



History of devolution

In 1707 the Act of Union abolished the separate Parliaments for Scotland and England, and created a single Parliament at Westminster in London.

However Scotland retained many distinctive features, including a separate church and legal system. A form of administrative devolution for Scotland was established in 1885 when the Scottish Office was created as a Department of the UK Government, assuming responsibility for many of the issues which in England and Wales were dealt with by Whitehall Departments, such as health, education, justice, agriculture, fisheries and farming, and was headed by a UK Cabinet Minister, the Secretary of State for Scotland.

In 1979 a Referendum was held on proposals by the then Government to establish a Scottish Assembly, but although a small majority voted in favour the proposals did not obtain the support of 40 per cent of the electorate, which had been set as a requirement before they could be implemented.

In 1989 the Scottish Constitutional Convention was established, consisting of representatives of civic Scotland and some of the political parties, to draw up a detailed blueprint for devolution including proposals for a directly elected Scottish Parliament with wide legislative powers. The SCC's Report in 1995 formed the basis of further proposals which were brought forward by the UK Government in 1997.

These proposals received overwhelming support in a Referendum on September 11, 1979, with 74 per cent voting in favour of a Scottish Parliament and 63 per cent voting for the Parliament to have powers to vary the basic rate of income tax.

Following the passage of the Scotland Act 1998, the Scottish Executive (officially referred to as the Scottish Government since August 2007) and Scottish Parliament were officially convened on July 1, 1999 - a date which marks the transfer of powers in devolved matters, previously exercised by the Secretary of State for Scotland and other UK Ministers, to the Scottish Ministers.

Elections to the Scottish Parliament are conducted on the basis of combining the traditional first-past-the-post system (to elect 73 constituency members) and a form of proportional representation called the Additional Member System (to elect 56 regional members - seven for each of the eight regions used in European Parliament elections).