1. What impact have recent debates about Scottish and Welsh devolution and the Scottish independence referendum had on English attitudes towards devolution?

As the research conducted by scholars at Cardiff and Edinburgh Universities has shown (see notably our three previous reports, *The Dog that Finally Barked, England and its Two Unions*, and *Taking England Seriously: the New English Politics*) after apparent indifference to devolution during its early years, there have been some important shifts in attitudes. Drawing on the most detailed surveys conducted on political attitudes in England, these reports have demonstrated two broad and important phenomena:

- What we have termed ‘**devo-anxiety**’: a concern that devolution had led to the other nations of the UK – and particularly Scotland – gaining unfair political and financial advantages at England’s expense; and
- A **dissatisfaction with how the structures of the UK currently deal with** (or, rather, fail to deal with) **England**. There is considerable unhappiness with how England is treated: a widespread feeling that while the concerns of other nations are being addressed, England is being neglected and (financially) taken advantage of.

These points are illustrated in our most recent survey (conducted in September 2015). For instance, we asked respondents in England whether they thought the different nations of the UK got more or less of ‘their fair share’ of UK government spending. Only 8% thought that England got more than its fair share and almost five times as many (37% though that it got less than its fair share). For Scotland the picture was very different: only a mere 3% thought that Scotland got less than its fair share, while 52% thought that it got more than its fair share.

2. Is there any clear preference among English citizens over how England should be governed? How has this changed over the last few years?

All of our four detailed surveys of the English population (conducted in the last five years) have shown considerable discontent with how England is treated. While there is a clear majority consensus on this, there is much less consensus on how the problem should be addressed. When various potential solutions (a Secretary of State for England in the UK Cabinet; UK government ministers for the regions of England; an English Parliament) are put to the public one at a time, one can get substantial support for all of them. When several possible ways of governing England are offered to people simultaneously, and they are asked to select their most favoured option, then there is usually no clear majority for any particular option. That said, some form of English Votes for English Laws (EVEL) in the House of Commons does appear to be the proposal that commands the most widespread and
consistent support, however we ask people about the issue. More radical proposals, like an English Parliament, tend to command less support.

In our 2015 survey, options of a Secretary of State for England in the UK Cabinet; UK government ministers for the regions of England and an English Parliament all won plurality support when offered individually. However, there was clear majority support (65% of all respondents) for the idea that “only English MPs can vote on laws that would apply in England”. Similarly, when several constitutional options were offered together, in various formulations, EVEL always emerged as the most popular single option even if winning only plurality, rather than outright majority, support.

3. Has there been a change in recent years in people’s preferences for whether particular policies should be decided at an England-wide or local level? If so, what factors do you think have influenced that change?

We have detected no great change in this respect in our research over recent years. What we have found consistently in our research in strong antipathy to local variation in standards of policy delivery. In the abstract, localism is attractive: when asked, 41% of our 2015 survey respondents supported the idea that ‘Local councils in England should have more powers’, compared with only 12% who believed that ‘Local councils in England should have fewer powers’. At the same time, few people want to risk being on the wrong end of a variation in standards, and there is very strong and consistent support for the idea that most policies should be delivered in a uniform manner. Our surveys have asked about a range of policies and “whether you think each policy should be uniform across the whole of England, or whether it should be a matter for each local council to decide”. The only policies on which there is clear support for localism are refuse collection and planning approvals. On many other matters – including nursery provision, schooling at both primary and secondary levels, and social services – there is strong majority support for policy uniformity.

4. Is there a clear desire for either changes that treat England as a single entity or for a more regional approach (e.g. combined authorities or regional assemblies)? Does opinion on this vary significantly by region?

Our research strongly indicates a desire for the recognition of England as England within the structures of the United Kingdom, and a very limited public support for any form of English regionalism. We tend to find very limited support for the constitutional status quo in our various survey questions; however, the one thing that is clearly less supported than the status quo is some form of regional governance. In our 2015 survey, when we offered the
constitutional option of “each region of England hav[ing] its own assembly”, alongside the status quo, Evel and an English parliament, regional assemblies won the support of only 9% of all respondents and was the least popular of all the four options. This was not a one-off finding; we have consistently found very little support for regionalism in England, however we phrase the question.

On this, and more generally, there is surprisingly little regional variation in attitudes, with the exception of London. London is the single consistent outlier on a range of attitudes: its population tend to evince somewhat lower levels of devo-anxiety and lower levels on unhappiness with how England is treated within the UK. But this is not to say that Londoners are exactly contented – they are merely less discontented than others. These are differences of degree, not of kind.

5. Do the city and regional decentralisation deals negotiated by the Government so far offer an answer to public dissatisfaction with how England is governed?

This is possible – if the new structures are seen to work after being established then they may well build public support. But there is little evidence of great support for them at present. We would also note the considerable public concerns about local variation in service delivery that we have already commented upon.

6. Does ‘English votes for English laws’ have the potential to address the English Question and discontent in England over the territorial constitution, as well as the West Lothian Question?

This is also possible. The reform has the advantage of ‘going with the grain’ of public attitudes in England: there is support for the basic principle, and Evel does appear to be, as we have stated, the most widely-supported option for addressing public dissatisfaction with England’s place in the UK.

7. Given that that the ‘English votes for English laws’ procedure introduced into Commons standing orders in 2015 does not prevent Scottish MPs from voting on ‘English-only’ matters, do you think that it will address English concerns about the West Lothian Question?

There are two important but distinct issues to address here. One is public concern. But there is also the issue of constitutional coherence and practical workability. The form of Evel as it has actually been adopted is a fairly minimalist version, broadly in line with the McKay Commission recommendations. If this proves to be workable, and if the adoption of this
mechanism persuades sufficient people in England that their interests are being adequately protected, then it may prove to be an effective solution.

2 February 2015