

Written evidence submitted by [Professor Francesca Gains](#), The University of Manchester [POD 009]

This written evidence follows up on the [oral evidence](#) given to the Committee on 16th March, providing further details of research evidence that I mentioned in relation to:

- the mayoral model and the powers that directly elected leaders use;
- how to engage all parts of the community in devolved governance structures;
- gaps in the evidence base particularly around equalities.

It concludes with a comment on the continued importance of support for devolution to address the impact of COVID-19 and implications of post-COVID-19 recovery.

The exercise of mayoral powers – (questions 16 and 50 from the evidence session)

1. I mentioned research (conducted with [Professor Vivien Lowndes](#) of the University of Birmingham) which examined how directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were using their powers. To expand on this, Police and Crime Commissioners are elected in the 40 Police Authority areas across England and Wales. There is a direct relevance for the way in which elected metro mayors exercise leadership. Indeed in Greater Manchester and Greater London the elected mayors have policing and crime in their portfolio and the roles are combined.
2. We examined how PCCs used formal powers, such as powers to appoint advisers, disburse funds, and exercise equalities duties. We also examined what is sometimes called 'soft powers' - the power to convene and incentivise stakeholders around issue agendas, to advocate for localities and set political agendas.
3. Our work showed that [the use of equalities duties \(for example commissioning evidence about the incidence of victimhood\) impacted on the prioritisation of violence against women policies](#). A further paper addresses [emerging new 'governance rules' for directly elected leaders such as PCCs](#). This argues direct election gives leaders (such as elected mayors) greater authority and legitimacy to provide strong, visible and transformative leadership across local authority boundaries and across stakeholders groups.

How to engage all parts of the community in the new governance structures (questions 16, 34 and 35 from the evidence session)

4. There are a variety of ways to engage all parts of the community in devolved governance policy making and consultations. This is especially relevant to ensure underrepresented groups have a voice in decision making structures. Some of the ways that combined and mayoral authorities can ensure women, in all their diversity (and other underrepresented groups) are involved in discussions about devolution and devolved policy making are discussed in a guide for policy makers in devolved settings, [Mind the Gap – Getting Women's voices into Policymaking](#), and include:
 - using existing statistical and polling data;
 - developing citizen science techniques;

- organising focus groups and listening exercises;
- the use of women's budgeting techniques;
- organising citizen assemblies;
- co-production.

Gaps in the evidence base (question 51 from the evidence session)

5. I note since the Committee sat on the 16th March the latest [devolution report](#) has been published. This is welcome; however, the financial information is very difficult to assess as it does not present year on year allocations or overall funding allocations over time by combined authority. The information provided in the report will not assist the requirement for scrutiny of devolved funding at either central government or combined authority level.
6. Additionally, I would like to stress the point made in the evidence session that it will be essential for combined authorities to use [equalities duties](#) to their full extent in order to seek and use evidence to support the economic goals of devolution. It is key to understanding the gendered nature of educational, occupational and labour market inequalities in devolved areas in order to realise potential productivity and growth plans in local industrial strategies.
7. Without a full understanding of the inequalities that exist on a gendered basis in combined authority areas it will not be possible to identify and direct policy action effectively to support better female engagement with the labour market. And this has consequences for the achievement of improved productivity as well as unlocking talent. A strong [equalities evidence base, such as that in *On Gender*](#), assists in achieving both the economic and social goals of devolution. This is going to be even more vital in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery.
8. Firstly, [devolved authorities must identify what is known, and where there are evidence gaps on gender inequalities](#) around key policy agendas they are trying to address around stimulating growth, innovation and employment, skill development, and in Greater Manchester's case, integrating health and social care.
9. This should include [educational](#), [occupational](#) and [labour market](#) data showing how structural gendered inequalities arise with women more likely to enter low paid and precarious employment such as care work. [Hearing from women about their needs for transport and childcare](#) in order to balance work and care is crucial for policies directing infrastructural resources. And to make the link between work and [unpaid family care weakening women's engagement with full time work](#) and the consequences of lower female labour market participation for [income insecurity in old age](#).

The future of devolution in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery

10. The Committee's oral evidence session immediately preceded the Prime Minister's statement to the House on the 16th March, which marked the first stage of the move to lockdown and extensive social distancing. The subsequent seven weeks have seen unprecedented measures to deal with the spread of COVID-19 and the economic and social consequences of lockdown measures.

11. The implications of the lockdown on all aspects of life are enormous. In this time, the localised knowledge and expertise in local government has been invaluable in supporting the delivery of essential services during lockdown. Local communities supported by local authorities have rallied to provide help for the vulnerable. Central government has needed the knowledge, expertise and capacity of local government to deliver and support such stringent social distancing measures.
12. Further, as the period of lockdown has gone on, attention has turned to some of the potential benefits that lockdown has uncovered. Again the realisation of these potential gains from the experience of lockdown requires the localised specialist knowledge of local government and particularly the strategic role that combined authorities can play in supporting joined up transport connectivity, business and skills support, bringing together health and social care services. The evidence discussed in [On Gender](#) will be necessary for policy makers to tackle low-paid and precarious care work, support for local transport and childcare developments, and target support for local businesses and skills development.
13. The fiscal consequences of lockdown on central and local government finances are and will be catastrophic and pressure on public finances greater than any period since the Second World War. Continued support to business, charities and third sector support will be needed, the loss of tax and business rate income will continue and the need for income replacement benefits. And the demands for public services to address unmet health needs, for mental health support, to make improvements to social care and for victims of domestic violence will continue to be high. Despite inevitable pressures on public finances which will follow, I argue the need for further devolution and the development of a devolution framework is stronger than ever.
14. Combined authorities provide a vital strategic link between local authorities providing vital public services in localities and the wider central government commitment to levelling up. Combined authorities headed by an elected mayor can provide the leadership and powers to join up agendas around business support, skills development with improved transport connectivity and health and social care integration. All essential to recovery and to realising some of the potential benefits that lockdown has revealed on work-life balance, public health and environmental improvement.

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