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## **Inclusive growth in English cities: mainstreamed or sidelined?**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of inclusive growth is increasingly presented as offering prospects for more equitable social outcomes. However inclusive growth is subject to a variety of interpretations and lacks definitional clarity. In England, via devolution, cities are taking on new powers for policy domains which can influence inclusive growth outcomes. This opens-up opportunities for innovation to address central issues of low pay and poverty. This article examines the extent to which inclusive growth concerns form a central or peripheral aspect in this new devolution through content analysis of devolution agreements. It concludes that inclusive growth concerns appear to be largely sidelined.

**Keywords:** Devolution, Inclusive Growth, ‘Good jobs’, Cities, England

JEL Classifications: I30, J48, O25, R58

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## **1) Introduction**

There is increasing interest in the idea of inclusive growth as potentially offering a model through which the gains from economic growth can be more equitably shared. Internationally this interest is seen in the promotion of inclusive growth by organisations such as the OECD (OECD, 2015; 2016). In the UK the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) ran a high profile commission on inclusive growth (RSA, 2017). There has also been a proliferation of indicators aimed at capturing dimensions of inclusive growth in the UK and elsewhere (OECD, 2015; Beatty et al, 2016; Rafferty et al, 2017; Shearer et al, 2017).

The concept of inclusive growth has also been taken-up at city and regional level. For example, in the UK, a range of cities have established ‘Fairness Commissions’, bringing local stakeholders together to lobby for local approaches to address inequality, often including through encouraging the payment of Living Wages (Lyll, 2016). Across Europe and the US there are also examples of cities developing approaches towards greater inclusivity in labour markets (Green et al, 2017).

The possibility of an inclusive growth focus by cities has current relevance in England (and the rest of the UK), with the ongoing process of devolution of powers to cities opening-up new opportunities. Since 2010, several cities have negotiated a series of City Deals, Growth Deals and Devolution Deals with central Government through which they have agreed the devolution of new powers and resources in policy domains such as transport, housing, business support, skills and employment.

The benefits of devolution, and their distribution, depend on the way devolution is designed and the nature and scale of devolution agreements (Tomaney, 2016). The process of devolution to cities potentially opens-up new opportunities for them to take actions to improve the equity of outcomes. However, there is an important evidence gap around the extent to which English cities are able to utilise such opportunities to develop more inclusive policies. Moreover, the concept of inclusive growth is not clearly defined and is subject to different definitions.

The extent to which cities articulate notions of inclusive growth or make the case for it is under-researched. This article addresses these evidence gaps by assessing the extent to which inclusive growth concerns appear to have been an important consideration of devolution agreements with English cities, and examining how cities frame their future plans for economic (and social) progress. To make these arguments the article provides new content analysis of published devolution agreements negotiated by central government with six large English cities in the period to the end of 2016. This is the period during which devolution to cities became established, so setting the context for ongoing developments. The article focuses particularly on issues of employment: a central concern of inclusive growth strategies.

In assessing devolution agreements this article contributes to academic and policy debates on devolution, deal making and inclusive growth, with a novel feature being the application of a ‘good jobs framework’ to assess the nature of approaches to inclusive growth. The ‘good jobs framework’ (Osterman, 2008) is way of assessing employment policy; distinguishing between efforts to create more high quality jobs and those seeking to improve the existing stock of jobs, as well identifying the nature

of the mechanisms utilised to meet these aims. The article also contributes to the literature examining the potential for inclusive growth concerns to significantly influence policy development and to challenge inequalities. The experience of English cities described in the paper has wider international relevance for a number of reasons. First, given the increasing international interest in inclusive growth, the research provides a novel way of analysing inclusive growth through content analysis and through the application of the good jobs framework. Second, with cities seen as important actors in inclusive growth (Lee, 2018), the paper demonstrates the importance of the consideration of powers and power relationships between different levels of government and policymaking. Finally, English cities provide a case of the challenges for developing inclusive growth approaches which are likely to have strong resonance for other liberal market economies and for countries with relatively centralised governance systems.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the development of inclusive growth as a concept and identifies some of the challenges with defining it. Section 3 details the process of devolution to English cities over the period from 2012 to 2016. Section 4 discusses the selection of cities and outlines the methods used to analyse city devolution and inclusive growth. Section 5 presents the analysis of the extent to which inclusive growth concerns are apparent in city devolution. Section 6 concludes and considers implications for policy.

## **2) The concept of inclusive growth**

Inclusive growth is a term which is now quite frequently deployed; however it is rather amorphous and is subject to a range of different interpretations. As Ranieri and Ramos (2013; 10) surmise, inclusive growth might be best characterised as ‘an intuitively straightforward and yet elusive concept’. For Lee (2018; 1), the concept is one which is ‘conceptually fuzzy and operationally problematic’, and which may function more through the adaption of existing policies and practices than through the development of new ones. Inclusive growth can include a range of policy domains, although primacy is often given to labour market issues and the quantity and quality of work (Green et al, 2017).

Particular framings of inclusive growth have important implications for the way in which the concept is understood. Turok (2010) distinguishes between the weighting which policy places on greater equality of opportunity versus greater equality of outcomes. He argues that inclusive growth approaches have tended to focus more on greater equality of opportunity, which tends to be politically easier to pursue than equality of outcomes because the latter is likely to rely more heavily on redistribution through taxation and social security systems.

Setting out a useful typology, Lupton and Hughes (2016) identify a ‘Growth Plus’ interpretation of inclusive growth, which prioritises growth but also recognises the need to link individuals to newly created opportunities associated with this, largely through connectivity and labour market supply-side initiatives. This approach works with the established economic model rather than presenting a substantive departure from existing practices. They contrast this with an ‘Inclusive Economy’ approach which seeks to challenge and change elements of growth generating inequality, rather

than mitigating their outcomes. The first approach works with the grain of existing neo-liberal framings, while the second represents a more radical shift towards a new economic model focused on the nature of growth and associated governance structures needed to serve the ‘wider public interest’ (Cowling & Tomlinson, 2011; 831).

The OECD (2015; 1) suggest inclusive growth can be supported by ‘win-win policies’ focused on macroeconomic stability, employment and skills, enterprise and innovation, finance, economic development, infrastructure, competition and product market regulation, and public services. However there is a danger that this view prioritises technocratic fixes and policy tweaking, but ignores thornier questions around the relationship between economic growth, political power and economic inequality.

In England the term ‘inclusive growth’ has tended not to be much used by policymakers, albeit language invoking it is evident. Prime Minister, Theresa May, for example has talked of the need ‘to make Britain a country that works not for the privileged few, but for every one of us’ (13 July 2017)<sup>i</sup>. In one of the nations of Great Britain - Scotland - the concept of inclusive growth is more explicitly acknowledged. The Scottish Government’s Economic Strategy (March 2015) specifies ‘promoting inclusive growth’ as being one of the country’s four priorities (Page 13). Scotland has also explicitly referenced and targeted issues of ‘Fair Work’; this is significant given the primacy given to issues of employment quantity *and* quality in most definitions of inclusive growth (Green et al, 2017).

### **3) Devolution and economic development in England**

Historically England has been characterised by centralised policymaking and limited devolution of powers to sub-national areas, although in the wider UK there has been devolution of selected policy areas to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government (2010-2015) initiated a series of ‘deals’ with selected cities to devolve powers and resources in particular policy domains. The Conservative Government (2015-2017) extended the coverage and scope of devolution agreements (National Audit Office, 2016). However the transfer of powers has been uneven between places and in terms of policy domains under consideration (O’Brien & Pike, 2015). The policy narrative has focused on ‘rebalancing’ and has been bound up with the idea of the need for a counterweight to the concentration of economic activity and growth in London and the Greater South East. The context to devolution and a focus on spatial rebalancing is that patterns of spatially uneven development are deeply engrained in the UK’s economic geography (Gardiner et al, 2013; Martin et al, 2016).

The process of devolution to cities started in earnest with the agreement of a series of City Deals: agreements between central and local governments involving the devolution of negotiated new powers and resources to individual cities (Crowley et al., 2012). Initially these focused on the eight largest cities outside London. A second set of Deals were subsequently agreed with seventeen smaller cities. The Deals made provision for devolution focused on transport, business support and skills. On the back of this a series of local Growth Deals were agreed which were designed to



address local barriers to growth. These attracted funding from a new Local Growth Fund.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (2016) established the framework for further devolution and a new wave of devolution agreements. Devolution to English cities has also been tied to provisions for governance changes: specifically the establishment of directly elected Mayors.

There have been a number of criticisms of the approach to devolution adopted in England. These relate to the processes through which devolution has been developed and the asymmetrical power relations between central and local governments; the limited nature of powers which have been devolved; the fuzziness of the devolution agenda and lack of a strategic approach; and, critically, the limited financial resources attached to devolution agreements. Each of these is discussed briefly in turn.

Devolution in England has been bound-up with a process of 'deal-making'. First, this means that devolution has progressed in a piecemeal and fragmented manner. Rather than a transparent offer of devolution of particular powers, there has been an ad hoc and opaque process of negotiation in private with individual cities (Ayers et al, 2017a). Secondly, agreement of deals is subject to content being acceptable and agreeable to central government, including individual ministers and the Treasury (Tomaney, 2016). This places clear limits on the potential terrain which devolution might cover.

More broadly, the nature of powers devolved has been constrained, and some powers have been centralised while simultaneously others have been devolved (Bailey & Wood, 2017). This raises questions about how meaningful the experience of sub-national devolution has been (Ayers et al, 2017a; Ayers et al, 2017b). Within this context it has been argued that more radical and citizen-centric principles are needed to replace a pre-occupation with the failings of individual places (lack of competitiveness, skills deficits etc.) which are the current priorities of devolution (MacKinnon 2016; Etherington & Jones, 2016).

Lee (2017) writing on the idea of a Northern Powerhouse, a concept which has received considerable political attention as offering an alternative to London-centric growth, identifies a series of issues with the development and deployment of the devolution and rebalancing agenda, including the lack of an over-arching strategy or an accountable institution.

Devolution has also been accompanied by a reduction in financing of economic development activities in comparison to the previous iteration of regional policy where delivery was executed through Regional Development Agencies (Hildreth & Bailey, 2013; MacKinnon, 2016). While the adequacy of funding to address spatial inequalities is a longstanding problem (Gardiner et al, 2013), extended fiscal austerity in the period since 2010 has reduced local capacity to act and invest to support local economic development. This problem is exacerbated by prioritisation of spending on a new industrial strategy which prioritises a narrow range of sectors focusing on economic competitiveness. These sectors are often under-represented in many disadvantaged areas (Fothergill et al, 2017).

These issues highlight a disconnect between the promise of devolution to empower cities to set their own priorities and the reality of limits to both powers and resources being devolved. Both powers and resources are clearly fundamental in the extent to which more inclusive approaches to development can be adopted. Here, historical studies of power relations and governance are instructive. The literature on statecraft identifies the preoccupation of central government with the ‘high politics’ of policy associated with macroeconomic management and taxation alongside the ‘peripheralization’ of many matters of ‘low politics’ to governmental agencies outside the centre’ (Bulpitt, 1986; 28). This framework has been applied to local English devolution, with the authors arguing that devolution does little to redress the concentration of high politics within central government, which by extension frames the dominant growth model and approach to economic development (Ayers et al 2017b).

The scope for changes associated with devolution towards developing a greater emphasis on inclusive growth can also be considered by drawing on Hall’s (1993) classic framework of the policy paradigm shift. Hall identified the following changes in policy instruments and hierarchies required to denote a policy paradigm shift:

- First order changes – quantitative changes in rates/levels of instruments of policy (instrument settings) but instruments and goals remain the same
- Second order changes – changes in policy instruments but not overall goals or hierarchy of goals
- Paradigm shift – radical shift in instrument settings; instruments *and* hierarchy of policy goals

We return to this framework subsequently in assessing the relationship between devolution and inclusive growth.

#### **4) Methods and case study cities**

The findings presented here are based on an analysis of the content of the published documentation of devolution agreements between central government and individual cities. All the agreements are publically available and provide details about the nature of approaches, powers and resources agreed, and contextual information about how the agreement aims to build on existing local strengths and meet local needs. The documents do not provide details about the negotiations themselves which are conducted privately between representatives from individual cities and civil servants negotiating on behalf of central government.

The analysis of devolution is focused on agreements covering six large English cities/city-regions agreed between 2012 and 2016 (although it should be noted that the devolution process has continued thereafter); with the main devolution agreements signed between 2014 and 2016. This was also a period of growing policy interest in inclusive growth in the UK, with the establishment of an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Inclusive Growth (2014); high profile OECD work on advocating inclusive growth (2015); the focus on inclusive growth in the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy (2015); and the launch of the Inclusive Growth Commission (2016). The rationale for selection of the cases was primarily based on their population size, representing the bulk of devolution to urban populations in England (outside London). The cases were also selected for mostly being at the vanguard of devolution, being

amongst the first wave of City Deals and moving furthest and fastest with their Devolution Agreements. The agreement of devolution deals has been associated with changing governance structures of ‘core’ cities and their hinterlands, particularly through the creation of mechanisms for cooperation across neighbouring local authorities in a wider city-region area. The cases selected are: the West Midlands (including Birmingham – total population 2,834,000); Greater Manchester (2,756,000); Liverpool City Region (1,525,000); Leeds City Region (3,048,000); Sheffield City Region (1,375,000); and the Tees Valley (670,000)<sup>ii</sup>. All have a substantial economic history of engineering/manufacturing and have been engaged in a long-term process of economic restructuring.

The devolution agreements reviewed are detailed in Table 1 (the references are provided in Appendix 1). All case studies except the Tees Valley were in the first wave of devolution through City Deals. All had also agreed multiple iterations of Growth Deals. Most had, at the time of analysis, moved from iterations of City Deals and Growth Deals to secure one or more fuller Devolution Agreements with central government (details of these are provided in the subsequent section). One case, Leeds, had not reached the point of a main devolution agreement with central government, whilst Manchester had agreed multiple iterations.

*[Table 1 around here]*

The documents were reviewed using a template to detail information about how cities had framed their overall approaches to economy and society, the content of the

devolution agreements and how this aligned to particular policy domains, and the approaches and activities targeting employment within the agreements.

Content analysis was also used to assess the prevalence of particular key terms within the text of documents. The aim of this was to get a measure of the extent to which economic and/or social development aims were embedded in those agreements. Key terms were developed to capture growth and elements of economic development, and to measure references to some of the major social challenges which might be tackled as part of an inclusive growth agenda. The search terms used were:

- Inclusion/ive (social/economic)
- Social
- Fair (society, outcomes)
- Low-pay
- Unemployment
- Justice (social)
- Well-being
- ‘Good jobs’
- Growth
- Competitive/ness
- Profit
- Enterprise
- Innovation/ive/ate
- Technology/ical
- Productivity/ive

The search terms were counted across all devolution agreements for each city. They were not counted where they were used as a proper noun, referring to, for example, the Regional Growth Fund or Local Enterprise Partnership. For nouns like ‘inclusion’ and ‘justice’ and the adjective ‘fair’, the words were counted when they were specifically referencing the concepts specified in parentheses.

The recorded information on approaches to employment in the cities was then placed into a ‘good jobs framework’, an approach first developed by Osterman (2008) when analysing employment policy and practice in the US (Table 2). The framework allows for an assessment of the predominant approach taken to improve the quality of local labour markets through the range of policy tools which are available to stimulate change. Two axes are identified. The first distinguishes between approaches seeking to create more high quality jobs (i.e. ‘create more good jobs’) versus those seeking to improve the existing stock of jobs in the local labour market (i.e. ‘make bad jobs better’). The second axis identifies whether policymakers seek to utilise standard-setting mechanisms, such as wage floors (minimum and living wages) and other institutional mechanisms (including unionisation), community benefit agreements (such as those typically associated with large developments), or financial (taxation) incentives; or whether they rely more on programmatic approaches such as sector-focused programmes and/or intermediary organisations. Using the framework is an important innovation as across most definitions of inclusive growth elements of job quality are of central importance.

The analysis presented draws explicitly on documents relating to City Deals, Growth Deals and Devolution Agreements. We find that inclusive growth concerns tend to be peripheral in these. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean that inclusive growth issues are absent from cities’ thinking more broadly or that they do not feature more strongly in other policy/strategy documents; although it does demonstrate such concerns have played a limited role in the central planks of devolution.

*[Table 2 around here]*

## **5) Assessing inclusive growth concerns in city devolution**

### *Policy domains in devolution agreements*

We start by setting-out the broad policy domains which constitute the focus of the main Devolution Agreements in the six case study cities (Table 3)<sup>iii</sup>. The devolution agreement documents for all case studies explicitly identify the broad policy domains of transport, housing and planning, skills, and business support. Most include some form of employment support. Half of the agreements also include innovation and public service reform. A minority of agreements explicitly identify investment funds, trade and exporting, energy and environmental, and health policy.

The transport policy domain in most agreements is primarily concerned with road and rail infrastructure programmes to support economic growth. Housing and planning largely involves proposals to unlock sites for new housing and commercial development, often through land and/or housing investment fund mechanisms. Across the agreements the devolution of ‘skills’ is relatively generic and involves the devolution of the national 19 plus adult skills programme and greater influence over post-16 education, training and apprenticeships. The agreements emphasise skills that meet local employer needs for growth (i.e. they aim to be ‘demand-led’). The process of devolving business support is also relatively standardised, based on localising the current national programme, and seeking to align the national Business Growth Service with local business support through local Growth Hubs. The focus is on



growth of start-ups, supporting growth sectors, increasing exports and further promoting inward investment. The Tees Valley Devolution Agreement is distinct in proposing a (business support) programme as a response to unemployment arising from industrial plant closures. Related to employment support, Greater Manchester's original Devolution Agreement of November 2014 explicitly identifies 'complex dependency' as an area for action, involving an expansion of their Working Well pilot to help tackle long-term unemployment. However, such examples of locally-developed initiatives are relatively rare across all of the devolution documents. Agreements identifying public services are primarily about public service reform..

*[Table 3 around here]*

*How have cities framed devolution?*

The way in which growth and economic development is framed by cities and the extent to which this is linked to aims of social improvements is important in considering the nature of, and scope for, inclusive concerns. From the policy domains and policy approaches adopted, it is clear that a growth narrative predominates across the devolution arrangements. Within this overall framing, the focus largely falls on 'barriers to growth'. These barriers are largely ascribed to a combination of a need for *physical development* to address infrastructure issues around transport and availability of business sites; improving *skills supply* through a greater local influence over national programmes for post-16 and 19+ adult skills provision and responding to employer demand; and through *business support* to tackle barriers to the growth of exports.

As well as these horizontal policies, particular economic sectors are highlighted in devolution agreements as being specific targets of policy. These tend to be high value-added sectors. The most prominent and strongly represented economic sector across all of the devolution cases is advanced manufacturing (or ‘high value’ manufacturing). This is followed by the energy sector (Leeds, Tees Valley, Sheffield, Liverpool, Birmingham/West Midlands), encapsulating ‘low carbon’ energy generation and innovations, carbon storage, and oil and gas refinement. There is also some emphasis on life sciences and financial and professional services (Birmingham/West Midlands and Leeds in both cases).

There is some limited evidence of a secondary framing around social concerns. Youth unemployment is one theme where several devolution agreements develop some form of intervention. The emphasis and aspirations are stronger in some cities than others, being most notable in Leeds City Region City Deal with the aspiration to be a ‘NEET free’ city. Critically there is little emphasis on how the economic and social elements of devolution are, or could be, linked together. Economic development approaches and interventions tend to be treated discretely from those parts of the agreements which focus on tackling unemployment.

There is some evidence of a gradual shift towards greater emphasis on social development through the iterations of devolution agreements, as exemplified by Greater Birmingham. The Greater Birmingham City Deal was strongly focused on growth in advanced manufacturing (and some other high-value growth sectors). The language is upbeat and boosterish. This upbeat message carries forward to the later

Devolution Agreement (including the wider Combined Authority), with this agreement coming at a ‘moment of great economic potential...[with the] opportunity to deliver significant additional economic growth and job creation’ (page 4). This time, however, the document also acknowledges ‘the economic and social challenges the region faces’ (ibid). There is further mention of ‘improving outcomes for individuals with multiple indicators of vulnerability (unemployment, offending, substance misuse, poor mental health and homelessness)’ (HM Treasury and WMCA, 2015; 14), but little reference to the solutions to these social challenges and how devolution might contribute to this.

Figure 1 presents findings from an analysis of document texts to provide evidence of the balance between economic and social concerns within devolution agreements (covering City Deals, Growth Deals and Devolution Agreements). This is a simple but insightful way of summarising the content of the documents. The results are presented separately for each of the case study cities. The words were selected to capture both economic and social elements of the devolution agreements and to help assess the balance between these. The reported results are a sub-set of the terms listed in Section 4. These are representative of the full search, with a limited number reported for ease of presentation. The term ‘growth’ is referenced almost 200 times across the various devolution documents agreed with areas covered by the West Midlands Combined Authority. The term similarly dominates the word counts across the other cities; referenced 97 times by Sheffield and 90 times by Manchester. Drivers or facilitators of growth such as innovation and technology are present but less frequently referenced.

By contrast there is much less emphasis on the social side. There is some concern with unemployment, referenced on average eleven times across cities. There are no specific mentions in the documents analysed of low-pay or associated issues. This is surprising given the ongoing national debate about low-pay, the link between low-pay and poverty, and the national debates about the erosion in the value of real wages since the 2007/08 recession. Similarly the term ‘inclusion’ is only mentioned four times across the documents from the six cities. In short, inclusionary concerns and issues of major social importance in recent years around pay and poverty are largely ignored in devolution.

*[Figure 1 around here]*

This is a basic analysis of the balance between economic and social concerns based on key words. However it is instructive in how large the gaps are between economic, particularly growth, and social concerns. The analysis provides ample evidence of the dominant growth narrative within the discourse of devolution. It suggests that rather than challenging the existing economic development model and the inequalities it (re) produces, devolution has focused primarily on barriers to growth and the pursuit of growth, rather than taking inclusion and broader social welfare as a point of departure.

#### *Devolution and ‘good jobs’*

The nature of devolution agreements can also be assessed through the extent to which they focus on the quality of employment, a critical element in an inclusive growth agenda. Here Osterman’s framework is used as a way of assigning measures in

devolution agreements according to the extent to which they target new growth of high quality jobs or the extent to which they seek to improve the stock of existing jobs, and whether they take a standard setting or programmatic approach. Table 4 reports this analysis, demonstrating a dominance of approaches seeking to grow good jobs rather than improve existing jobs. Hence, the entire emphasis of devolution as it relates to employment quality appears orientated towards ‘programmatic’ approaches to ‘creating more good jobs’. The primary focus revolves around investment in physical sites combined with some emphasis on skills supply. In Greater Birmingham the approach is geared around development of existing strengths in advanced manufacturing and development of green jobs. In Liverpool there is an emphasis on science and developing the Knowledge Quarter. Sheffield has a greater focus on local skills supply tied to particular sub-sectors (glass production and high speed rail) as well as an economic development focus on advanced manufacturing and nuclear research. Tees Valley identifies oil and gas as well as wider advanced manufacturing and logistics. Leeds City Region is perhaps less sectorally focused, although it does have an emphasis on biotech and low carbon jobs. Greater Manchester identifies a range of sectors including advanced manufacturing, business services, bio-tech and pharmaceuticals. In all the cities the approaches taken can be viewed as programmatic in that none seek to provide any systemic change linked to some form of minimum thresholds. Yet all six case study city-regions have large low-wage markets which remain outwith the devolution conversation as captured in the documents analysed.

In part the emphasis on programmatic interventions reflects how individual cities are constrained in their ability to influence policy in important areas of standard setting linked to broader job quality concerns. Core policy areas such as national minimum

wages are not in their influence and are set nationally. Notwithstanding this, the complete absence of (softer) standard setting measures and any programmatic focus on the large bulk of low-paid employment in these areas is clearly problematic when trying to relate policy and practice under devolution with a focus on inclusive growth. There are some programmatic approaches relating to employment entry (tackling unemployment), but increasingly the UK's poverty problem is associated with in-work poverty and poor quality work rather than high rates of joblessness (Lee et al., 2017). Devolution up to this point does not provide a direction for beginning to address this issue.

*[Table 4 around here]*

The sectors targeted are of particular interest, being heavily concentrated in relatively narrow higher value-added activities. This type of narrow sectoral targeting has been criticised for missing much productive capacity and concentrating the potential gains from growth on a narrow section of the population (Mayhew & Keep, 2014; Sissons & Jones, 2016; Fothergill et al, 2017). Any focus that the devolution agreements have on job quality improvement links solely to the creation of new jobs; there is no emphasis across the agreements of any engagement of policy with the bulk of the (low-paid) labour market. This reading of the devolution agreements finds them to be narrowly pre-occupied with growth generation in specific sectors which are, for the most part, relatively small in employment terms. This narrow sectoral focus, combined with the emphasis on the creation of new jobs, neglects a large proportion of the labour market, and one which is critical for inclusive growth concerns – individuals who are in employment but who are in jobs which insecure, poorly paid

and offer few opportunities for development. The use of Osterman's framework therefore suggests that the approach to employment taken in devolution agreements is distinctly unbalanced.

### *Explaining the marginality of inclusive growth concerns*

The analysis has demonstrated the limited nature of inclusive growth concerns in devolution agreements, but what explains this? In a sense, the marginalisation of inclusive growth reflects the inherent imbalance in the particular approach to devolution adopted in England. The deal-making method is fundamentally asymmetrical in terms of power relations, with boundaries and resources controlled by central government (Tomaney, 2016; Etherington & Jones, 2016). Furthermore, in the context of an extended period of fiscal austerity, devolution has really been the only means through which cities can seek to secure some additional (limited) financial resources. Within this context, it is unsurprising that the content of devolution agreements largely mirrors the priorities of the Conservative central government and reproduces the orientation of national policy. This appears an important constraint on locally determined policies, practices and investment for more inclusive outcomes, and highlights the central role of the national context in framing prospects for inclusive growth in cities.

There are however other factors which may also offer a partial explanation for the lack of emphasis on policies seeking to engender inclusive growth. There may be a gravitation towards the status-quo in economic development policy from negotiators on the cities' side as well. This could stem from risk aversion, or lack of capacity and

expertise to devise alternative approaches. Given the complex nature of defining inclusive growth, potential policy trade-offs, and the entrenchment of the historical focus on growth per se as the primary target, formulating informed and nuanced policy for inclusive growth is clearly more challenging than defaulting to existing approaches. There may also be a lag between on the one hand the increases in the profile of inclusive growth, both in the UK and internationally, given the ‘high-level’ insights of organisations driving this debate, and on the other the permeation of inclusive growth concerns into local and city-level policies and practices.

## **6) Conclusions and policy implications**

Inclusive growth is a concept which is increasingly presented as a means of more fully linking economic and social progress. There is a growing interest in the parameters of inclusive growth internationally. Yet the concept itself is fuzzy. This article has addressed inclusive growth in sub-national policymaking through novel analysis of the content of new devolution agreements in England.

The UK has historically had a highly centralised approach to policymaking. Since 2010 there has been a process of incremental devolution of new powers primarily to urban areas. This includes powers in policy domains which are relevant to more inclusive growth outcomes. Devolution therefore potentially opens-up opportunities for cities to modify national policy to prioritise inclusion and social development. This article has assessed whether inclusive growth concerns have informed policy and practice in devolution in selected English cities. This is a societally important question.



The devolution process has been fragmented and has moved at differential speeds across the case-study cities. Manchester moved quickly from City Deals to several iterations of Devolution Agreements; while progress towards further devolution elsewhere was slower. Notwithstanding the differential pace, there is considerable commonality around the policy domains which cities have targeted and the nature of changes which cities are targeting. The framing of the agreements across the cities also has obvious commonalities around the focus on growth and addressing barriers to growth, and in the targeting of particular priority sectors.

Conceptual framings of inclusive growth have highlighted the distinction between greater equality of opportunity and greater equality of outcomes (Turok, 2010). There is little evidence within devolution settlements of significant consideration of these. Where there is some focus on opportunities these tend to be around labour market entry, particularly youth employment/unemployment. The approaches here are piecemeal and only weakly integrated with the core focus of growth within the agreements. There is no real emphasis across the devolution agreements of policy or practice seeking to influence equity around outcomes. Other authors have identified a distinction between a 'Growth Plus' approach which prioritises growth but also seeks to widen the pool of opportunities locally and an 'Inclusive Economy' approach which seeks to shape economic and social development towards more inclusive outcomes rather than mitigate these post hoc (Lupton & Hughes, 2016). Our analysis provides some, although relatively weak, evidence of a 'Growth Plus' approach which is focused primarily on supply-side interventions; but scant evidence that wider 'Inclusive Economy' thinking has permeated the devolution agenda.

Osterman's good jobs framework allows for an analysis of the potential reach of a local employment and economic development approach, including influencing the demand-side of the labour market. The analysis presented here suggests that the approaches to employment and job quality in devolution examined here are quite unbalanced, with a dominance of approaches seeking to grow good jobs but much less engagement with approaches to improve the existing jobs. Extending this to look at types of jobs it is clear that the experience of city devolution is premised almost entirely on seeking to generate the growth of employment in predominantly high-value sectors. This primary focus on a relatively small number of high-value sectors can also be seen in the wider national approach to industrial strategy (HM Government, 2017). There is a striking lack of engagement with low-pay sectors which constitute a large proportion of employment across the case study cities. Given the concerns around low-pay, in-work poverty and wider job quality in the UK, it is perhaps surprising that these issues are almost entirely absent from devolution priorities. Of course cities do lack many of the powerful standard setting powers which can improve the quality of work (such as statutory minimum wages), but there are a range of potential programmatic approaches which can be developed to improve work quality which are also absent from devolution agreements.

Authors have stressed the durability of the UK growth model and policymakers attachment to its fundamentals even during periods of crisis (Hodson & Mabbett, 2009; Cowling & Tomlinson, 2011). We observe this durability through devolution, which has done little to challenge existing inequalities. Analysis from the UK and elsewhere suggests that growth is not necessarily strongly linked with better outcomes

for low-paid workers, and that context matters (Mishel et al., 2009; Lee & Sissons, 2016). Yet inclusive growth concerns appear to be largely sidelined in the devolution processes as a narrative of growth (and assumption of trickle-down) prevails. For inclusive growth to move beyond aspiration, political will and action are needed to address longstanding social problems; these are conspicuous by their absence in early iterations of devolution to English cities.

The limited nature of inclusive growth concerns in devolution agreements in part reflects in-built design factors which shape the way of devolution has been approached in the England. The partners in ‘deal-making’ in devolution come from very different positions of power, with central government dictating the terms under which agreements can be negotiated (Tomaney, 2016; Etherington & Jones, 2016; Ayers et al 2017b). Under these conditions, approaches taken to economic development in devolution agreements have tended to mirror the priorities and practices of national government, where little emphasis has been placed on inclusive growth. The precise nature of boundary drawing and negotiability in devolution agreements is an important area for further research.

Reflecting on Hall’s (1993) seminal work on policy paradigms our analysis uncovers only minor policy changes associated with devolution and the nature of economic development policy. The overall goals of policy, the hierarchy of policy goals (which are critical to signifying a shift towards inclusive growth) and the dominant framing within the national growth model remain largely unaltered. There have been modest changes in the levels of policy instruments as local areas take on greater responsibility for policy development in some areas, but this is combined with significant

constraints on resources. In addition, the nature of policy instruments has retained a large degree of consistency with established national approaches.

Our analysis does not imply that cities are not doing anything around inclusive growth. Many cities have in recent years held 'Fairness Commissions' and developed local approaches aimed at greater equity (for example through local Living Wage campaigns). Cities have also focused on issues such as weak employment prospects and household poverty, for example through the use of European Social Fund monies (Green et al, 2016). There is also some evidence that inclusive growth concerns may play a stronger role in other local documents, such as Strategic Economic Plans produced by Local Enterprise Partnerships (Crisp & Lupton, 2017). However, critically our work demonstrates that inclusive growth concerns do not appear to have been a priority of the early stages of devolution. This is significant as devolution is presented as an opportunity for cities to frame their own development, set their own priorities and to influence the alignment of resources. As this analysis has shown however, in practice the priorities and approaches which have been agreed have largely reproduced national policy orientations, with little emphasis on inclusive growth.

There are a number of research gaps identified by the evidence we present. The nature of the negotiations between cities and central government and the process of boundary drawing and negotiability is not well understood (for an exception see Ayers et al, 2017a). As trust and working relationships are established between local and national actors, it may be the case that cities are able to focus more on social development and inclusive growth and to mainstream these aims; this is an important

area for ongoing research. Similarly, as policy influencers, such as think tanks, charities and societies, in the UK and internationally, increasingly promote the concept of inclusive growth this may also encourage a greater permeation of inclusive growth concerns into national and local policy-making. Changes in governance structures in cities, with the introduction of elected Mayors, may also give greater emphasis to policy making around inclusive growth concerns. There is ample scope for internationally comparative work seeking to understand the nature of policy development around inclusive growth in different national and institutional contexts. More broadly, there is much to be done to unpick the conceptual and empirical ambiguity of what inclusive growth is, and critically to identify how models of inclusive growth can be developed which meaningfully address long-running patterns of spatially and socially uneven development.

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## Tables and Figures

Table 1: Devolution agreements covered by the analysis

City	Devolution agreements
Greater Manchester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City Deal (July 2012); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16); Devolution Agreements (Nov 14; July 15; Nov 15; Mar 16)</li> </ul>
Birmingham/W Mids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great Birmingham and Solihull – City Deal (July 12); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16)</li> <li>Black Country – City Deal (Feb 14); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16)</li> <li>Coventry and Warwickshire – City Deal (Dec 13); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16)</li> <li>West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Agreement (Nov 15)</li> </ul>
Liverpool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liverpool City Region – City Deal (July 12); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16); Devolution Agreements (Nov 15, March 16)</li> </ul>
Leeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leeds City Region – City Deal (July 12); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15)</li> </ul>
Sheffield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sheffield City Region – City Deal (July 12); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16); Devolution Agreements (Feb 15, Oct 15)</li> </ul>
Tees Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tees Valley City Region – City Deal (June 14); Growth Deals (July 14; Jan 15; Nov 16); Devolution Agreements (Oct 15)</li> </ul>

Table 2: The good jobs framework

	Standard setting	Programmatic
<b>Make bad jobs good</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum wages</li> <li>Living wages</li> <li>Unionisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career ladders programmes</li> <li>Labour market intermediaries</li> <li>Sectoral programs</li> </ul>
<b>Create more good jobs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community benefit agreements</li> <li>Managed tax incentives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension services</li> <li>Sectoral programs</li> <li>Consortia or partnerships under business or union auspices</li> </ul>

Source: Osterman (2008)

Table 3: Coverage of main devolution agreements across policy domains

	Transport	Housing & planning	Skills	Business support	Employment	innovation	Investment funds	Trade & Exporting	Health	Energy and environment	Public services
Manchester	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Birmingham/W Mids	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
Liverpool	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Leeds*	✓		✓				✓	✓			
Sheffield	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Tees Valley	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	

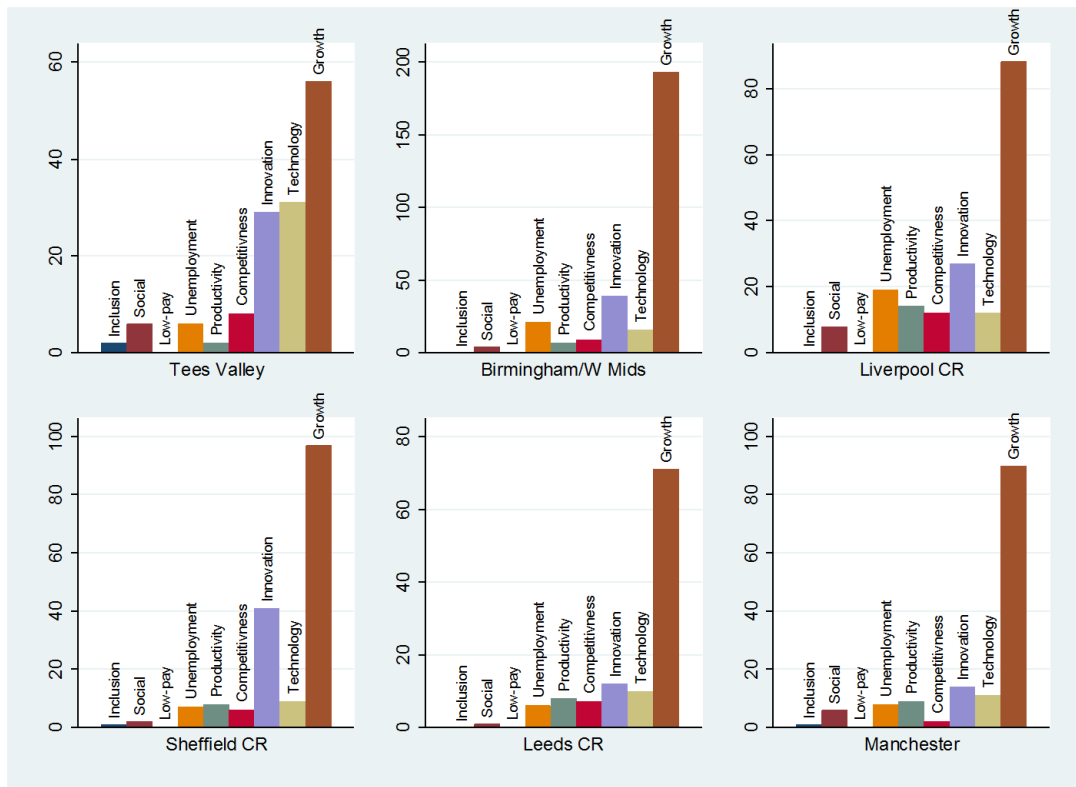
\*Refers to the City Deal

Table 4: Applying a good jobs framework to devolution agreements

	<b>Standard setting</b>	<b>Programmatic</b>
<b>Make bad jobs good</b>		
<b>Create more good jobs</b>		<p>Investments in sites, skills equipment for advanced manufacturing and other high-value activities (Birmingham and W Midlands)</p> <p>Green Deal Accelerator to improve energy efficiency and generate green jobs (Birmingham)</p> <p>Harnessing science and knowledge assets – including at Daresbury and Liverpool Knowledge Quarter (Liverpool)</p> <p>Investment in skills infrastructure - including in FE, the British Glass Academy, National College for High Speed Rail at Doncaster, Skills Bank, improving links with business (Sheffield)</p> <p>Centre for Procurement based around Advanced Manufacturing and Nuclear Research Centres (Sheffield)</p> <p>Jobs growth target linked to economic improvement and some targeted activities in biotech and low carbon (Leeds City)</p> <p>Focus on industrial/commercial sites for high value growth sectors (advanced manufacturing, low carbon, oil and gas, digital and logistics), e.g. Materials Processing Institute, Teeside Advanced Manufacturing Park, Redcar and Cleveland Oil and Gas Academy (Tees Valley)</p> <p>Job creation in life sciences sector, science and technology, and low carbon. ‘Airport City EZ’ focusing on advanced manufacturing/engineering/aerospace, business services, healthcare, industrial bio-technology, pharmaceuticals. (Greater Manchester).</p>

Source: Authors’ analysis of devolution agreements

Figure 1: Referencing of selected economic and social terms in devolution agreement documents



Source: Authors' analysis of devolution agreements (City Deals, Growth Deals and Devolution Agreements).

The y axis represents the number of counts of specific terms across the documents analysed. (Note that the number of counts varies by city and the individual graphs are scaled differently in order to facilitate comparison between cities.)

## Appendix 1: Details of reviewed devolution documents

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[All documents were accessed between 8<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017]

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<sup>i</sup> Although there is some tentative evidence inclusive growth is starting to enter the lexicon, it was mentioned (once) by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Spring Budget Speech (2017) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/spring-budget-2017-philip-hammonds-speech>)

<sup>ii</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/populationdynamicsofukcityregionssincemid2011/2016-10-11#total-population>

<sup>iii</sup> These are the full devolution agreements rather than the iterations of City Deals and Growth Deals. For Leeds, which does not have a devolution agreement, the content of the City Deal is used to populate Table 3.