

# How has devolution done?

Scottish devolution when voted on at the end of the last century was claimed to be the way to allow Scotland to perform better than England in public services and economic growth when they could run their own services and boost their tax revenues.

I have no intention of arguing we should seek to reverse a democratic decision taken in a referendum, and many Scots may well have voted for more Scottish decision taking however it worked out. It nonetheless sheds an interesting light on policies towards higher spending and higher taxes to see what Scotland has bought by choosing both. It is a perfect experiment compared to England over the last 23 years.

Scotland has imposed a higher 21% intermediate Income tax rate, a higher higher rate at 42% and a higher Top rate at 47% compared to the rest of the UK at 20%, 40% and 45%. This has helped Scotland to afford much higher public spending per head, though the bulk is paid for by a bigger grant from UK taxes. Scotland last year spent £13,881 per head on public services compared to £11,549 in England.

If we take the two key services of health and education we see little advantage from these higher sums. Scottish pupils on average are well behind English ones in maths and science judged by international secondary school comparative assessment, and similar in English. The NHS in Scotland has more long waits to get NHS treatments than England and has a bigger percentage on waiting lists.

Meanwhile there has been no boost to growth from higher spending and taxes. Since 2000, the first full year of the Scottish Parliament, Scottish GDP has advanced 86.6% in cash terms compared to 106.2% for the UK as a whole.

Scottish voters need to ask some tough questions of their government. Why aren't public services better for all the extra money? Why is economic growth lagging so badly? It also warns England that a further hike in taxes and public spending would not deliver better results on this evidence.