

To: Secretary of State
From: Principal Private Secretary

15/05/2020

Join up with the other Territorial Offices

1. There is currently some informal join up between the TOs at official, SpAd, and ministerial level but this is often focused on specific issues and can be quite ad hoc. In the past, there used to be a fortnightly catch up between TO SoS with key officials joining as needed. Having spoken with my opposite numbers in the other TOs there is support for more join up between the TOs as a group.
2. The Cabinet Office have been quite hands on in their role on coordination and join up on devolution issues, which has the result of TOs sometimes feeling a bit disempowered in their relationship with the centre and with DAs, although this is much less of an issue for NIO. An overly centralised approach also risks undermining the role of individual TOs who of course know the particular issues and personalities of their DAs in great detail. It's worth noting that the other TOs are much smaller than NIO.
3. There is an opportunity for the TOs themselves, led by TO SoSs, to be more proactive in terms of how we coordinate on DA issues, drawing out the commonalities but also being clear on the differences. One of the traps that Cabinet Office often falls into is treating the DAs as a homogenous block. That is of course a particular issue with regard to Northern Ireland where there are many differences with Scotland and Wales.
4. There is also an opportunity for us to be more proactive on strengthening the union by doing more coordination between TOs so that we're pushing for the real tangible benefits of the union that make a difference to people's everyday lives and focusing on making levelling up a reality in the DAs. This frees up space for the Cabinet Office to think about the union strategy from more of a UK-wide perspective.
5. The degree of coordination and join up between TOs is of course a spectrum and something that could be increased over time if we think that is beneficial. However, even if we keep this as a relatively light touch exercise to join up at both policy and political level to ensure a more coherent approach with the centre, that itself would be a positive thing.
6. **Are you content that we start a fortnightly meeting of the TO SoSs to look at shared issues? YES , Def, like this idea**