice, skills, tourism, and cultural policy—to create a more effective single body (the 'one-stop shop') which will have the resources and flexibility to improve life for the regional electorate. That is, after all, the acid test of administrative arrangements. It is important that the structures of regional government are created so as to permit these benefits: but the structures themselves cannot guarantee those benefits.

Part of the CCC's case is that policy for Cornwall is frequently made outside Cornwall, by policy-makers who have no understanding of Cornwall's unique problems. A Cornish assembly, it is claimed, would prevent this lack of understanding. Whatever the merits of the claim about poor policy-making, it must be noted that a Cornish assembly would not *guarantee* good policy-making in Cornwall; neither will a wider regional structure itself guarantee bad policy-making for Cornwall. Bad policy-making derives as much from poor information, poor leadership and poor management as from the geographical area covered.

The Government's proposals

The proposals for elected regional assemblies made in the White Paper are discussed in chapter 4. It is assumed, throughout this report, that the White Paper's proposals will be exactly replicated in the eventual legislation on regional assemblies.

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[8] This might not be the case under a very 'strong' form of devolution, with a high degree of fiscal autonomy for the regional governments, but that is not being proposed in the U.K.. The allocation of public funds between regions—which amounts to cross-subsidy of poor regions by rich ones—may well become more contentious when elected regional governments are involved, and may become more transparent as a result: but cross-subsidy will not cease in the foreseeable future.

However, the White Paper does state that "there are likely to be further proposals for the decentralisation of responsibilities to assemblies as time goes on."[9] Chapter 5 examines the potential effects of devolution of the powers and budgets of further regionally-based executive agencies, which have not been included in the current proposals, on the three models proposed.

[9] DTLR / Cabinet Office, op. cit., paragraph 4.6

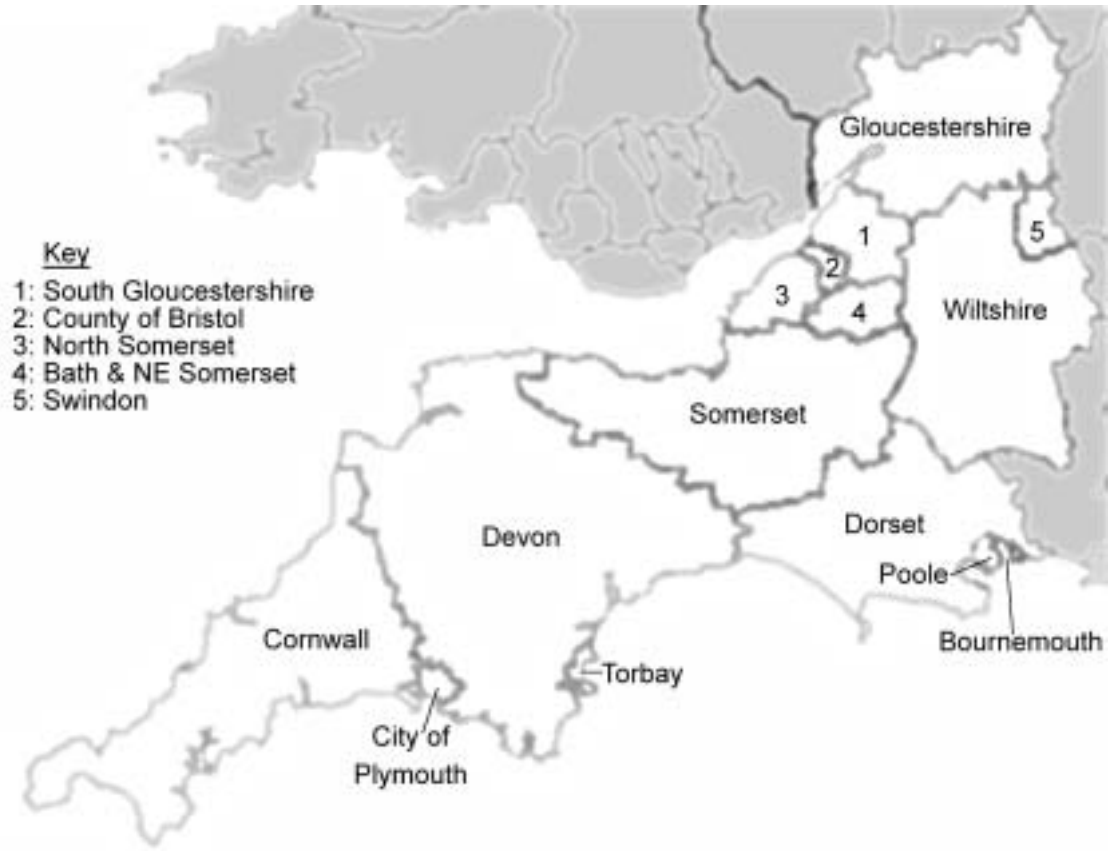
Chapter 2: An Overview of the South-West Region

To provide context for the political issues examined by this report, this chapter summarises the standard South-West Region in political, geographical and economic terms. In order to simplify the analysis of these issues in later chapters, this chapter is divided into two separate sections, one for the standard South-West Region, and one for Cornwall itself. This structure should not be taken as an indication that the report assumes that a firm dividing-line exists between the two.

Geography

The South-West Region has the reputation of being one of the more distinctive, and probably the most diverse, regions of the UK. In terms of land area it is the largest of the English regions. Geographically, much of it forms a peninsula (of which Cornwall is the tip) stretching away from England into the Atlantic Ocean, giving it some 700 miles of coastline. The northernmost tip of the region is closer to Scotland than to the westernmost tip. A variety of names is used to describe it, such as 'Wessex', 'the West' or 'the West Country' (though none of these represent defined sub-regions). Much of the region is comparatively remote from both London and the large cities of midland and northern England. Its boundaries are with the South-East, and with the West Midlands and Wales.

The region contains some 4.9 million inhabitants, with a population density below the English average. It is predominantly rural, and polycentric: its largest city is Bristol (500,000 inhabitants), followed by Bournemouth, Plymouth, Swindon (200-250,000), Bath, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Exeter and Torquay (100,000), and Taunton and Weston-super Mare (50,000). Considerable in-migration from elsewhere in the UK has taken place in recent decades: evidence suggests that the perceived high quality of life is a significant driver of this. The above-average ratio of retired people in the region is a probable consequence of this trend.



Being largely a peninsula with few bordering areas, government departments frequently use either the standard South-West Region or a very similar entity as a single region (see table 2.3 below). Government departments' south-west regions have typically included Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset (the western areas) with a less-well-defined eastern boundary. Previous variations include part or all of Dorset or Wiltshire being placed in a south-eastern or 'south-central' region, and part or all of Gloucestershire being grouped with the West Midlands. Less common has been the use of Devon and Cornwall as a separate regional unit from the remainder of the region: it has been known for Devon and Cornwall to be termed 'the South-West' and the remainder of the region 'the West'.

It is extremely rare for Cornwall to be considered a region for the purposes of sub-divisions of government departments *except* when English 'regions' in a particular department's administration have numbered 30-60—in other words, when areas of similar size to the standard counties have been used. Cornwall's designation as a separate region for the purposes of Objective 1 programmes was the exception to the rule: Government policy had previously been to group it with Devon, preventing Cornwall from qualification for Objective 1 status at the time of an earlier (joint) bid in 1989.

Economy

The South-West Region never underwent the degree of industrialisation of the northern and midland regions of England. Consequently it suffered less from the decline of traditional

industries in the 1970s and 1980s. Traditionally the economy has focused around agriculture, fishing and tourism: lately, the financial and legal service industries have established a significant presence in the northern part of the region, particularly around Bristol, Bath and Swindon. Most regionally-based central government departments are based in either Bristol or Exeter.

The quality of the region's environment is recognised as an economic asset for the region, attracting tourism, heritage employment, and people of working age generally. There exist "significant areas of international and national designations for nature conservation and landscape".[10]

The high ratio of retired people and a high rate of second-home ownership are symptoms of an economic dilemma. The region's environmental quality is instrumental in attracting in-migration and making the region an attractive place to live and work, but the desire to preserve this quality can lead to the obstruction of substantial industrial or infrastructure development.

There is also "a perceived gradation in economic fortunes from the prosperous north and east [of the region] to the less affluent west partly due to different economic structures and degrees of accessibility".[11] Although the RPG goes on to point out that this is a simplistic picture, there is some truth in it—and Cornwall, being furthest west, suffers particularly strongly, as demonstrated below in table 2.4. But the gradation applies within Devon, Somerset and Dorset: economic problems are not confined to Cornwall. And there exists serious deprivation within the large urban areas, Plymouth, Bournemouth and Bristol.

Cornwall qualified for EU Objective 1 funding in 1999: the programme will last from 2000 to 2007. Some £600m of investment into five areas became available. These are: Small and Medium Enterprise and Micro-Business Support, strategic investments, developing people, community economic development and rural structural adjustment, and regional distinctiveness. The Objective 1 programme is managed from GOSW's Plymouth office. Regional Planning Guidance states that "Objective 1 status gives Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly the opportunity to promote sustainable economic growth, to restructure the area's economy creating wealth, stemming decline and retaining distinctiveness."[12]

Regional Planning Guidance

The September 2001 Regional Planning Guidance divides the South-West region into four sub-regions. These are Northern (Avon, Gloucestershire and north Wiltshire); South-East

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[10] South-West Regional Assembly, *Regional Planning Guidance,* 2001, p.9

[11] Ibid., p.10

[12] Ibid., p.36

(South Wiltshire and Dorset); Central (East Devon, Somerset); and Western (Cornwall, north and west Devon, west Somerset).

The RPG calls for focusing economic growth in the Northern sub-region, because of its better transport links and closeness to other economic centres; and the Central sub-region, due to its "pivotal role…of helping spread economic prosperity westwards throughout the region".[13] The South-East sub-region will be less easily developed due to "the level of protection afforded to environmental assets at international level",[14] whilst in the Western sub-region "there is a need for strong policies and action to tackle long-term and deep-seated economic and social problems".[15] Most development should take place within the 11 towns identified above, known as the "Principal Urban Areas". The RPG recommends avoiding the expansion of dormitory towns and of other currently smaller towns (with the exception of a number of the smaller towns in the Western sub-region, principally in Cornwall). As Cornwall makes up most of one of the sub-regions, it is treated as a "Principal Area for Regeneration where growth should be encouraged".[16] This means encouraging growth in the six or seven most important small towns in Cornwall.

RPG treats Plymouth as the urban centre of the Western sub-region, and states that "Plymouth's role, as the major urban centre in the area and the focus for the economic and social life of the communities within and around it, should be strengthened. This would benefit the wider area and improve the economic well-being of eastern Cornwall and south-west Devon."[17]

Under current arrangements, Cornwall is perceived and treated as part of a 'continuum' of the South-West region, affected by problems of peripherality and economy which grow stronger as one travels further west. The South-West region is treated as a single entity for the purposes of economic development.

Politics

The South-West Region has no recent history of discrete political arrangements, or of identifiable culture (with the argued exception of Cornwall—see Chapter 3) distinct from the remainder of England. The region contains six counties, ten unitary authorities, and 35 district councils. Cornwall is one of the county councils and contains six of the district

[13] Ibid., p.20

[14] Ibid., p.20

[15] Ibid., p.20

[16] Ibid., p.23

[17] Ibid., p.35

councils. There are 51 parliamentary constituencies, of which 5 are in Cornwall, and seven seats in the European Parliament operated on a region-wide party list constituency.

The pattern of party strength diverges from that in Parliament as a whole, because of the strength of the Parliamentary 'third party', the Liberal Democrats. The South-West, and Cornwall, have long been considered to be their stronghold. During the mid-twentieth century, when the then Liberal Party held 10 Parliamentary seats or less, some were almost always in Cornwall or the South-West. Currently, the Liberal Democrats hold 15 seats in the region, Labour 17, and the Conservatives 19. An electoral map would reveal an apparent strengthening of Liberal Democrat support as one travels further west. Labour Party seats are concentrated in the urban areas: it is rare for Labour to win a rural seat in the South-West Region.

A similar party structure exists in local government. In Devon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire, and many of the unitary authorities, power moves between the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. Gloucestershire has a strong Labour Party contingent. Unitary authorities vary between Labour (Swindon and Bristol), Conservative (Plymouth, Torbay and Bournemouth) and Liberal Democrat (Poole, Bath & North-East Somerset, and South Gloucestershire). Cornwall County Council, and its district councils, contain strong Independent representation.

The results of the 1999 European elections are shown in Table 2.1. On a turnout of only 24%, the Conservatives won four seats, whilst Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the United Kingdom Independence Party won one each. The latter enjoys relatively strong support in the South-West Region, as does the Green Party. The Liberal Party has a small local presence, and Mebyon Kernow, the Cornish nationalist party, regularly takes part in Cornish elections, occasionally winning seats.

Table 2.1: European election results, 1999, South-West constituency		
Party (seats won)	**Votes**	**Percentage**
Conservative (4)	434,645	41.7%
Labour (1)	188,362	18.1%
Liberal Democrat (1)	171,498	16.5%
UKIP (1)	111,012	10.6%
Green	86,630	8.3%
Liberal	21,645	2.1%
Pro-European Conservative	11,134	1.1%
British National Party	9,752	0.9%
Socialist Labour Party	5,741	0.6%
Natural Law Party	1,968	0.2%

Institutions of regional governance

Briefly described here are the most significant parts of regional government within the South-West Region. This section looks only at those bodies which relate to government *of* the South-West Region: for instance, the Ministry of Defence office in Bristol and the Meteorological Office in Exeter are not discussed, being concerned with national policies.

The South-West Regional Assembly (SWRA)

The SWRA is the voluntary Regional Chamber for the South-West Region. The Regional Chambers were set up under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. SWRA's only statutory function is to 'monitor' the South-West Regional Development Agency. In mid-2000 the SWRA merged with the South-West Regional Planning Body, and thus has responsibility for producing Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) for the South-West Region (published in September 2001). The SWRA shares the offices, and many of the staff, of the South-West Regional Local Government Association in Taunton.

Like the other Regional Chambers, the SWRA has taken steps beyond its official remit, and has developed relationships with a variety of bodies in the standard region (see table 2.3). All the Regional Chambers have been tasked, by an array of central government departmental initiatives, with producing a variety of 'strategies' (see Table 2.2): these have varied from the largely aspirational Regional Cultural Strategy to statutory Regional Planning Guidance. All the strategies, however, are negotiated and agreed rather than imposed: the SWRA has no executive authority over any other regional body.

Table 2.2: Current regional strategies	
Strategy	**Produced by**
Regional Economic Development Strategy	RDA with Regional Chamber
Regional Planning Guidance (RPG)	Regional Planning Body
Regional Transport Strategy	Part of RPG
Regional Cultural Strategy	Regional Cultural Consortium
Sustainable Development Framework	Sustainable Development Round Table
Regional Housing Strategy	Regional Housing Forum
Regional Waste Strategy	Part of RPG
Framework for Employment and Skills Action	Learning and Skills Councils, Employment Service, RDA

The SWRA has the largest membership (117) of the Regional Chambers. 79 members are local authority councillors. Each of the 51 principal councils (i.e. counties, districts and unitaries) is allocated one member, with the remaining 28 used as 'top-ups' to achieve overall political proportionality. The 'top-up' councillors mostly come from authorities with larger populations. The remaining 38 members are 'social and economic partners', drawn from business, the voluntary sector, environmental groups, and trade unions.

The SWRA is chaired by a Conservative Party local councillor. There are four vice-chairs, one from each of the three parties and one from the social and economic partners. It has a budget of some £1.3m: of this, £500,000 comes from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister,[18] and the majority of the remaining £600k derives from local authority subscriptions.

South-West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)

The South-West Regional Development Agency was set up in 1999 under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. Most of its initial functions and budget lines were derived from a number of predecessor bodies, most notably English Partnerships and the Rural Development Commission. Its budget in 2001-02 was some £95 million. Its head office is in Exeter, with other offices around the region in Plymouth, Truro, Poole and Bristol. It has a

[18] This budget was previously provided by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

board of 13 members appointed by the Secretary of State. Board members must have experience of "some matter relevant to the functions of the Agency"[19].

SWRDA must produce a Regional Economic Development Strategy, and submit it for approval by SWRA. If approval is not forthcoming further work must be done, but the two organisations have a close relationship which aims to prevent conflict. SWRDA's role is chiefly as a grant-giver and aid-provider to regional businesses, regenerating and improving infrastructure rather than actually carrying out development work itself.

Government Office for the South-West (GOSW)

GOSW was set up initially in 1994, with representatives from the Departments of Transport, Education and Employment, Trade and Industry, and Environment.[20] These have been joined by representatives from Culture, Media and Sport, the Home Office, and the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. GOSW also has responsibility for administering the EU Objective 1 programme in Cornwall, and the Objective 2 programmes in west Devon, west Somerset, and Bristol.

GOSW employees are civil servants from different departments under a single Regional Director. They are very much representatives of central government in the region, though sometimes (for instance, with Regional Planning Guidance) they are expected to relay the views of regional organisations to the centre. The Director, though holding a budget of some £360 million in 2001-02, has no power to vire—i.e. to move money between different programmes: the different parts of the budget are earmarked by the 'parent' departments.

GOSW representatives often attend SWRA meetings and sit on various SWRA panels dealing with certain subjects. Some GOSW responsibilities were transferred to SWRDA on the latter's formation: some were also lost to the local Learning and Skills Councils in 2000.

[19] RDA Act 1998, s.2.2.

[20] Since then these departments have become Education and Skills; Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Local Government and the Regions); Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Table 2.3: Executive agencies in the South-West region	
Body	**Coterminosity of boundaries compared with standard South-West region**
Arts Council of England	Standard
Countryside Agency	Standard
English Heritage	Standard
English Nature	Standard
English Tourist Board	Standard
Environment Agency	Standard minus Gloucestershire and Swindon
Forestry Commission	Standard
Highways Agency	Standard
Housing Corporation	Standard in practice—though formally a single region for South-East and South-West
Learning & Skills Councils	Six sub-regions: Avon, Devon & Cornwall, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire
National Health Service	A single region for South-East and South-West, plus 3 Strategic Health Authorities in the South-West
Resource (Museums, Archives and Libraries Council)	Standard
Small Business Service (Business Link)	As Learning & Skills Councils
Sport England	Standard

Executive agencies

There are a variety of executive agencies in the South-West Region. Most follow the standard boundaries of the Region, though with exceptions (shown in Table 2.3). Most of them already have joint working relationships with the three regional organisations (SWRA, SWRDA and GOSW) listed above.

Cornwall

Cornwall is at the furthest point of the South-West peninsula. Like many parts of the South-West Region it suffers from many economic and social problems, though they are often more

starkly evident there. It is a predominantly rural area, though containing substantial industrial decay from the decline of the once-widespread tin industry. Local poverty is complemented by a large tourist industry, leading to a high rate of second-home ownership and a serious problem of seasonal unemployment. Low wages and high house prices are the norm. Considerable inmigration has taken place in the last 50 years, though in Cornwall in-migrants of working age tend to outnumber retired people.

Economic indicators comparing the seven counties of the South-West Region frequently show Cornwall finishing not only seventh but a poor seventh. This is demonstrated in Table 2.4.[21] These high-level indicators demonstrate a considerable gap between the more prosperous north of the South-West (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Bristol and Bath) and the peninsular areas of Devon and Cornwall. Generally, Devon is some distance behind the regional average, whilst Cornwall is a very long way behind. The CCC cites this substantial economic divergence as demonstrating that Cornwall has uniquely strong economic problems which require a unique solution in the form of a separate regional body.

The population of 480,000 has a distinct settlement pattern, with no town containing more than 25,000 people. The nearest large city is Plymouth, in Devon, which exerts some effect on employment in the south-east of Cornwall.

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[21] Source: provided by SWRDA, using statistics from the Office for National Statistics. Key:

* Basic prices = market prices — (taxes — subsidies),

** Level 2 = 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent; Level 3 = RSA Advanced Diploma, BTEC National or equivalent; Level 4 = First degree, HCN/HND or equivalent.

*** These include: pharmaceuticals, office machinery computers, Aerospace, electronic/communications.

Table 2.4: Intra-Regional socio-economic comparisons in the South-West Region									
	UK	**SW**	**Bristol & Bath**	**Cornwall**	**Devon**	**Dorset**	**Glos.**	**Somerset**	**Wiltshire**
GDP per head (UK = 100)	100	**91**	106	65	79	87	102	87	108
ILO unemployment rate	5.3	**4.1**	5.2	5.7	5.3	3.7	3.5	4.1	3.3
Labour productivity (manufacturing GVA per head, at basic prices)*	33,615	**33,178**	40,694	24,511	30,083	28,495	35,917	31,440	33,233
Percentage of **employers** with Current Hard-to-fill **Vacancies**	16.5	**15.6**	18.8	15.6		20.3	17.2	12.3	23.2
Business formations (% of total stock of VAT registered companies)	11	**10**	12	8	8	11	10	9	12
Population change (% 1991-2000)	3.37	**5.45**	4.98	5.05	4.47	5.41	4.51	5.62	6.80
ILO Employment rate	78.4	**81.8**	82.9	74.3	80	81	85.5	83.2	85
% of self-employed to total employment	11.18	**13.14**	11.20	17.20	14.38	14.35	11.32	14.74	10.88
Average weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates	349.79	**313.22**	337.57	255.85	282.99	303.76	337.99	310.02	332.27
Productivity: GVA per hour worked (UK = 100)	100	**91.2**	105.5	65.2	79.3	87.1	101.8	86.7	108.5

An analysis commissioned by the South-West Regional Development Agency identified seven economic sub-regions within the standard region.[22] Of these, Cornwall was the only one which directly corresponded to a county area. The report stated that "zones have been defined that are essentially economic sub-regions, each…exhibiting varying degrees of economic integration and similar economic characteristics".[23] This report groups South-East Cornwall with the remainder of Cornwall in terms of economic activity, rather than with Plymouth.

The Isles of Scilly, some thirty miles west of Cornwall, has its own unitary authority for a population of 2,000. For most local service provision they co-operate with Cornwall County Council. Economically they share Cornwall's problems of peripherality and focus on tourism and the environment.

Government Offices

It is unusual for Cornwall to have its own branches of central government institutions. For instance, none of the institutions listed in Table 2.3 above use Cornwall as an English region for the purposes of service delivery. More common is a region corresponding to, or similar to, the South-West Region. This lack of institutional presence would cause difficulties for the setting-up of a Cornish Assembly, a problem which will be examined in chapters 4 and 5. However, in the last few years there has been a limited trend of 'institutional drift' towards Cornwall. GOSW and SWRDA both now have small branch offices in Truro. Also now being set up is Creative Kernow—sponsored by South-West Arts—and Heritage Kernow, sponsored by English Heritage and others. These are branch offices rather than independent organisations.

Cornwall shares the problems of geographical peripherality of the South-West Region, but to a greater degree: transport infrastructure becomes poorer the further west one travels. This is of particular importance with regard to location of institutions of governance: the poor quality of road and rail transport, abetted by the terrain, means that many of the dominant towns of the South-West Region are further away from Cornwall than they 'appear' on a map. Exeter to Truro takes over two hours by train, and more by road. Bristol is almost 200 miles away. Hence, the many Exeter-based administrative offices covering Cornwall are located an unusually large distance, in time, from much of Cornwall.

For the same reason few administrative offices are located in Cornwall in order to cover a wider area, which contributes to a lack of administrative presence in Cornwall. Few regional administrative offices exist in other parts of the standard South-West region, such as Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, and North Devon. But Cornwall, being poorer and more peripheral, would stand to benefit more sharply if this situation were altered.

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[22] See Pieda Consulting, *Spatial prioritisation: an executive summary*, Reading, 1998

[23] Pieda Consulting, op. cit., p.2

Politics

The County Council is unique compared to English counties in that it still has a large Independent representation (25 out of 79), alongside a strong Liberal Democrat and small Conservative and Labour presences. Similar patterns exist on its six district councils, whilst the Isles of Scilly council is fully Independent. Independents, however, do not stand in Parliamentary elections. The UK Independence Party in 2001, and the Referendum Party in 1997, won higher than average support in Parliamentary elections. The nationalist party, Mebyon Kernow, occasionally wins district and county seats.

Conclusion

The South-West Region is a diverse region economically and socially. As the largest region in England, any future regional assembly covering the area of the seven counties will have to deal with very different sub-regional issues; Devon has discrete problems of its own, and there is considerable inner-city deprivation in Bristol, Gloucester and Bournemouth. Advocates of the SWCC position argue that Cornwall is an integral part of this diversity, and that, though undoubtedly unique in some respects, that uniqueness does not represent a step-change that demands a different approach, in terms of institutional structures, from that proposed for the remainder of the South-West. Advocates of the CCC position, meanwhile, argue that Cornwall's uniqueness does indeed demand such an approach; also, that the Cornish cultural 'brand' would be a valuable asset in establishing a viable regional assembly.

The positions of the two Constitutional Conventions are examined in greater detail in Chapter 6. The next chapter looks at the arguments around 'culture', the relationship between it and decentralisation to regional assemblies, and what role these issues might play in elected regional government for the South-West region.

Chapter 3: Devolution and culture

This chapter examines the cultural foundation of the case for devolution for both the South-West Region and Cornwall. By 'cultural foundation' is meant distinctiveness which characterises any of the regions which are the subject of the present report, and how that cultural foundation should or could relate to the form of devolution which takes place.

Cultural foundation of political structures

Concepts like 'culture', 'nationality', 'ethnicity' and 'identity' are frequently used to justify the geographical extent of political structures. The use of these concepts, and combinations of them such as 'national identity', as bases for political structures is taken for granted in Europe. But this is, in fact, a modern European phenomenon. There is an extensive sociological literature on the rise of nationalism and the nation-state in modern Europe, and the role of ethnicity and identity in the creation of nation-states.

Culture and identity are largely created rather than inherent, from a pre-existing set of cultural symbols which act as 'raw material'. Englishness, or German-ness, or any other identity, is constructed through according particular importance to different cultural symbols. Those symbols, and the importance accorded to each of them, may vary within the identity in question—thus Englishness, or British-ness, may mean different things to different people. But it should be stressed that the fact that identities are created rather than inherent does not mean that identities are infinitely malleable. All identities are built upon existing resources and exist within a web of social relations, which cannot be easily reshaped.

Identity is very often used as a rationale for greater political autonomy for a given region or regions. It can be a useful source of social capital for a regional assembly. Keating describes social capital in this context as "patterns of social relationships and trust that permit a balance of co-operation and competition, allowing the production of public goods and long-term collective investment."[24] The latter two are valuable goods to any government.

Whilst regional identity was until recently seen as an obstacle to modern development, Keating argues that territorial and/or ethnic identity are increasingly used as sources of loyalty, in opposition to globalisation:

> "Peripheral nationalisms of developed western societies represent attempts to…reconstitute politics on a territorial basis which is legitimated historically but which can be used to confront contemporary political and economic realities."[25]

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[24] Michael Keating, *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia, and Scotland*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001, p.55

[25] Ibid., p.62-3

This strong statement refers to 'stateless nations' such as Scotland, Brittany, and Catalonia, but can be applied (less strongly) to traditional regional identities. Its implication is that, where possible, formation of new regional governments should make use of existing identities. There are affinities between the mobilisation of social capital described above and the commercial concept of 'brand loyalty'.

The claim that a distinctive identity means that a region, or sub-region, deserves regional government finds further support in European regions. In Italy, for instance, there are 5 'special regions', which have substantial legislative powers and administrative autonomy, and 15 weaker 'ordinary regions'. Each of the five special regions is culturally distinct: Sicily and Sardinia have long had autonomy/independence movements, whilst the other three (Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta, and Friuli Venezia-Giulia) contain linguistic minorities. Similarly, Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country were the first Spanish regions to achieve autonomy, in the late 1970s, and did so on the basis of their status as 'historic nationalities'. Belgium has two regions, Flanders and Wallonia, based on ethnic and linguistic divisions (with a third region for the capital, Brussels).

But the practice of matching regional governments to regional identities is not a normative one. It is not necessarily the case that where one finds an identity, one must create a region. That assumption derives from the theories of nation-state referred to above: the reasoning is that if a 'nationality' should have its own state, then a distinctive region or 'national minority' should have its own autonomous region. Such ideas are not without foundation—national minorities frequently do want autonomous regions and national governments often find it convenient to grant them—but neither are they immutable principles for the organisation of regional government.

Depth of identity

A further factor in regional devolution is depth of identity. In the UK, the Scottish Parliament has legislative powers, whilst the National Assembly for Wales has only secondary legislative powers (commonly referred to as 'executive devolution'). The rationale behind the differences was that the Scottish 'desire' for self-government was stronger than the Welsh. That belief appeared to be confirmed by the 1997 referendum results, in which the National Assembly for Wales received a 'yes' vote from 50.3% of the Welsh electorate, whilst the Scottish Parliament won the support of 74% of Scottish voters.

The implication of these gradations is that the stronger the regional identity, the more autonomy should be available. This process is marked in Spain's continuing devolution programme, where the 'historic nations' of Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country insist that, whatever powers are available to other regions, they should have more by virtue of their stronger identity.[26] These gradations, though, are based on the shared assumption that

[26] This is known as the 'hecho diferencial'. It is a political issue, not one existing in constitutional law.

regional power should correlate to identity, and that those regions do indeed have stronger identity—which again are normative beliefs. It would be almost impossible to conduct a neutral analysis of the strength of regional identity. This report is not able to make recommendations flowing from assertions about the depth of competing identities in the South-West region.

The role of identity

Opponents of regional government in England often argue that as the standard English regions have no regional identity (with the possible exceptions of the North-East and Yorkshire), there should be no regional level of government. A detailed survey carried out in 1994 by the Local Government Commission confirmed that public identification in England is primarily with the town or village in which people live, followed by the county area.[27] Traditional county areas are seen as the 'natural' level for upper-tier local government by opponents of regional government.

The belief that identity *alone* is the basis for patterns of regional government has very little foundation. A large number of European regions have no particular identity. Many of the German Länder have little historical identity, and were very unpopular with the public directly after their creation in 1948: but they have now become accepted by the German public. Many French and Italian regions (even those with familiar names to holiday-makers) function as groups of provinces or *départements*.[28] And a strong regional identity and a successful regional government do not necessarily correlate—examples are Alsace (which has the former but not the latter) and Nord-Pas de Calais (vice versa) in France. Good government is dependent in the end on coherent political programmes and competent administrators. But conversely, the success of regional governments in regions without identity does not mean that, when it is found, identity must be ignored.

In England, the lack of regional identity leads advocates of regional government to rely upon the concept of 'common interest'. It is argued that there are many issues of government which are more effectively dealt with at a wider level than that of current county or local government structures. Economic development, planning, environmental issues, and culture are commonly-quoted examples. Regional government allows county and unitary authorities to come together to pursue joint programmes more effectively than they could on their own, with the implication that counties and unitary authorities are not large enough, in terms of population or area, to take the required 'strategic overview'. It is rarely articulated why a strategic view requires large geographical areas: but these views are fundamental to the contention that Cornwall needs to become a part of a larger region.

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[27] Local Government Commission, *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires*, HMSO, 1995, p.30.

[28] The French *département* and the Italian province are equivalents of UK county-level government.

What role, therefore, should cultural foundation and identity play in the creation of a region? Though it cannot be regarded as a necessary component of a successful regional government, a strong regional identity, on balance, ought to be an advantage for a fledgling regional-level institution, not least in establishing its credibility with its electorate. The availability of a distinctive regional 'brand' can also be an advantage in economic development. Sturm suggests that economic modernisation initiatives in Germany have found this to be the case:

> "Regional support must be able to count on 'motivational resources', that is, support given freely or cost-efficiently by the local people, because not only do they identify with their region, they are also ready to do something for its future…. Motivational resources…cannot stand too much frustration and should therefore be given a clear framework with regard to the tasks to be fulfilled and the time this is going to take."[29]

This suggests that where territorial identities exist, boundaries ought to follow them if possible.

European regions

The pattern of European regional boundaries is diverse. Often, distinctive regional identities are accorded their own regions. Moreover (importantly for the case of Cornwall) this does frequently lead to regions of anomalous sizes and shapes. In Germany, Hamburg and Bremen, both cities of just under 1 million inhabitants, have their own regional governments. This reflects their historical status as city states. By comparison, the average German Land contains 4.9 million people**.** The most striking example is Valle D'Aosta, in north-west Italy. This region contains only 115,000 people, compared with an Italian average population of 2.8 million. It is also some five times smaller geographically than the Italian average.

But there are also examples from Europe of regional identity not being respected. The regional boundaries of Brittany, for instance, exclude its historical capital, Nantes: this has been interpreted as a pre-emptive move by the French state against any Breton aspirations for further autonomy. The French Basque population has no region of its own, forming part of the Aquitaine region based around Bordeaux. And the Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige, instead of redrawing regional boundaries around its German minority, has produced special arrangements for them *within* the region.

There are very few inherent restrictions, therefore, on the relationship of identity to regional government: none of the examples from Europe provide a definitive framework for regional government within the South-West Region. In fact, what is most noticeable about patterns of regional government in Europe is their heterogeneity. There are huge variations in geographical area, population, powers, functions, overall number of regions, and role within

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[29] Roland Sturm, "Regions in the new Germany", in eds. Keating and Loughlin, *The Political Economy of Regionalism*, op.cit., p.283.

national politics between regions in the different countries of Europe. The shape of regional government relates to national political issues, not to verifiable facts or pan-European assumptions.

Valle d'Aosta (Italy)

Valle d'Aosta is in the far north-west of Italy, bordering Switzerland and the rich Piedmont region. It is bilingual (French and Italian) and has a population of only 115,000. It is one of the Italian 'special regions', granted extensive legislative powers. Valle d'Aosta is both a region and a province—most Italian regions are made up of two or more provinces.

Economic success has been forthcoming in Valle d'Aosta. But regional autonomy is not the only factor at work. The town of Aosta is located at one end of an important pass road across the Swiss and French Alps. It is also located close to the Italian economic powerhouses of Milan and Turin. Tourism and agriculture have come to be supplemented by a small industrial base, particularly including specialism in the renewable energy market deriving from the largely mountainous landscape. Though on the north-west extremity of Italy, the region is emphatically not peripheral in European terms. That fact must be borne in mind if comparisons are made with a notional Cornish assembly: Cornwall, and indeed the whole South-West Region, are more geographically peripheral and would not have the ready access to major European markets that Valle d'Aosta's geographical position permits.

Trentino-Alto Adige

The granting of legislative autonomy to Trentino-Alto Adige was also influenced by World War Two. This region had belonged to the Austrian Empire until 1918 (when it was known as South Tyrol) before being absorbed by Italy. It contains two provinces, Trento and Bolzano. Bolzano (bordering Austria) is approximately 70% ethnic German, whilst Trento is almost entirely Italian (though there is no clear ethnic 'dividing line' within the region).

The interest of Trentino-Alto Adige for this discussion is that the solution to ethnic difference was to devolve much regional power to the provincial level, thus guaranteeing Bolzano province substantial autonomy, particularly cultural, *within* Trentino-Alto Adige. In formal political terms this is similar to one of the proposals made in this report (see the discussion of model 3 in Chapter 4).

The South-West Region

Despite the caveats about identity not being a necessary condition for the existence or success of regional government, analysis of it is important for this discussion. This section will examine what distinctive identity and culture can be claimed for the South-West Region.

The South-West

Very little has been written on regional identity or culture in South-West England. That is unsurprising, as regional culture in England has almost never been the subject of in-depth study; and also because the boundaries of the South-West as a territory containing a

distinctive culture are unclear. Being a peninsula, tapering away from the remainder of England, the area is more commonly perceived from outside rather than from within as being a distinctive region. Agriculture and rurality, a long coastline and spectacular environment, combined with geographical peripherality, encourage this view from outside. Inhabitants of the region are sometimes believed to speak with a distinctive accent, though in fact there are a variety of distinguishable accents within the seven counties.

The variety of names for the region, while of some interest, do not help to a great degree in establishing a culture or identity for the South-West Region. The Saxon kingdom of Wessex (deriving from 'west Saxon') covered a similar area to the present South-West Region though excluding Cornwall.[30] The word 'Wessex' is in common usage as a title for businesses, clubs and other organisations. The author conducted an Internet search of the word 'Wessex', and found that organisations using the name were most commonly located in Hampshire, Dorset, Berkshire, and Wiltshire—that is, along either side of the eastern boundary of the South-West Region. A similar search carried out on the words 'West Country' revealed organisations using this phrase to be concentrated in Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Cornwall, with Wiltshire and Dorset slightly less commonly found.

The variations in perception of a South-West region are evident from even this search. Government agency boundaries have reflected these variations. For instance, Dorset, and sometimes parts of Wiltshire, have often been grouped with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Devon and Cornwall together have occasionally been treated as a separate region. Mackintosh's early proposals for regional government, in 1968, include a South-West region consisting of Cornwall, Devon and West Somerset, with the remainder of today's standard region grouped with Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire in 'South Central'.[31]

Attempts have been made to advocate a distinct culture for Devon and Cornwall. The existence of the West Country Development Corporation during the 1980s and 1990s provided a focus for these efforts. Stanyer claimed in 1991 that "Cornwall and Devon undoubtedly 'go together' in the minds of most British citizens and form a traditional area of England which has a more distinct identity than any other group of counties in the Kingdom."[32] Devon and Cornwall had performed poorly through the 1980s compared to neighbouring Brittany: according to Stanyer, "one reason for this is the lack of a strong

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[30] A fringe group called the Wessex Regionalists wishes to recreate Wessex, removing Cornwall from the South-West Region and adding Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Berkshire and Oxfordshire (all currently in the South-East region) to it. The Wessex Regionalists see themselves as of a similar status to the Cornish nationalist party Mebyon Kernow, and support the latter's aims. They occasionally stand electoral candidates, without any success.

[31] J.P. Mackintosh, *The Devolution of Power*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.192

[32] In eds. Havinden, Quéniart and Stanyer, *Centre and Periphery: Brittany and Cornwall and Devon compared*, Wheatons, Exeter, 1991, p.204

regional identity around which the necessary forces could be mobilised".[33] But no Devon-and-Cornwall identity has emerged as a result of these efforts: if anything, Cornish identity has strengthened.

The variety of names shows that the South-West Region is not clearly defined. But equally, the wealth of uses of the various terms (all of which relate to 'west-ness') demonstrate an awareness that a distinct area exists, albeit with uncertain boundaries.

In 2000 the first 'cultural strategy' for the South-West Region was produced, by the Regional Cultural Consortium, Culture South-West. This is an umbrella group established in 1999 to provide co-ordination of cultural funding in the region. The strategy was a largely aspirational document, and it made no comments about elected regional assemblies. But it did note that the South-West was "a region of regions".[34] There was no common culture uniting the seven counties of the standard region; distinct cultures were a feature of the sub-regions (here including Cornwall).

Cornwall

To the CCC, the existence of a sense of Cornish identity is close to indisputable. Indeed, the first sentence of the preface of Payton's seminal work *The Making of Modern Cornwall* reads "Why is Cornwall different?"[35], suggesting that the existence of 'difference' is taken for granted. This view holds that Cornwall is akin to Wales: it is not a part of England but has its own, Celtic, ethnicity, culture, and language.

Unlike the nations of Scotland and Wales, Cornwall's distinctiveness has been ignored by the UK and by Westminster and Whitehall during modern history. Much of this may be due to Cornwall's small size (one-sixth of the population of Wales), its propensity to vote for neither Labour nor the Conservatives, its lack of a successful nationalist party, and its distance from centres of economic power.

There is considerable sociological and political writing on Cornwall, dwarfing that available for the South-West. Considerable arguments are made for the existence of a distinctive identity. Features of the claimed Cornish identity include rugby football, Cornish pasties and other foods, brass bands, wrestling, a revived Bardic tradition, and the shared heritage of the Cornish language and tin mining. Cornish politics, with continued strong Independent representation and a nationalist party, is also distinctive.

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[33] eds. Stanyer et al, p.71

[34] Culture South-West, *In Search of Chunky Dunsters: A cultural strategy for the South-West,* 2000, p.13

[35] Philip Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall*, Dyllansow Truran, 1992, p. ix

Cornwall was once a distinct cultural and political entity. The *Historical Atlas of South-West England*[36] analyses place-names in Devon and Cornwall, and finds place-names of Celtic origin to be overwhelmingly located in Cornwall. Conversely, place-names of Anglo-Saxon origin are overwhelmingly in Devon, though a small concentration can be found for a few miles into North-East Cornwall. The authors conclude that a 'political separation' between 600 and 1100 was the cause. The continued use of the Cornish language, plus the natural boundary of the river Tamar, kept Cornwall very distinct until around 1750.[37]

There is a tendency outside Cornwall to dismiss a distinctive Cornish culture as having died with the Cornish language in the late 18th century. One respondent from outside Cornwall characterised this viewpoint:

> "People don't take it [Cornish identity] seriously. People think it's a joke, and being Irish, I'm sensitive to that…. In Bristol there's no anti-Irish prejudice because they reserve all their hatred for the Welsh, often on the basis of total ignorance of the culture…. And something similar probably happens towards Cornwall."

This view is abetted by the concentration of attention within Cornish scholarship on portrayals of Cornish industrial history, discussions of ancient institutions, and disputes about the true shape of the Cornish language.[38] Little work has been done on the nature of Cornish identity which is not from a Cornish perspective, but at the same time little interest has been shown in Cornish identity by government. The prevalent opinion amongst policy-makers, politicians and academics outside Cornwall appears to be that Cornwall is a county which is part of the South-West Region.

Some fear of unleashing an irrational 'nationalism' is also detectable: there appears to be a belief that a Cornish regional body would become preoccupied with arcane cultural issues at

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[36] eds Roger Kain and William Ravenhill, *Historical Atlas of South-West England*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1999. (Ironically, "South-West England" in this title refers to Devon and Cornwall!)

[37] During the Middle Ages, the Stannary Parliament made Stannary Law which applied to 'Cornish tinners' (though the law's jurisdiction often applied more widely than simply to miners). The Parliament and Law have never been formally repealed, though they have been unused since 1752 and 1896 respectively. The existence of the Duchy of Cornwall was once of constitutional significance, but it is now essentially a commercial organisation.

[38] The Cornish language has been undergoing a revival throughout the 20th century. Since historical records of its use are relatively rare, some vocabulary has been 'reconstructed' through comparison with its closest relatives, Breton and Welsh. This has led to repeated disputes over spelling, grammar and vocabulary: three systems of grammar and vocabulary have been in use. At the same time, numbers fluent in the language have never risen above 2000, though popular knowledge of the language also survives through dialect and place-names. *Cornish Studies*, the journal of the Institute for Cornish Studies, exemplifies the issues referred to: in the second series, some 50% of all articles relate either to events before 1900 or to the Cornish language.

the expense of economic and social ones. An example of this is a press release by the Cornish Labour Party regarding the possibility of a Cornish assembly:

> "There was…a fear that Cornwall could become too inward looking at a time when it needs to attract more investment for improved employment and infrastructure…. We do not support a nationalistic assembly but we do appreciate that cultural differences and distinctions within the region must be recognised."[39]

These types of concern are rarely clearly argued (for example, what is a 'nationalistic assembly'?), and inchoate worries at times appear to dominate analysis of the issues, but they may influence opinion on the appropriate shape of regional boundaries.

A distinctive culture

The post-war 'Cornish Revival' mirrored the nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales in many ways, though on a smaller scale. Mebyon Kernow (MK) was formed in 1951 purely as a culture-related pressure group, much as Plaid Cymru had been in Wales. MK encouraged dual membership with political parties, but began to contest elections itself in 1970 in the wake of the electoral successes of Plaid Cymru in the late 1960s.

Unlike their Scottish and Welsh counterparts, MK has never held more than a few county and district council seats at a time, and has never come close to electing its own MP (although two 1970s MPs were also members of MK). But their presence has obliged a more Cornish outlook from major party election candidates: standing up for Cornwall has become a highly effective part of any Cornish election campaign.[40] Inmigration during the last 50 years, combined with continued economic underperformance, has created a considerable sense of grievance reflected in several political campaigns in the last 35 years. There is a history of 'home-grown' development plans produced within Cornwall, as alternatives to central- or regionally-sponsored plans for the area. These have rarely been acknowledged by authorities from outside Cornwall; this is a significant factor leading to opposition to a South-West regional assembly. The Cornish Constitutional Convention is not the first campaigning group to make a distinct case for Cornwall, but the latest in a long line.

There has been an ongoing determination to maintain the boundary of Cornwall. Both the Kilbrandon (1968) and Redcliffe-Maud (1972) reports suggested a Plymouth unitary authority including parts of south-east Cornwall. This was opposed by popular and institutional mobilisation. A similar level of agitation was unable to prevent the incorporation of Cornwall with Plymouth for elections to the European Parliament.

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[39] County Labour Party of Cornwall, press release, November 2001. The press release related to a meeting where the Labour position on a Cornish assembly had been discussed.

[40] Philip Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall*, op. cit., p.223-232

The regional arts board, South-West Arts, has set up a form of sub-agency for Cornwall called 'Creative Kernow'. This is a 'one-stop shop' created to help arts within Cornwall to be more coherently advised, funded and promoted. It will not take on executive and budgetary functions from South-West Arts. The step resulted from pressure from a variety of individuals and organisations within Cornwall, over time, asserting that Cornish culture was sufficiently different to merit separate consideration within South-West Arts.[41] The fact of this pressure suggests that concerns about a distinctive Cornish culture are not imaginary.

Comparisons of Cornish identity

Little sociological or comparative work has been done on Cornish identity or self-definition. Aldous and Williams carried out a survey in 2000 which showed 30% of Cornish students aged 16-18 self-identifying as Cornish and some 60% as English (with the remainder as 'other'). There was an increase in Cornish identification further west into Cornwall. [42]

A survey was carried out in 2002 by Golley Slater, consultants hired under Cornwall's Objective 1 programme. In a sample of 719 adults, this found that 35% self-identified as Cornish, 33% as British and 27% as English. The high self-identity of 'British' instead of English is also found in the northern regions of England, as well as in Scotland and Wales.

These two surveys alone cannot be evaluated conclusively, but observations can be made. On the one hand, it would be very surprising to obtain comparable results from any English county—few would be likely to identify with Yorkshire, for instance, *over against* England. On the other hand, these results reveal levels of self-identity somewhat lower than those found in the devolved nation of Wales. The Welsh Election Survey of 1979 found 57% of respondents self-identifying as Welsh, 34% as British, and only 8% as English.[43] That suggests a more widespread Welsh identity even twenty years ago.

Wales throws a light upon the meaning of territorial identities which is of importance to the present study. The Welsh identity has long been fundamentally contested. There are divides between urban and rural, Welsh- and English-speaking, north and south Wales. These divides have been used to suggest that Wales was not a 'nation' or 'region', that there was no coherent 'Welsh identity' and, therefore, Wales did not merit its own form of political representation in the form of a devolved parliament or assembly. In 1984, for instance, Neil Kinnock (then Labour leader) suggested that North Wales should have one regional

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[41] The use of the word 'Kernow' (Cornish for Cornwall) in the title marks a small but growing trend towards greater use of Celtic words and names by Cornish public bodies.

[42] Philipa Aldous and Malcolm Williams, "A Question of Ethnic Identity", *Cornish Studies 2:9,* p.213-226. No option of 'British' was given in this survey, which may distort the findings.

[43]Denis Balsom, "The Three-'Wales Model" in ed. Osmond and Gomber, *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*, 1985, p.1

assembly and South Wales another.[44] This suggestion related to the economic and cultural differences between North and South Wales. Arguments over the distinctions between North and South Wales resurfaced in the 'no' campaign during the 1997 devolution referendum.

On the other hand, those campaigning 'yes' in that referendum did so on the basis (often felt to be so self-evident that it was not made explicit) that Wales was indeed a nation—or at the very least, 'different' from the rest of Britain—and therefore deserved devolved government. Both sides, in effect, shared the view that a form of self-government was linked to a particular notion of identity.

However, this does not automatically mean that Cornwall is entitled to an assembly in order to allow its identity to strengthen just as Wales's did. Fevre and Thompson (1999) remark that it is commonplace for academic writing to assume that regional or national grievances must be justified, even if the evidence for their prevalence amongst the population at large is scant. Much writing on Wales has explained away lack of Welsh identity as a form of 'false consciousness', whilst asserting that any evidence of Welsh identity, however debatable, was a portent of the future. In other words, it was assumed that Welsh identity would increase over time and that this would be both 'right' and beneficial.

Conclusion

There is a strong case to be made that a distinctive Cornish identity exists. The levels of self-identity shown in the surveys described, plus the distinctive features outlined, suggest a regional identity that may be qualitatively different from any other in England. If 'depth of identity' were to automatically map directly on to strength of political devolution, it is likely that a Cornish Assembly could expect fewer powers than Wales or Scotland, but a South-West regional assembly would have very thin powers indeed. Elcock and Parks (2000) suggest:

> "Where a region has a mainly cultural basis supported by some functional viability, the case for regional autonomy will be strong and the region definite. Conversely, where a region's main *raison d'être* is functional, even if it has some cultural support, the case for autonomy is likely to be less watertight."[45]

The culture of the South-West Region is not distinctive enough that there is a clear boundary separating the region from the remainder of England. There is clearly something there, not strong enough to become a 'mainly cultural basis' for regional devolution, but present nevertheless. Of the two categories in Elcock and Parks's statement it falls firmly into the latter.

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[44] Osmond (1985), p.251.

[45] Howard Elcock and Judith Parks, "Why do regions demand autonomy?", *Regional and Federal Studies 10:3*, Autumn 2000, p.104

Chapter 4: Models of regional government

This chapter sets out three possible models for devolution to the South-West Region. It examines the possible electoral and political management arrangements for the three models, in the light of the previous chapter and of the Government's programme. It also examines the functions that such an assembly might undertake, the reach of its powers, and the means for arriving at each of the three models.

The models are:

1. A, seven-county South-West regional assembly;
2. A Cornish assembly and a six-county South-West regional assembly;
3. A South-West regional assembly with special arrangements for Cornwall.

These models will be fleshed out on the working assumption that the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, forms the exact blueprint for future English regional assemblies. The proposals for elected assemblies in that document are summarised below.

Your Region, Your Choice

Under the proposals made in the Government's White Paper, elected regional assemblies will be created on the boundaries of the standard regions only. They will be created only following a referendum, the timing of which will be decided by the Government alone. Before a referendum takes place, the Boundary Committee for England will draw up a plan for *fully unitary* local government to replace the existing two-tier county and district structure in the region in question. (Existing unitary authorities will not be reviewed.)

Regional assemblies will elect between 25 and 35 members, by the Additional Member system of proportional representation (used in Scotland, Wales and London). Approximately one-third of the members will be 'top-up list' members: there will be a single top-up constituency in each region.

Regional assemblies will be financed by a block grant, with four components. One will be the budgets inherited, along with their functions, from existing regionally-based institutions. A second will be a running costs allowance of some £20 million. A third will be a power to precept upon the local authorities in their region. The fourth will be the power to borrow (currently available to Regional Development Agencies) subject to Government approval. Assemblies will be able to move funds around between budget heads as they see fit.

The proposed functions of regional assemblies are displayed in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.[46] The 'executive functions' are those over which elected regional assemblies will have direct executive control, with the right to allocate budgets as they see fit. The 'influencing

[46] Reproduced from Mark Sandford, *Commentary on the Regional White Paper,* Constitution Unit, 2002

functions' are those where the elected assembly will have a statutory right to consultation or appointment of board members.

Table 4.1: Executive functions of elected assemblies	
Function	**Current location**
Economic development	Regional Development Agency
European funding programmes	Government Office
Planning	Regional Chamber / local authorities
Housing capital investment allocations Housing association allocations	Government Office Housing Corporation
Culture Tourism Museums, Libraries and Archives Upkeep of heritage sites Sport (under review) Arts "that are regional in character" (under review)	(Regional Cultural Consortium) Regional Tourist Board Resource English Heritage Sport England Arts Council of England
Rail Passenger Partnership grants	Strategic Rail Authority
Rural regeneration programmes	Government Office
Regional contingency planning	

Table 4.2: Influencing functions of regional assemblies	
Function	**Nature of function**
Business support	Consultation by Small Business Service
Skills	Draw up Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action Appoint two members to every local LSC board. LSCs to consult Assembly on plans, and have regard to Assembly's plans (statutory)
Planning	Power to request call-in of major projects by Secretary of State if not consistent with Regional Spatial Strategy
Transport	Advise on allocation of money to local transport plans (Government Offices) Make proposals to Highways Agency and Strategic Rail Authority: consultation by those bodies
Lottery funding	Appointment of members to regional awards committees
Culture	Regional Cultural Strategy, to be followed by Arts Council, Sport England and tourist authorities
Public health	Health Improvement Strategy with Regional Directors of Public Health
Environment	Appointments to Environment Agency's regional committee[47] Right to consultation of and by Environment Agency, Countryside Agency, English Nature
Crime reduction	Local crime reduction partnerships and drug action teams to consult Assembly on their strategies.

Elected regional assemblies will also be obliged to create ten strategies, listed in Table 4.3:

[47] Environment Agency regions are entirely different from the standard regions, being based on river basins; it is not clear, therefore, how this proposal is to be implemented.

Table 4.3: Strategies for an elected regional assembly[48]
Regional Economic Development Strategy
Regional Spatial Strategy (replacing RPG)
Regional Transport Strategy
Regional Cultural Strategy
Sustainable Development Framework
Regional Housing Strategy
Regional Waste Strategy
Framework for Employment and Skills Action
Health Improvement Strategy
Biodiversity Strategy

Models for the South-West

The following three models suggest possible means of application of the Government's proposals to the South-West Region.

Model 1

Model 1 is a South-West regional assembly, covering all seven counties. Local government in the region would be reorganised into a unitary structure. There would be some 20-22 single-member constituencies and 10-12 seats available in a 'top-up' constituency covering the entire region.

An approximate budget likely to be initially available to Model 1 is shown in Table 4.4. The figures shown are based on budgets currently available for each function currently proposed for elected regional assemblies. The White Paper proposes that each budget should be separately allocated, and the several figures should be rolled into a single block grant. This method of funding is similar to the Standard Spending Assessment, the current formula for local authority funding allocations.

[48] DTLR/Cabinet Office, 2002,*Your Region, Your Choice*, box 4.1, p.36

Table 4.4: Expenditure in 2001/02 on programmes for which an elected South-West regional assembly would take responsibility	
National programmes	**Expenditure (£ million)**
Regional Development Agency	98
Housing capital—local authorities	55
Housing capital—registered social landlords	50
Rail Passenger Partnership	1
Rural regeneration programmes	2
Arts, sport and tourism	8
English Heritage	1
General administration grant	20
Local authority precept	5
Total national programmes	**240**
European programmes	55[49]
Borrowing	?
Possible total	**295**

The powers and flexibility available to a body with these limited powers and comparatively limited budgets will be thin. The level of borrowing that will be available to an elected assembly is uncertain, but it will be limited by the assembly's ability to finance repayments. There is little slack in the budget above through which to do so. This model of regional assembly would also not have power to carry out significant capital spending projects. These are the most substantial opportunity for an assembly to make its mark and make a visible difference to the lives of its electorate.

Moreover, European programmes are not recurring expenditure and should not therefore be counted as part of a block grant: the £55 million quoted will have been spent by the earliest date by which an elected assembly could be up and running in the South-West.

This model of assembly would be a starting-point in creating real regional capability: knowledge about economic, social and environmental indicators at the level of the English regions is very limited. It would be capable of carrying on the work of the current

[49] Note: This figure does not include the Objective 1 funding available to Cornwall, which is a one-off injection of aid, and the inclusion of which would totally distort the figures given.

administrative structures and giving them a political focus, increasing the degree to which policy measures can be tailored to the needs of the South-West.

Model 2

This model envisages a Cornish assembly alongside a regional assembly for the six counties comprising the remainder of the South-West Region (henceforward RSWR). The two assemblies would be equal in status. The assembly covering the remainder of the South-West Region would function in the same way as the single regional assembly proposed under Model 1.

Given that the Government indicates, in the White Paper, that it is not willing to create elected regional assemblies on any boundaries except the standard ones, this model is not achievable under the terms of the White Paper.[50] For the present discussion, this fact is put aside.

Table 4.5 breaks down the budget initially available to the assembly proposed in table 4.4, under Model 1, for two separate assemblies as proposed under this model. As detailed figures for the actual breakdown of spending between Cornwall and the rest of the standard region are not available, one-tenth of each budget in Table 4.4 has been allocated to Cornwall and the remaining nine-tenths to the RSWR. This reflects the ratio of the population of Cornwall and the RSWR. This is a schematic method of separating out existing expenditure and should be taken as indicative only. A Cornish assembly might in fact receive more or less money with which to carry out its responsibilities.

[50] The White Paper states that the Government would consider using the mechanisms presently available under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 to alter regional boundaries. However, this Act only allows alteration of existing boundaries, not the creation of more regions than currently exist.

Table 4.5: Expenditure in 2001/02 on programmes for which a Cornish assembly and an elected regional assembly for the remainder of the South-West Region would take responsibility		
National programmes	**Expenditure for RSWR assembly (£ million)**	**Expenditure for Cornish assembly (£ million)**
Regional Development Agency	76	19[51]
Housing capital—local authorities	49.5	5.5
Housing capital—registered social landlords	45	5
Rail Passenger Partnership	0.9	0.1
Rural regeneration programmes	1.8	0.2
Arts, sport and tourism	6.75	0.75
English Heritage	0.9	0.1
General administration grant	20	8
Local authority precept	4.5	0.5
Total national programmes	**205.35**	**39.15**
European programmes	(55—see below)	?
Borrowing	?	?
Possible total	**205.35**	**39.15**

The general administration grant for a Cornish Assembly would not reduce exactly proportionately to the population size of the two assemblies modelled. The administration grant covers fixed costs—such as assembly members' salaries; administrative, finance, and personnel staff; and publicity materials—which could not be reduced below a certain minimum. As a very rough estimate, loosely modelled on the costs of elected members and

[51] The figure of £19 million represents approximate SWRDA expenditure in Cornwall in 2001-02. (Source: personal communication from SWRDA office.)

administrative staff to the Greater London Authority, a budget of £8 million has been assumed.[52]

Cornwall's Objective 1 programme is also omitted for the purposes of this table, as it would entirely distort the budget figures. The £55 million of current European programmes listed under the RSWR budget relate to areas outside Cornwall. It should be noted that this is a one-off sum and will not be available by the time any RSWR assembly takes up its powers, which is why it is omitted from the 'possible total' in Table 4.5.

A unitary authority for Cornwall

A further alternative solution to the issues addressed in this report which has been proposed is the creation of a unitary authority for Cornwall, beneath a South-West regional assembly. The aim was to provide a powerful voice for Cornwall within the South-West Region, hence allaying fears that Cornwall would be marginalised by an elected assembly based on a wider area. A unitary Cornwall, with a population of some 480,000, would be the largest local authority by population in the South-West Region.

Under the Government's proposals for elected regional assemblies, local authorities will have an important role as one of the main delivery agents for the ten strategies that assemblies will write. Local authorities are likely to be closely consulted over the content of these strategies, as they will be vital partners for regional assemblies. They will have an important regional role. Therefore, a unitary authority for Cornwall might be able to exercise considerable influence over the content of the regional strategies, to its own benefit. That would not be guaranteed: many parts of the very diverse South-West region have different interests from those of Cornwall and might exercise a stronger collective voice themselves.

The possible benefits from this proposal are mainly confined to the democratic arena. It is not likely that a unitary authority for Cornwall would constitute a significant difference from the current two-tier structure when it came to negotiating inward investment and economic support. In 2002 the county council spent some £377 million annually, and the six district councils combined only some £53 million.

This proposal would be supported by some within Cornwall who, whilst unconvinced of the case for a Cornish assembly, believe that Cornwall should have a single elected authority to speak with a single voice. The need for a single elected authority in Cornwall was stressed by several respondents both in Cornwall and the remainder of the South-West. Besides this, there is widespread discontentment with the boundaries of the six district councils in Cornwall, many of which cover two or three small towns which have few interests in

[52] The true administration figure for a Cornish assembly would depend upon whether the Government chose to award it £20 million running costs, as in the White Paper, despite the smaller population size compared to other regional assemblies.

common. A unitary authority is perceived as a way of solving both of these problems at once.

It has been suggested that a South-West regional assembly could devolve some of its own responsibilities, with regard to Cornwall, to a unitary authority in Cornwall. However, for this to be possible, a future Regional Assemblies Act would need to include a power for elected regional assemblies to delegate functions to local government. No such power is proposed in the White Paper. The Government could draw up such a power to be applied solely to Cornwall, though this might lead to controversy.

It is inescapable that a unitary authority for Cornwall would remain a form of local government, and would not represent a step change in the power available to be exercised over Cornwall from within Cornwall.

Devon and Cornwall

Since the establishment of the regional bodies described above, there has been some drift in the private and voluntary sector toward establishing regional boundaries that are coterminous with the standard ones. However, it is appropriate to note one common deviation: that is the grouping of Devon and Cornwall separately from the remainder of the standard South-West region. This has occasionally been advanced because of the geographical size of the standard South-West region, and the extra distance of Devon and Cornwall from the economic centres of the remainder of England

The new Strategic Health Authorities and the local Learning and Skills Councils both operate a Devon-and-Cornwall level structure: so do the police force and ambulance service, normally conceived of as local government services. The Liberal Democrats' regional organisation is based on Devon and Cornwall alongside the remainder of the standard region. The West Country Development Corporation was established over the two counties between 1992 and 1996. There also exists a Devon and Cornwall Business Council, whose chief executive told the author:

> "Nothing would cause us to change the geographical coverage of the Devon & Cornwall Business Council, which has not been based upon any administrative, political, cultural or sentimental criteria—but simply the unique strategic infrastructure problems constraining economic development in a lowly-populated extended peninsula (problems shared equally by the counties of Devon and Cornwall)."[53]

This regional pattern is commonly referred to as the "5+2" pattern—i.e. one region for the five counties (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and the former Avon) plus one for Devon and Cornwall. With a combined population of some 1.6 million, Devon and Cornwall was apparently considered to be "big enough" to form a region by the Millan Report of 1996:

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[53] Telephone interview followed by e-mail correspondence, February 2002.

> "In the South-West, Devon and Cornwall have a distinct identity from the rest of the region and we are minded to propose a separate chamber corresponding to the new GOR office in Plymouth."[54]

In 1996 there was speculation that more than one regional chamber could 'nest' within a single standard region, though in the event the proposal above was not implemented. In fact the Government Office in Plymouth has never been a territorial sub-regional office; it was established to administer European programme funding, which in 1996 was concentrated in Cornwall, north and west Devon, and west Somerset.

A region consisting of Devon and Cornwall alone is a feasible proposition. Cornwall would form about one-third of the region's population, compared to the current one-tenth of the South-West region. It would not be possible for Cornish needs to be ignored within the region. There might be some support for it within Cornwall: some respondents, whilst doubting the case for a Cornish assembly, felt strongly that the standard South-West region was over-large and unwieldy, and that its boundaries needed to be reviewed.

But there would also be plenty of opposition from within Cornwall to a link with Devon. The CCC has argued that Devon and Cornwall do not suffer from comparable problems and should not be grouped in terms of strategic policy-making. This position has some weight: a report produced in 1996 demonstrated that the pattern of deprivation in Cornwall was unlike any other part of the UK.[55] Devon, by contrast, exhibited patterns of rural deprivation, extreme inner-city poverty and rural affluence which were comparable with many other parts of Britain.

A possible alternative would be to imitate the solution used by the Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige, discussed in Chapter 3. The two provinces making up this region have very different characters: broadly, one is ethnically German, one Italian. To maintain the region instead of permitting a region solely for Bolzano, the German province, the regional government decentralises most functions in turn to the two provinces.

But if this were to be considered for a Devon and Cornwall region, a number of difficulties emerge. The current Government proposals would not permit decentralisation of functions to sub-regional authorities (this was possible in Trentino-Alto Adige as that region has its own statute of autonomy, tailored to its particular needs). To permit this, a separate Devon-and-Cornwall bill would be required. Also, Devon no longer has a single county authority, having lost Plymouth and Torbay to unitary status during the 1990s: would those two authorities be able to take on regional functions?

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[54] Labour Party, *A New Voice for England's Regions*, 1996, p.13

[55] Judy Payne, *Interpreting the Index of Local Conditions: Relative Deprivation in Devon and Cornwall*, Universities of Exeter and Plymouth, 1996

In practice it seems very unlikely that a region for Devon and Cornwall would be considered by the Government, and it would certainly not be accepted by many people in Cornwall.

Model 3

In legislative terms this model is an equivalent structure to that suggested under model 1: a seven-county assembly for the South-West Region, with the same powers, functions, and electoral arrangements. But included in this are several institutional arrangements permitting a degree of autonomy to Cornwall within that structure. Potential special arrangements are listed here. In practice they are not all necessary to make the model work—they could be 'cherry-picked'—but the more that are used, the stronger the special arrangements become.

1) A Cornish Office, with an Executive Member for Cornwall[56], would be created. The Executive Member would sit in the regional executive; like other ministers, he or she would be responsible for the department's actions. The Cornish Office would hold a similar place in relation to the Assembly to that held by the Welsh Office in the UK prior to devolution in 1999: most of its staff could be located in Cornwall.

The Cornish Office would obtain a budget from the South-West Region assembly. This budget would most likely be in the region of the figure of £39 million quoted for a Cornish assembly under Model 2 above, but *minus* the £8 million running costs cited under that model. That would make the effective budget for the Cornish Office nearer £31 million. It is possible that political expediency, or strength of need, would lead the South-West regional assembly to make a larger budget than that available to a Cornish Office.

This model would permit the gradual devolution of Cornish functions from the South-West Region's constituent departments to the Cornish Office. That is what happened to the Welsh Office itself: it accumulated functions from its inception in 1966 through to the 1990s. This facilitated greatly the creation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, because of the existing administrative presence that was available to the new democratic institution. This gradual approach would mitigate the administrative upheaval referred to earlier. And if it became clear that certain functions could not be administered within Cornwall alone, under this model that becomes clear before a more comprehensive reorganisation is attempted.

The Executive Member for Cornwall would ultimately be responsible to the leader of the South-West Region. The leader would select the Executive Member for Cornwall

[56] The actual titles of the departments and portfolio holders will no doubt be decided either by the regional assemblies themselves or by Government. As the elected regional assemblies proposed by the White Paper are very slimline bodies, it seems unlikely that the term 'Minister' would be used to describe the members of the regional executive: instead, 'Leader' and 'Executive Member' have been used.

and would have the right to replace the Executive Member if he or she so wished. There are party complications: if the governing party(ies) held no seats in Cornwall, a non-Cornish assembly member would have to be appointed as Executive Member for Cornwall.

A scrutiny committee for the Cornish Office would need to be created. This Committee would meet perhaps fortnightly, as in the existing devolved assemblies. This mirrors the arrangements for the Welsh Office at Westminster before devolution. But the Welsh Affairs Committee normally consisted only of Welsh MPs. It would be impossible to follow this precedent under the Government's current plans. Whilst Wales has 40 MPs, in a South-West regional assembly of 25-35 members Cornwall will have 2-3 assembly members (one of whom may be the Executive Member for Cornwall).

The numbers on this proposed committee could be made up either by non-Cornish assembly members, or by co-option of local government councillors from Cornwall. The White Paper proposes to permit co-option of members on to regional assembly committees, possibly with voting rights. The political proportionality of the committee would need to be addressed: the convention is that political proportionality matches that of the overall assembly. This might be difficult in this case, as Cornish political balance is quite different from that of the South-West Region as a whole.

2) Cornwall could be over-represented in the South-West Region assembly terms of seats—just as Scotland and Wales were pre-devolution (and still are) at Westminster. Under the White Paper's proposals, assuming an assembly of 25-35 members, this could entail three seats instead of two for Cornwall (excluding the single top-up constituency for the whole of the South-West region).

3) The Ministry for Cornwall could formulate a joint Strategy for Cornwall with local government bodies (whatever their shape would be under this model). It would make sense to co-ordinate spending in Cornwall across the existing bodies. This Strategy could not have statutory force, but would be a valuable focus of policy-making.

4) This model would be further strengthened if a unitary authority were to be created for Cornwall, as explored above. That would reduce the number of different authorities that it would be necessary for the Cornish Office to consult. The Scilly Isles will continue to be a unitary authority and will need to be consulted separately by the Cornish Office.

This model attempts to recognise the distinctiveness of Cornish claims within the South West Region; and, if put into practice properly, it holds open the door for further change. It will

also clarify the difficulties, if they exist, with running 'regional-level' issues in a territory the size of Cornwall.

Referendums

The creation of any regional assemblies will be subject to a referendum of the relevant electorate. Under models 1 or 3 above, the electorate of the South-West Region would vote in a single, standard-region-wide referendum. But how would a referendum be held if two assemblies were proposed, as under model 2?

In principle, the creation of one regional assembly should not be subject to a veto power from another region. There are very few international examples of referendums on a geographical area's constitutional status being subject to formal or *de facto* veto by other geographical areas. The matter is complicated, and politicised, by the possibility (examined further in Chapter 6) that, in a referendum across the South-West Region, Cornish 'no' votes could be decisive in a rejection by the electorate of a South-West regional assembly.

It follows that, if a referendum takes place on a Cornish assembly, it should take place in Cornwall only, and should not be linked to a referendum in, or about, the standard South-West region. This may be somewhat controversial, but alternatives are not appealing:

- **A single referendum for the South-West Region: if a 'no' vote was received, a single referendum in Cornwall**. The arithmetic of this could allow Cornish 'no' votes to prevent any devolution in the South-West Region, then to vote 'yes' for a Cornish Assembly. This would be unfair to supporters of a regional assembly in the South-West Region.
- **A single referendum with multi-question option in Cornwall only**. This would permit a three-way choice in Cornwall only. The choice would be: a Cornish assembly, a South-West regional assembly, or no assembly. In the RSWR only the latter two choices would be available.
  This allows both support for a South-West regional assembly and a Cornish Assembly to be expressed. But it would be unfair for inhabitants of the RSWR to vote on devolution without knowing whether Cornwall is 'in' or 'out'. Arithmetically, it would be unclear whether a majority in the six counties outside Cornwall, or in all seven counties, of the South-West region, was required. If Cornwall voted for its own assembly, but votes for a South-West regional assembly in Cornwall were critical in obtaining a majority for a South-West regional assembly, a paradoxical situation would result.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped out the legal and electoral processes, and governmental structures, around three possible models of devolution to the South-West Region. Prediction of possible future constitutional situations is not an exact science; this chapter is the first and not the final word on the issues.

Chapter 5 looks in more detail at how the different administrative models proposed here would work in practice. It should be noted here that it is possible that initial decisions made may have a lasting effect on the various options set out above. For instance, if a South-West regional assembly were created and a unitary authority for Cornwall also created, this would pose problems for a future move to a Cornish assembly if that came about. Alternatively, it would be *theoretically* possible—though unlikely—for the remainder of the South-West region to vote for an assembly and for Cornwall not to, which would create an anomalous situation. This serves as a reminder that the issues under discussion have few simple answers.

Chapter 5: Viability of regional assemblies

This chapter explores the possible administrative, economic and financial consequences of the three models of regional devolution described in Chapter 4. Several interviews were carried out with senior officers in regional executive agencies in the South-West, and in local government in Cornwall, to explore the issues raised in this chapter.

This chapter represents a set of tentative explorations rather than confident predictions. It is near-impossible to make predictions about the medium- to long-term consequences of constitutional change: nothing that is stated here should be taken as certain or inevitable. Political issues will be perhaps more vital in the eventual choice of model, but for the purposes of this discussion they are held in suspense until Chapter 6.

Finance

The financial powers of elected regional assemblies are, in many ways, as important as their functions. Without serious money, and at least some flexibility over how it is spent, no regional assembly will be able to effectively discharge whatever responsibilities it is given, and thereby to add value to government in England.

The comparatively small size of assembly budgets under the models sketched out in Chapter 4 (which assumed that regional assemblies would take the form set out in the White Paper) has already been referred to. This is mitigated somewhat by the freedom to move money around as the assembly sees fit, within the context of negotiated performance measures.

But the budget likely to be available to a Cornish assembly under Model 2, in particular, will be particularly small, and there is room for doubt whether such an assembly could make any significant contribution towards Cornish problems, especially economic issues. The larger sums likely to be available to a South-West regional assembly permit greater flexibility to commit significant sums to Cornwall.

The sums available to Regional Development Agencies have come in for criticism from commentators. Though welcome, and preferable to no money, they have been criticised as inadequate to fulfil the considerable tasks set by Government:

> "[RDAs'] budgets account for less than 1% of public expenditure in their respective regions. With such modest powers and budgets the RDAs have been charged with a Sisyphean task…. Many English regions long to emulate their more dynamic continental European counterparts, but the latter are embedded in robust national systems where many functions—health, education, training and transport for example—are far better resourced, and this is one of the less visible ways in which the *national* level contributes to the quality of life at the sub-national levels."[57]

[57] Kevin Morgan, "The New Regeneration Narrative", *Local Economy*, forthcoming in autumn 2002, p.3

These problems remain whichever of the three models described is used in the South-West. They are compounded by the lack of regional social capital in the UK, where public, private and other sectors have little experience of working together for shared policy objectives. When this happens, greater momentum in regional development can be achieved.

Central funding

Elected regional assemblies, in the form proposed in the White Paper, will rely on lobbying and co-ordination to achieve visible results. Outside these roles, their success will be dependent upon central government grant. They will have very limited powers to raise their own money. Thus the distribution of grant will be fundamental in the potential of elected regional assemblies to achieve useful outcomes.

According to the White Paper, the Government is currently developing formulas to govern the distribution of funding to regional-level authorities. If these formulas are needs-based, it is probable that a Cornish assembly would be entitled to more than £39 million—one-tenth of the current South-West allocation plus £8 million running costs—due to the severe economic problems that it faces. Actual South-West RDA spending in Cornwall in the last financial year amounted to £19-20 million.

The allocation of extra funds to a Cornish assembly, and the provision of an additional £8 million in running costs, could lead to controversy because of the higher per-capita funding involved for the Cornish institution. Higher per-capita funding does not in itself demonstrate that this assembly would be non-viable. Almost all regional governments in Europe, particularly in poor regions, depend upon central support by means of what amount to inter-regional transfers or 'subsidy'. The creation of elected regional assemblies in England will not lead to the end of inter-regional transfers: central government's retained powers and commitment to equality of service provision will remain for the foreseeable future. By way of other examples, Valle d'Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige have been strongly favoured in regional transfers by the Italian state. Political circumstances will inevitably lead to some regions doing better than others in obtaining funding.

Equally, a Cornish assembly is not guaranteed higher per-capita funding, and there is room for doubt over the effectiveness of a body with a very low level of grant as illustrated in Chapter 4.

Administrative viability

Model 1

An elected regional assembly for the South-West region should have few problems in functioning effectively, despite the small budget available.

A Model 1 assembly would also have few problems in taking over the functions of housing allocations, arts, sport and tourism, and European programmes, as listed in Table 4.1. These are all currently administered on the basis of the standard region.

Were further proposals to be made for decentralisation of responsibilities to a Model 1 assembly—such as those listed in Table 2.3—few administrative problems would arise, as most of these bodies too are administered on the basis of the standard region. Some of the national executive agencies retain a strategic capacity at their central offices, with regional offices acting as delivery points. If further decentralisation was proposed, arrangements would have to be made, either to permit the centre's current strategic capacity to be exercised in and for the region, or to establish link mechanisms between the central office and the regional administration.

As an aside, there is evidence of considerable opposition to this kind of 'dismemberment' of national agencies from within the agencies themselves: they perceive themselves as national agencies delivering regionally, fulfilling statutory duties through a national strategy. This issue will affect all regional assemblies equally, however, and should not prevent decentralisation from taking place.

Model 3

The proposals for a Cornish Office made under Model 3 are discussed here. The Cornish Office would take over some or all of the functions of the South-West regional assembly as they applied to Cornwall. Economic development, housing funding allocation, arts, sport, tourism and the remaining functions listed in Table 4.1, would be passed to the Cornish Office.

A block grant for Cornwall would need to be negotiated between the Executive Member for Cornwall and the leader of the South-West regional assembly. This raises the possibility of Cornwall obtaining proportionately more or less than its size, or its needs, entitle it to: politics would decisively influence the amount of funds made available.

Some of the functions listed above, if they are passed over to the Cornish Office, are likely to bring very small budgets or staff allocations with them. This could cause problems in creating policy-making capacity. Bodies such as South-West Arts employ around 40 staff (full-time equivalent) at present: this would imply only 5-10 moving into the Cornish Office. It is possible that further staff would need to be employed. This would not be an insurmountable obstacle, but raises once again the political issue of comparatively higher expenditure on Cornwall.

There would also be some overlap between the planning, tourism, arts and libraries functions of the Cornish Office and of local government. But the resources in question are not large, and joint working should be feasible at a small-scale, Cornwall-only level, so again this need not be an insurmountable obstacle.

It would be possible that some regional assembly functions would not be transferred to the Cornish Office, but would continue to be exercised on the basis of the whole of the South-West region. This would reduce the *raison d'être* of the Model 3 assembly, but it would in the

end be a matter for the politicians elected to the assembly to decide how faithfully the model was followed.

Strategies

Decisions would have to be made about how to handle the ten strategies that the regional assembly will have to write. Each strategy will either need to be written for the entire region, or for the region excluding Cornwall. If the Cornish Office is to have any meaningful ability to diverge in policy from the remainder of the South-West region (which is, in the end, its *raison d'être*), it would make sense for it to create an overarching strategy for Cornwall, and not to be bound by strategies written for the entire region. A Cornish strategy could be written jointly with local government, as suggested in chapter 4.

Alternatively, a Cornish strategy could be explicitly derived from the strategies written at the level of the entire region. This would entail less flexibility for the Cornish Office to devise tailored policies that were different from those elsewhere in the region. Political pressure is likely to be more decisive than practical issues in determining exactly how the Cornish Office relates to the rest of the regional executive. For instance, there may be strong pressure to maintain a region-wide land-use planning regime.

Either way, there would be a limit to the divergence in policies that would be possible for a Cornish Office under this model. Most importantly, the Executive Member for Cornwall would be selected by the leader of the South-West, and would be subject to replacement by him or her. The Executive Member for Cornwall would not be able to disregard the overall priorities of the South-West regional assembly. Cornwall would, for instance, be required to contribute towards meeting the high-level indicators which the South-West regional assembly would have to negotiate with central government.

Further decentralisation

If further proposals were made for decentralisation of functions to regional assemblies, the Model 3 assembly would need to decide on a piecemeal basis whether to allocate a proportion of staff and budgets to the Cornish Office. That decision would inevitably involve both political and administrative considerations.

There should be few problems for the RSWR area in handling further functions, as it contains nine-tenths of the population of the standard South-West region and the majority of the offices of the executive agencies and Government Office functions which are likely to be proposed in the medium-term.

In terms of allocating staff and budgets to the Cornish Office under any proposals for further decentralisation, some agencies would fall into the category outlined above of being able to hand over very few staff to Cornwall. For example, the Countryside Agency has a staff of 42 in the South-West: this implies a staff of 4-6 being transferred to Cornwall under this model. The issue of recruiting extra staff, already referred to, would apply here.

It should be noted, however, that the majority of executive agencies which might be proposed under a further 'round' of decentralisation are concerned almost exclusively with research, strategy, and the allocation of funds. Bodies like the Countryside Agency, Environment Agency, and Highways Agency make grants to more local organisations—in the Environment Agency's case via local offices—to deliver their programmes. A Cornish Office would therefore need the capacity to draw up effective strategies for these bodies, but few changes would need making to the delivery mechanisms, which are already local.

The existence of a Cornish Office under this model would be useful if, after the establishment of a regional assembly for the South-West, a decision was taken to create a separate Cornish assembly. The relevant administrative apparatus would already be in existence in a single office, and disruption would be correspondingly less.

This model, however, does suffer from severe limits of accountability. The Executive Member for Cornwall would report ultimately to the leader of the South-West, who would be able to sack the Executive Member if he or she so wished. Also noted in Chapter 4 was the difficulty in creating an effective scrutiny committee which was based in Cornish politics, given the small number of members available to a Model 3 assembly. A Cornish Office on this model might well be perceived in Cornwall as yet another quango whose ultimate source of power lay outside Cornwall. Local government would need to take a visible and leading role in creating a joint Cornish Strategy to set the direction of policy in Cornwall as carried out by the Cornish Office.

More problematic in this scenario would be local government reform. Under the White Paper, a pattern of unitary local government must accompany the establishment of a regional assembly. The options for this regarding Cornwall were examined in Chapter 4.

Under this model, if anything other than a single unitary local authority were created for Cornwall, there is a strong risk that the public perception would be that Cornwall County Council was being 'replaced' by a Cornish Office whose accountability was primarily to the South-West regional assembly. The establishment of two or three unitary authorities in Cornwall would remove any directly-elected Cornwall-wide authority, and would probably meet with fierce public and political opposition. The decision will ultimately be for the Boundary Committee for England; but a Cornwall unitary authority would be by far the best choice.

However, the creation of a Cornwall unitary authority would make it very difficult for Cornwall to move towards its own regional assembly. This is because of the problems with running a regional assembly and local government body over the same geographical area, detailed below. A merger between the two would not be possible without specific primary legislation relating to Cornwall.

Model 2

This model proposes a Cornish assembly alongside a South-West regional assembly which covers the remainder of the standard region (RSWR).

Generally, the same comments apply to the proposed assembly for the RSWR as apply to the assembly proposed under Model 1. This model of assembly would have few problems setting up, running, and functioning. The only obstacle would be the disruption resulting from the administrative reorganisation necessary to create a Cornish assembly.

A Cornish assembly would face three difficulties. The first is the administrative reorganisation required to bring regional-level functions, currently exercised outside Cornwall, under the control of a Cornish assembly. This would require relocation of at least several dozen staff, and would lead to some organisational upheaval, which would interfere with the making and delivery of policy, and which is likely to cost a comparatively large amount of money. Cornwall has a low starting-point in terms of 'administrative presence', with almost all the regional-level administrative offices which deal with Cornwall being located outside the county.

There would also be a question as to whether those functions that remained outside the control of both a Cornish assembly and an RSWR assembly ought to continue to be administered on the basis of the standard South-West region. Some of these functions already have field offices in Cornwall. But the prospect of two regional assemblies 'nesting' in a single Government Office region might lead to conflict. The 'field offices' remaining outside regional control might be expected to follow conflicting strategies from the two assemblies, for instance. In a sense these kinds of tensions are part of political life, but the prospect of enhancing their chance of occurring could be a deterrent to central government seriously considering establishing a Cornish assembly.

Secondly, the model would require that Cornwall County Council cease to exist in its present form. It would be illogical for two bodies to run side by side, covering the same geographical area. It could either be merged with the Cornish assembly, or reorganised into two or three unitary authorities. It is unlikely that six unitary authorities, on the boundaries of the present districts, would be permitted: they are far smaller than the average English unitary authority in population terms.

A merger between a Cornish assembly and Cornwall County Council would be impossible without legislation. County councils have no power, under the 1972 Local Government Act, to merge with another body. Theoretically the 'power of general competence' in the Local Government Act 2000 could be used: but this does not allow councils to raise money. A merged body would be subject to the local government audit regime. This would probably lead to restriction of its financial freedoms—the 'county' and 'regional' elements of the body's total budget would have to be kept separate, for instance. Certainty over which element—the county or the region—was carrying out every part of every policy would be needed in order to avoid the possibility of legal challenges.

There are a number of possible means of solving these problems using legislative smoke and mirrors, some of which are listed in Appendix 2. But the need for such complex solutions, and the potential uncertainties listed in the previous paragraph, would deter the Government from considering any of them. The only practical means of achieving a merger of assembly and county council would be to pass a specific Bill for a Cornish assembly in Parliament.

Such a bill would face two serious problems. It is unthinkable that the Government would find legislative time for it before the next general election in 2005-06. It could be introduced as a Private Member's bill, but government support would be required to pass it, and that is unlikely to be easily forthcoming in view of the Government's current position.

Therefore, the creation of 2 or 3 unitary authorities seems the most likely prognosis for local government reorganisation under this model.

Thirdly, some of the comments made above relating to the Cornish Office which would be created under Model 3 apply also to a Cornish assembly. The very low initial staffing levels might restrict the policy-making capacity of the assembly. In a slightly different context, very small nation-states such as Iceland sometimes have problems developing independent policy solutions and tend to borrow them from neighbours.

If a Cornish assembly was offered more substantial powers, including budgetary control over most or all of the bodies listed in Table 2.3, its budget would be greater and it would thereby gain the flexibility necessary to make an impact on economic and social problems. By comparison, local government in Cornwall currently spends some £430 million: whatever the pattern of unitary authorities under a Cornish assembly, local government is likely to have far more impact than a regional body with a budget one-tenth of its budget.

The assembly proposed would have a budget of some £39 million, half of which would be running costs. Though these are *only* schematic figures, based on current budgets they are in the correct order of magnitude. Assuming that, by the time a Cornish assembly was set up, Cornwall's Objective 1 programme would be coming to an end[58], the marginal adjustment to spending plans that such an assembly would be able to make would be tiny. A Cornish assembly might be able to obtain extra funding from EU programmes or from England-wide investment programmes, thereby mitigating this difficulty, but as sources of income these cannot be relied upon.

Though it was suggested in Chapter 4 that a Cornish assembly should be permitted £8 million for running costs, these were to cover costs of members' salaries, publicity and organisational functions such as finance and personnel. Only a limited amount of this money would be available for extra executive staff: and the smallness of the organisation points to

[58] The current Government timetable envisages the first referendum(s) on regional assemblies taking place in 2005 at the earliest: disbursement of funds under the Objective One programme ends in 2007

extra staff being needed. In turn, this points to the prospect of higher administrative costs under this model.

In terms of the transition to a Cornish assembly, time and money would be required for administrative reorganisation, to move staff (both geographically and organisationally) from their present positions into it. Inevitably there will be some loss of personnel in such a process. In many respects a Cornish assembly staff would have to rapidly readjust, as some of the agencies which a Cornish assembly would 'take over' do not have a staff division which deals with Cornwall alone. One would have to be created from scratch whilst maintaining ongoing programmes. Time would also have to be spent breaking down regional data, currently collected only on the basis of the standard region, into Cornwall and RSWR (remainder of South-West region) categories. This report cannot estimate the cost of the adjustment process, but the time and money involved would be a discouragement to the Government.

Delivering functions

Similar comments apply to those made on the Cornish Office proposed under Model 3. It seems that functions such as those of the Regional Development Agency and the allocation of housing funding could be handled fairly easily by a Cornish assembly. Their functions are data analysis and disbursement of funds. Subject to the caveats about the need for extra staff due to the small size of the assembly, those functions should be exercisable.

The issue of low staffing levels in a small assembly becomes more acute with regard to functions such as tourism and arts, which attract smaller staffs and budgets. For the most part, again, these regional functions consist of disbursement of funding to other organisations. Again, the comments made under Model 3 above apply: there might be a need for extra staff, leading to extra costs, simply in order to run an effective organisation. Secondments from local government could offset this problem to some extent.

If extra staff, leading to higher running costs, were required, this could lead to claims that Cornwall was being revealed to be 'too small' to have its own regional authority, as it was showing diseconomies of scale. If such problems did emerge, the decision as to whether they constituted insurmountable obstacles would be essentially political. The Government would need to decide whether to maintain a Cornish assembly under these circumstances: this is not a choice that can be made on a neutral basis.

Elected assemblies will be offered an array of strategy-making powers, in many important areas of policy in which executive powers and budgets will not be on offer to them. It is not clear how much scope there will be for assemblies to exercise influence through strategic powers: in most cases, they will not have direct control over the means of delivery. This could be a problem for a Cornish assembly if the relevant delivery mechanisms were based, as many public-sector authorities for Cornwall currently are, outside Cornwall. The priorities of a Cornish assembly in health, biodiversity, transport, and employment and skills might

well be in conflict with those of a South-West regional assembly: the relevant delivery bodies (health authorities, Environment Agency, Highways Agency and Learning and Skills Councils) would need to weigh up competing priorities. Conversely, on other issues such as waste, culture, housing and sustainable development, Cornwall could derive advantage from its small size and smaller number of local authorities. Cornwall's economic difficulties, and relative territorial cohesion, should permit it to share with London a relatively strong consensus over what kinds of joint action are necessary to remedy its problems.

With regard to further decentralisation of functions, the comments made about the Cornish Office above apply to a Cornish assembly as well. The majority of regionally-administered executive agencies grant funds to local bodies to deliver their functions; a Cornish assembly, given appropriate strategy-making and administrative capacity, ought also to be able to do so just as well. But this decision will no doubt be made on an agency-by-agency basis.

Clout

The reservation was expressed by many interviewees, both from agencies and elsewhere, that a Cornish Assembly would not have enough 'clout' to compete with the other, much more populated and economically stronger, English regions. Cornwall has a population of 500,000; the smallest English region by population is the North-East, with 2.6 million. Cornwall's economy is underdeveloped and weak. Those who advocate Cornwall's membership of the South-West Region argue that staying within the South-West is a better guarantee of economic success than 'trying to go it alone'.

The definition of 'clout' is uncertain. With regard to inter-regional competition for government funding, the Government has claimed in the White Paper that funding formulas are being developed. These will be in place by the time the first elected regional assemblies are created. Regional lobbying may bend formulas to a small extent, but this is unlikely to be significant. Regional assemblies are not to be permitted direct control over significant capital spending, though they will be able, again, to lobby for it.

It is open to debate whether Cornwall would be better served by lobbying for capital projects and inward investment by a Cornish assembly, or whether it would be more effectively served by a South-West regional assembly lobbying for it occasionally, alongside speaking up on behalf of (for example) Bristol, Plymouth and Bournemouth. One respondent involved in accessing funds for Cornish organisations claimed that "We get a warmer response in London than we do in Bristol". Cornwall might gain little from lobbying alone, but it could also lose out to other of the diverse interests in the standard South-West region. Each point of view is untestable without creating the institution concerned.

It is not necessarily the case that a regional assembly's voice before government will be determined by its population size and economy, however. Under Model 2, a Cornish assembly would have the same constitutional status (in terms of access to ministers and entitlement to formula-based funding) as a South-West regional assembly. It would not

automatically be ignored by central government. In Canada, the tiny province of Prince Edward Island (population 113,000) enjoys a comparatively large voice when its representatives attend Premiers' Conferences (of all the provincial prime ministers).

In terms of economic aid and inward investment, there is more room for doubt about the possibilities of a Cornish assembly. This rests principally on the small budgets suggested under Model 2 in Chapter 4. For example, an economic development budget of some £20 million per annum would not go far; it would be able to attract very few major investment projects to Cornwall. A Cornish assembly could still play an important role co-ordinating other public and private investment. But that implies that there is a strong case for a significantly larger budget than suggested in Chapter 4—bearing in mind that the figures in Chapter 4 are a model only and not necessarily accurate—in order to enable a Cornish assembly to make a significant impact in the area of economic development.

Cornwall's peripherality must also be taken into account. Its geographical position on the Atlantic edge of Europe means that it is a long way from significant European markets. Smaller regions in the 'heart' of Europe would derive much advantage over Cornwall from their geographical position. Cornwall has long suffered from poor transport and communication links in any case, but improvement of those could not be *relied* upon to entirely remove this problem. One respondent summed up this viewpoint in the phrase "Geography has always defeated Cornwall". At the same time, the South-West itself could be described as a peripheral region of Europe—though its eastern tip is not far from London and benefits from that closeness. And inclusion in the South-West region does not automatically represent a corrective to such a fundamental issue.

Interviews revealed some evidence of business disquiet in the South-West at the prospect of a Cornish assembly. One (Bristol-based) respondent went as far as to call it a "nightmare scenario". Other fears included competition between a Cornish assembly and an RSWR assembly for very limited resources, and a fear of extreme parochialism in a Cornish assembly.

The small scale on which a Cornish assembly would operate could also bring advantages. These relate partly to the comments made on identity and social capital in Chapter 3. Members of a Cornish assembly would have considerably smaller constituencies than those of a South-West regional assembly. They would also have more opportunity to relate Cornish assembly policy to some of the specific economic problems suffered by Cornwall. One of the CCC's contentions is that policy made for Cornwall from outside of Cornwall has rarely taken account of the particularity of Cornish issues. This claim can be and has been disputed, and the creation of a Cornish assembly is not an automatic guard against such problems. But arguments against a Cornish assembly based simply on economies of scale may be misplaced:

> "The literature suggests that small nations and regions may have some advantages in coping with and adapting quickly to a changing external

> environment, given certain characteristics. One is a small decision-making elite, with a high degree of interaction and mutual trust. Another is a capacity for creating social capital and solving collective action problems to produce positive sum outcomes."[59]

As suggested earlier, good policy and able politicians and administrators are as fundamental to success in this field as are the constitutional structures available.

Conclusion

The administrative limits which impinge upon the practicality of the three models of regional assemblies presented in Chapter 4 are not as tight as is often assumed in debate. Questions remain to be answered, however, about the feasibility of a Cornish assembly exercising the very limited functions proposed in the Government's White Paper. These principally relate to the very small body and budget which are implied by the modelling carried out in Chapter 4. These questions could be partially answered by increasing the budget likely to be available to a Cornish assembly, or by increasing its powers: both strongly political questions.

Chapter 6 explores the political issues which surround the questions addressed by this report, and examines how they are likely to shape a future elected assembly or assemblies in the South-West region.

[59] Michael Keating, *Nations against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia, and Scotland,* op.cit., p.67. It is beyond the scope of this study to state whether or not these conditions do or could exist in Cornwall, however.

Chapter 6: Politics and regional government

The issues addressed by this report, concerning appropriate forms of regional government in the South-West region, are quintessentially political. Politics will be the primary source of decisions for the future governance of the region, and politics will play a major role in determining which arguments have the most influence.

The political interests of the Government are likely to be the most influential. The South-West Constitutional Convention and the Cornish Constitutional Convention have only limited lobbying power. It is clear that the Government's policy on regional government in England is a top-down one: it has been guided almost exclusively so far by the internal dynamics of the Cabinet and by the Government's overall political programme. Although the Conventions both represent important elements of public and institutional opinion, neither has the leverage with which to ensure that the Government takes their views on board.

The position of the South-West Constitutional Convention (SWCC)

The SWCC takes as its geographical extent the Government's standard South-West region, known locally or regionally as the 'seven counties'. These are: Gloucestershire, the former Avon, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall. This region, with a population of just under 5 million, is used as the standard by most regional offices of Government departments (see table 2.3).

The SWCC was launched in May 2001. It has attracted support from the Labour, Co-operative, Liberal Democrat, and Green parties, and is chaired by Bishop Michael Langrish of Exeter. Conservative members have acted as observers but there has been no official party involvement.

The SWCC's arguments against a regional assembly for Cornwall are threefold. Its small population size, of just under 500,000, is one-third of the population of Northern Ireland (which is currently the smallest region of the UK). It is claimed that economies of scale gained through carrying out functions at a 'regional level' would be lost in such a small region.

It is also argued that Cornwall would benefit economically from being part of a large and successful region, able to lobby successfully for inward investment and government funding. Governments and multinational companies could more easily ignore the voice of a Cornish assembly, representative of only 500,000 people and covering an area with a very weak economy.

Moreover, it is argued that as Cornwall is the far end of a peninsula, many issues of public policy relating to it are inevitably connected to decisions which will be made outside Cornwall. Examples given by respondents include waste strategy—Cornwall is currently

very short of capacity to store waste. Also mentioned was the need to improve trunk roads in the Somerset area to improve communications between Cornwall and the rest of the UK. Respondents stated that a Cornish assembly would lose leverage over these fundamental decisions by not being part of a South-West assembly. As a Cornish assembly's only boundary would be with the South-West, this is a particularly vital source of power.

Secondly, there is a fear that Cornish opposition to an assembly for the standard South-West Region could prevent any devolution in the South-West Region. This relates primarily to winning a referendum for a South-West regional assembly.

The section on opinion polls, shows the available evidence on public attitudes. The few polls available show wide variations in results, and cannot be regarded as indicative. In the South-West Region, the lack of regional identity (examined in Chapter 3) and the strength of Conservative support (as well as support for the UK Independence Party) indicate that a considerable proportion of the electorate will vote 'no' in a referendum. It is also generally expected that a regional referendum will attract a low turnout.

If much of the Cornish electorate chooses to vote 'no' in a referendum on a South-West regional assembly, therefore, the prospect of winning that referendum recedes still further. It is conceivable that Cornish 'no' votes could tip the balance in rejecting a South-West regional assembly. The SWCC therefore opposes campaigning efforts which might increase the likelihood of that result.

Thirdly, the SWCC argues that the Government will not countenance creating a regional assembly for the area of a single county. Implicit in the concept of regional assemblies is the concept that existing county areas are too small, by population or area, to carry out certain functions. Permitting one county area to opt out of that rule would imply that the Government's case for creating regional assemblies on the standard boundaries was flawed or arbitrary. Theoretically the Government could assert that Cornwall was an exception to the rule for the remainder of England: but there is no indication that it is willing to do so.

Given that opposition to, and lack of interest in, regional government remains high amongst business, the media, and the public, the strength of this argument should not be under-estimated. The Government would be very reluctant to set a precedent by showing willingness to reconsider regional boundaries in the South-West. The 'regional agenda' in general would be compromised by the creation of a Cornish Assembly:

> "The argument against this [a Cornish assembly] concerns not Cornwall itself but the possible knock-on effect. How many other county councils, seeing a possibility of boosting their own power and prestige, would suddenly begin to argue that 'Borsetshire', too, was a historic and unique cultural entity?"60

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[60] Stephen Tindale, *Devolution on Demand: options for the English regions*, IPPR, 1995, p.17

The need to create administrative structures in Cornwall was also raised in chapters 4 and 5. This is rarely cited by 'opinion-formers' as an argument against a Cornish assembly, but carries weight: the necessary reorganisations would take time and money, which would divert attention from the process of decentralisation itself.

The position of the Cornish Constitutional Convention (CCC)

The CCC was launched in March 2000. It has support from Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Independent, and Mebyon Kernow politicians. The Labour Party in Cornwall has so far remained neutral. The CCC has produced several working papers on plans for a Cornish Assembly, and has collected 50,000 signatures to a petition calling for a devolved Cornish Assembly.

The CCC argues that Cornwall is sufficiently distinct from the South-West, in geographical, cultural, and socio-economic terms, that Cornwall would be best served by its own devolved assembly. It is argued that Cornwall has no 'common interest' with the remainder of the South-West, having a distinct economic profile. The figures cited in Table 2.4 show that there is support for this position.

There is also considerable resentment at the number of governmental bodies which administer Cornwall from outside Cornwall. This relates not only to regional executive agencies such as the Highways Agency, Environment Agency and the Government Office for the Region, but also to bodies such as the police and fire service and the Learning and Skills Council, which elsewhere in England are normally organised on county boundaries. It is claimed that these offices have consistently failed to design appropriate policy for Cornwall's distinct circumstances. It is important to note that the case made by the CCC (and previous campaigns within Cornwall), with regard to the effect of the location of these bodies, is not merely cultural or emotional, but also relates to economics and good policy-making. Moreover, the absence of government institutions reduces the number of well-paid jobs in Cornwall, contributing further to economic decline.

Moreover, the CCC claims that the seven-county South-West region is unpopular with the people of Cornwall. Cornwall has a strong Celtic heritage, including the recently-revived Cornish language, and thus it is argued that it should not be forced into a wider region. The CCC is the only Constitutional Convention to have drawn up a petition, which has been signed by some 50,000 people, calling for a Cornish assembly.

The CCC has produced a 'prospectus' entitled "Devolution for One and All", which makes detailed proposals for a Cornish assembly. The functions proposed by the prospectus are roughly equivalent to those available to the National Assembly for Wales, though some go further: boundary commission functions or probation services, for instance, are very unlikely to become available to a Cornish assembly. Either way, they are not on offer in the Government's White Paper.

The prospectus also proposes local government reform, to follow the establishment of a Cornish assembly. It suggests the use of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in Cornish assembly elections: this is partly due to maintain the tradition of independent politicians within Cornwall, who would stand a greater chance of election under STV. A Cornish assembly would have around 45 members—larger than the numbers currently proposed by the Government for regional assemblies.

No doubt mindful of criticisms about Cornwall being 'inward-looking' and 'cutting itself off' under a Cornish assembly, the CCC has emphasised the need for, and desirability of, partnership with other regions and agencies in its literature. The CCC insists that the decisions to work together with others should remain with a Cornish assembly in the first instance. The need for influence over infrastructural decisions in the South-West cited above would be achieved through political negotiation.

There has been no clear sign that the Government is willing to alter its position, permitting regional assemblies to be established only in the standard regions, as a result of CCC campaigning efforts.

The Government's position

The UK government's policy on elected regional assemblies is essentially top-down. Much of the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, is a series of trade-offs between sceptical Cabinet ministers. There are good reasons for the Government to control the agenda tightly. There is a fear that the establishment of elected regional assemblies will be perceived as a distraction from the Government's main aim of reforming public services. There is also considerable opposition on principle, from the Conservative Party and a proportion of the public, to regional government in England. The Government is reluctant to invest much political capital, or become embroiled in heated public debate, on a subject which *appears* to be of low salience at present. Its decisions on elected regional assemblies derive from national political priorities first and a commitment to extending democracy second.

The Constitutional Conventions which exist in the standard regions have had a role in framing wider debate. The Campaign for the English Regions produced its own 'white paper', *Democratic Regions*, early in 2002, proposing elected regional assemblies on a slightly stronger model than was later proposed in the Government's White Paper. But they have been pushing at a relatively open door. The CCC's demands, in order to be met, require the asking of some fundamental questions, a step back from the Government's current thinking, and a fundamental reorientation towards the question of Cornwall. Few governments are known for doing any of those things without substantial political pressure. The CCC's campaign relates to a small geographical area which delivers few votes to the Government: the pressure it can apply is limited.

The Government has been unwilling to engage in debate over the boundaries of the standard regions. The (valid) reason given is that a full debate on the exact boundaries of regional

assemblies would produce much more heat than light and produce little better a result than the existing pattern. The question of Cornwall is the only boundary dispute to have attracted a vocal campaign, but it is not the only potential dispute in England. The status of Cumbria, which is in the North-West but was for many purposes part of the North-East until recently, is open to question. Peterborough, Bournemouth, North and North-East Lincolnshire, and the southern part of Teesside are four further examples of potential boundary disputes.

The Government has given hints that it may be open to persuasion on the subject of boundaries. A Labour Party policy document published in May 2001 stated:

> "Our preference is to stay as close as possible to the Government Office/RDA boundaries, but we recognise the need for some flexibility."[61]

However, the White Paper appeared to indicate a retrenchment of the Government's view of boundaries, and population, covered by an elected regional assembly:

> "These regions…are a credible size to support a regional assembly…. Regions based on these boundaries are large enough to take a strategic view between the national and local levels and to add real value without undermining the role of local government."[62]

> "The Government has not completely ruled out in the longer term the possibility of adopting boundaries for regional assemblies that do not follow the existing boundaries...[but] in the short to medium term, we do not plan any changes."[63]

With a population of only 480,000, Cornwall is frequently described as being 'too small' to become a region. Frequently, little attempt is made to back such claims up, other than to point out—correctly—that a Cornish assembly would be an anomaly in the context of current plans for English regional assemblies. It is also correctly asserted that many European regions have no regional identity yet still achieve success.

UK governments are not known for their willingness to concede special case status, especially when carrying through potentially controversial policies such as the establishment of elected regional assemblies. To establish a Cornish assembly, extra work would need to be done and the administrative reorganisations already referred to would need to be proposed. Most critically, permitting a single county to become a region would beg the question of why all counties could not become regions, strengthening the hand of opponents of elected regional government and potentially throwing the Government's policy off course. The disruption and difficulty of these problems would be strong deterrents to Government approaching the issue at all.

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[61] Labour Party briefing, *Q & A Regional Government*, May 2001, p.3

[62] DTLR/Cabinet Office, *Your Region, Your Choice*, 2002, p. 48

[63] Ibid., p.49

If events led to a special Bill for a Cornish assembly, it would symbolically class Cornwall as a 'special case' region, just as the Greater London Authority did for London. This could circumvent the possibility of Cornwall setting a precedent for a very small, county-area regional assembly.

European experiences do not indicate that national governments in general are keen to establish regions which are anomalous in national terms. The Italian 'special region' of Valle d'Aosta, cited previously on account of its very small population, was created in 1948 in response to the (real or perceived) threat of annexation of the territory by France. The German Land of Saarland, with a population of 1 million, owes its separate existence partly to its status as a demilitarised zone—and not being part of the West German *Bund*—until 1959.

Special arrangements under Model 3

The political consequences of the proposals for a Cornish Office, made under Model 3 in Chapter 4, deserve particular attention.

A Cornish Office could only be the product of agreement amongst the politicians elected to a South-West regional assembly. It differs from the other models in that its form is settled after the election of a South-West regional assembly, not before. One possible means of recognising the office would be to provide for a Executive Member for Cornwall and Cornish Office in the South-West regional assembly's standing orders.[64] There might be political pressure from other county areas for similar provisions: to avoid this pressure, it would be necessary for commitment to special arrangements for Cornwall to be a clear part of the regional executive's stance. Alternatively, the statutory instrument setting up the assembly, or a Schedule to the main Regional Assemblies Act, could make a provision that a Cornish Office must be created by the regional assembly. This would prevent the office from being abolished by the South-West regional assembly itself.

Debates might also be fierce over the composition of the Cornish scrutiny committee, proposed in Chapter 4. It was suggested that members could be co-opted from Cornish local government to make up the numbers. However, it is unlikely that a regional assembly would be prepared to have a committee with a majority of co-opted members. This would detract from the democratic credentials of the assembly itself.

Either way, a scrutiny committee could not itself reverse any decisions of the Executive Member for Cornwall that it disagreed with. That could only be achieved through political pressure via the whole of the South-West regional assembly. For that sort of political pressure to be effective, it would be important that the Cornish Office was not regarded as

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[64] This would not 'entrench' the office. The Cornish office could still be abolished by a hostile executive by amending standing orders.

'semi-detached' by the South-West regional executive, but instead seen as an integral part of the functioning of the assembly.

Opinion Polls

The political positions of the major actors are not fundamentally affected by the few opinion polls that have been carried out. These polls are described below, but come with a health warning. They reveal contradictory and counter-intuitive results when figures for different regions are compared; and they were conducted at a time when public awareness of the issues surrounding regional government was low, and knowledge about the Government's intentions was nil.

A survey carried out by MORI in March 1999 asked a variety of questions in advance of the first elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. This poll showed that 86% of respondents from the South-West region were aware that they lived in the South-West standard region.[65] The average across England was 78%.

47% of respondents in the South-West region supported an elected assembly for the South-West, but 39% opposed it. 72% of respondents agreed that a regional assembly for the South-West "would look after the interests of this area better than central government", but 50% believed that "A regional assembly would lead to more bureaucracy than the present system of government in this region".

Respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with the statement "This region is too divided for regional government to work well". 37% of respondents in the South-West agreed, but 44% did not agree. This is represented as a 'net disagreement' of 7%. This compares with a net agreement with the statement of 10% from respondents in Yorkshire and Humberside, and a net disagreement of 12% from respondents in the South-East. Intuitively, the former might be expected to be more likely to disagree and the latter to agree that their region was divided.

A poll by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust in October 2000 was similarly inconclusive, showing 31% support for an elected regional assembly in the South-West Region and 34% for one of "appointed business and local government representatives".[66] A further poll, by the BBC, in September 2000, revealed that 40% of respondents in the "South-West" (here, Devon and Cornwall) and 39% of "the West" (Somerset, Gloucestershire, Avon and Wiltshire)

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[65] See http://www.mori.com/polls/1999/ec990308.shtml. The question asked was: "England is divided into several regions for the purposes of administration of government services. Can you tell me which region you think you are in?"

[66] For details of these opinion polls, see John Tomaney and Peter Hetherington, *Monitoring the English Regions*, Constitution Unit, November 2000, p.14-16.

favoured an elected assembly for the given region. The non-standard regions used in that poll are the BBC's own regions.

A further BBC poll in March 2002 investigated instead the standard regions. It showed 61% of people in the South-West Region supported a South-West regional assembly. Similarly high percentages were recorded across all English standard regions by this poll (from 49% in the South-East to 73% in the West Midlands). However, similarly to the MORI poll of 1999, this poll indicated that 62% of respondents across England expected regional assemblies to "increase bureaucracy and red tape" *and* 60% expected them "to bring government closer to the people". (Figures for the South-West alone were not available for those questions.)

None of these surveys included the option of a Cornish regional body, making it impossible to draw conclusions about support for a Cornish assembly from them. Cornwall is rarely treated as a sub-division in national opinion polls. However, a recent poll conducted by Golley Slater showed support for a Cornish assembly at 46%, whilst 34% of respondents wanted no regional government and only 12% supported a South-West regional assembly.[67] To this should be added the petition of 50,000 signatures obtained in support of a Cornish assembly by the Cornish Constitutional Convention.

Conclusion

The political debates which surround the issues discussed in this report suggest that a form of elected regional assembly which presents significant difficulties in implementation is unlikely to be considered by the Government. The prospect of central government changing its position, in response to demands from representative groups, on such a potentially controversial policy is weak: there is no sense (other than rhetorical) in which the establishment of elected regional assemblies is being treated as a bottom-up development in policy. Besides this, there is a need for a shift in attitudes if a Cornish assembly were to be seriously considered by Government. There appears little willingness to treat such a body as a possible element of Government policy on elected regional assemblies.

The special arrangements proposed under Model 3 should not meet with opposition at central government level. They might, however, lead to political tension within a South-West regional assembly itself.

Opinion poll results have not yet had any significant effect on the political debate. The debate itself has too low a level of public salience for this to be possible, and that is not likely to change until the prospect of the establishment of any elected regional assemblies at all is

[67] This poll was carried out as part of a study entitled "Cornwall: Image and Brand Development", under the Objective 1 programme. (It is the same study as the Golley Slater work referred to in Chapter 3.)

closer in time. Once the implications of the proposals in the White Paper become clearer, public attitudes may firm up.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The aim of this report is not to reach a conclusion about which of the three models of devolution sketched out would be the best for the South-West Region or for Cornwall. The aim of the report has been to map out the possible paths ahead for each of the models, and to suggest some of the pitfalls that each would need to confront. It has also aimed to emphasise that the model that is chosen will result from a political decision. There are no obvious or inescapable options resulting either from circumstances in the South-West Region or transferable from elsewhere. The report has also not attempted to predict how well any of the three models might work, especially in the democratic arena. All could be made to function, but whether or not one is optimal is beyond the scope of the report.

Modelling of this kind is far from being an exact science, based as it is on current knowledge about Government policy and about regional government as it exists currently. The first elected regional assembly will not take up its powers until 2005-6 at the earliest: in the three or four intervening years there is plenty to play for politically.

However, there are some observations that can be made about the various options on offer. Most fundamentally, there is a need for greater dialogue between supporters of a Cornish assembly and supporters of a seven-county South-West regional assembly. The former especially have produced considerable amounts of work over several years in support of their case, which is rarely considered in detail, most likely for primarily political reasons. The case for a Cornish assembly is often dismissed with generalities rather than clearly argued against: this engenders resentment from its advocates.

The small size of Cornwall, together with the thin model of elected regional assemblies proposed by the Government, would lead to a very small Cornish assembly. It would be beneficial, if a Cornish assembly were established, to offer it greater powers than are on offer elsewhere in England. The CCC's 'prospectus', *Devolution for One and All*, aspires to a strong model of devolution. Some version of this would increase its likely viability, and go some way to quenching the strength of feeling that is present in many quarters in Cornwall.

A more powerful assembly would need to be introduced via a dedicated Bill: this could enable it to absorb County Council functions if that was desirable. This is similar to the process in five of the Spanish regions, where, in those which were made up of a single province, the regional government absorbed the former provincial government when it received its powers.[68] A dedicated Bill would also reinforce a sense that Cornwall was a 'special case', meaning that it would not carry implications for county government across England.

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[68] Most autonomous communities (regions) in Spain consist of between two and eight provinces. The provinces, of which there are 51, roughly correspond to English counties

However, questions remain to be answered about how far a Cornish assembly would rely upon the co-operation of the remainder of the South-West, particularly in issues such as transport planning and waste strategy. Different assertions are made from each point of view on these issues. Would a Cornish assembly have greater voice with which to negotiate with an RSWR assembly over critical policy issues, or would Cornwall County Council do so more effectively from within the South-West Region? Without the machinery of regional government there is not much opportunity to obtain hard evidence either way. Opinions on either side are strongly held.

It would be helpful to ascertain the Government's position on the issue more clearly than has been possible at present. Chapter 6 indicated that the Government was unlikely to move from its position that regional boundaries will not be changed. But 'unlikely' does not mean 'impossible'. The Government has not committed itself to ignoring the Cornish case. Their position is likely to become clearer as the debate advances.

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Appendix 1: Terminology

Term	Meaning
Cornwall	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
South-West Region ('seven counties')	The standard Government South-West region, containing seven counties
RSWR ('six counties')	The 'remainder of the South-West Region'; the standard region excluding Cornwall
The Regional Assemblies Act	An Act of Parliament following the Regional White Paper: it is assumed for the purposes of the report that it would mirror exactly the proposals in the White Paper
The White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice*	The Government's proposals for English regional assemblies, published in May 2002.
The Executive Member for Cornwall	A portfolio within the South-West Region executive for regional issues within Cornwall
Mebyon Kernow	A Cornish nationalist party ('Sons of Cornwall' in Cornish).
Cornish scrutiny committee	A committee scrutinising the work of the Executive Member for Cornwall within the South-West Region's Executive.
SWCC	South-West Constitutional Convention
CCC	Cornish Constitutional Convention
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance
GOSW	Government Office for the South-West
SWRA	South-West Regional Assembly
SWRDA	South-West Regional Development Agency

Appendix 2: Merging a Cornish assembly and Cornwall County Council

Possible solution	Problems
1. Special provisions in the Regional Assemblies Bill	
The Bill would contain a Part relating to Cornwall, specifying that a new region was to be created, that certain executive agencies must realign their boundaries with it, and that, if a referendum were successful, the Cornish Assembly would take over Cornwall County Council. The new body would have full powers to vire between local government and regional government funding. The Part would specify its constitutional and audit status.	The Government would most likely be unwilling to spend Parliamentary time, and risk losing the Bill, dealing with one anomalous region. The Part would be substantial and would invite challenge and delaying tactics from opposition parties. It would also invite questions about the validity of one approach for Cornwall and a different one for other county areas.
2. Allowing the County Council to absorb the Cornish Assembly	
Purely in legal terms, the County Council could be permitted extra powers and funding equivalent to taking over a Regional Assembly. A variety of Statutory Instruments could be passed to oblige executive agencies to pass over their functions to the County Council.	The legal status of such a body would be chaotic. Other counties would demand similar powers. There are a number of complex legal issues around county councils sponsoring independent bodies. Cornwall would still need to be removed from the South-West Region for the purposes of regional administration.
3. Allowing the Cornish Assembly to absorb the County Council	
The Cornish Assembly could take over the powers of the County Council. If control of the power and budgets of the district councils was also wanted, that would need to be specified in the Regional Assemblies Act.	This is not possible as the law stands. A clause in the Regional Assemblies Bill making it possible would lead to fierce resistance from the Local Government Association, as such a clause would have to permit any region to take over any local authority (unless the clause applied only to Cornwall, in which case point 1 above applies.)

4. Replacing the County Council with a residuary body	
The County Council could be legally abolished by Statutory Instrument, in favour of a residuary body, and its functions transferred to the Regional Assembly. This is possible under the 1992 Local Government Act s.22; the provisions were intended for abolition of counties under the Local Government Commission review.	This would be a very unusual way of achieving the desired end. It could lead to legal complications and possibly to transforming the districts into unitary authorities. The Government would be unwilling to create unitary authorities which have such low populations.

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