

Strengthening the UK

CPF

Discussion Brief 2022/2

CPF Discussion Briefs exist to stimulate debate. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Conservative Party.



Contents

2022/2 Strengthening the UK	3
The Challenge	4
Questions for discussion.....	4
Recent Government Action & Plans	5
Context: Charts and Data	5
Sources and Further Details.....	7

Dear Colleagues,

2022/2 Strengthening the UK

Thank you to everybody who participated in our consultation on Families and Communities. This new consultation paper invites your input on strengthening the United Kingdom.

Please send your responses to the questions in this paper to CPF.Papers@conservatives.com, using the associated response form published alongside the paper on the CPF website. The deadline for submitting your response is 3rd July. We aim to publish our next discussion paper, on Jobs, Pensions & Microbusiness, on 4th July.

A summary of responses to this consultation paper will be sent to the Prime Minister's Policy Unit, relevant Ministers, Party Chairman and CPF Chairman by mid-August. We look forward to hearing your ideas.

Kind regards,

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The Challenge

"Accountable and empowered local leadership has been the golden thread in British history and critical to the success of our peoples. I feel that when the balance of power tips too far away from local communities and towards central government, that people feel a sense of disempowerment.

"Talent is spread equally across our country; but opportunity is not. Disparities persist, between places and within them. ... Overcoming those difficulties is a shared challenge. It is a challenge for governments in Holyrood and in Whitehall [and Stormont and Cardiff], it is a challenge for local government and it's a challenge that should bind people together across parties." (Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, 24 February 2022)¹

This consultation is not about devolution. CPF Groups considered the constitutional questions connected with the Union at the start of 2021. Rather, this consultation is about what more can be done to strengthen social bonds across the UK.

The armed forces recruit from across the whole country and demonstrate how strong regional identities (e.g. in local regiments) can co-exist alongside a strong sense of national pride. The question is how to replicate this balance of strengths across other areas of our lives and culture, including regional spending, local government strategy and the civil service.

Reportedly, Brits are more likely to have visited Paris than Edinburgh and more likely to have been to Amsterdam than Nottingham.² Half (49%) have never visited a Scottish castle³ and one-in-seven (14%) have never visited London,⁴ including one-in-three (34%) UK schoolchildren.⁵ Five-in-six (83%) agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. One-in-six (17%) adults (aged 16+) in England, however, feel that they do not belong very strongly or at all to Britain and one-in-three (35%) feel they do not belong to their neighbourhood. In addition, two-in-five (39%) adults report that all of their friends are the same ethnic group as them and two-in-seven (28%) said they are all from the same religious group. One-in-five (20%) said they have the same level of education as all their friends and almost one-in-five (18%) state that all of their friends are the same age group as them.⁶

Various schemes exist to expand the horizons and opportunities available to individuals, e.g.:

- The National Citizen Service (NCS) exists to engage, unite and empower young people, enabling 16- and 17-year-olds to spend a few weeks in the summer or autumn mixing with a new crowd, taking on fresh challenges together.
- The Turing Scheme provides funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world. It enables UK organisations from the higher education, further education, vocational education & training and schools sectors to offer their students, learners and pupils life-changing experiences to study or work abroad.

Questions for discussion

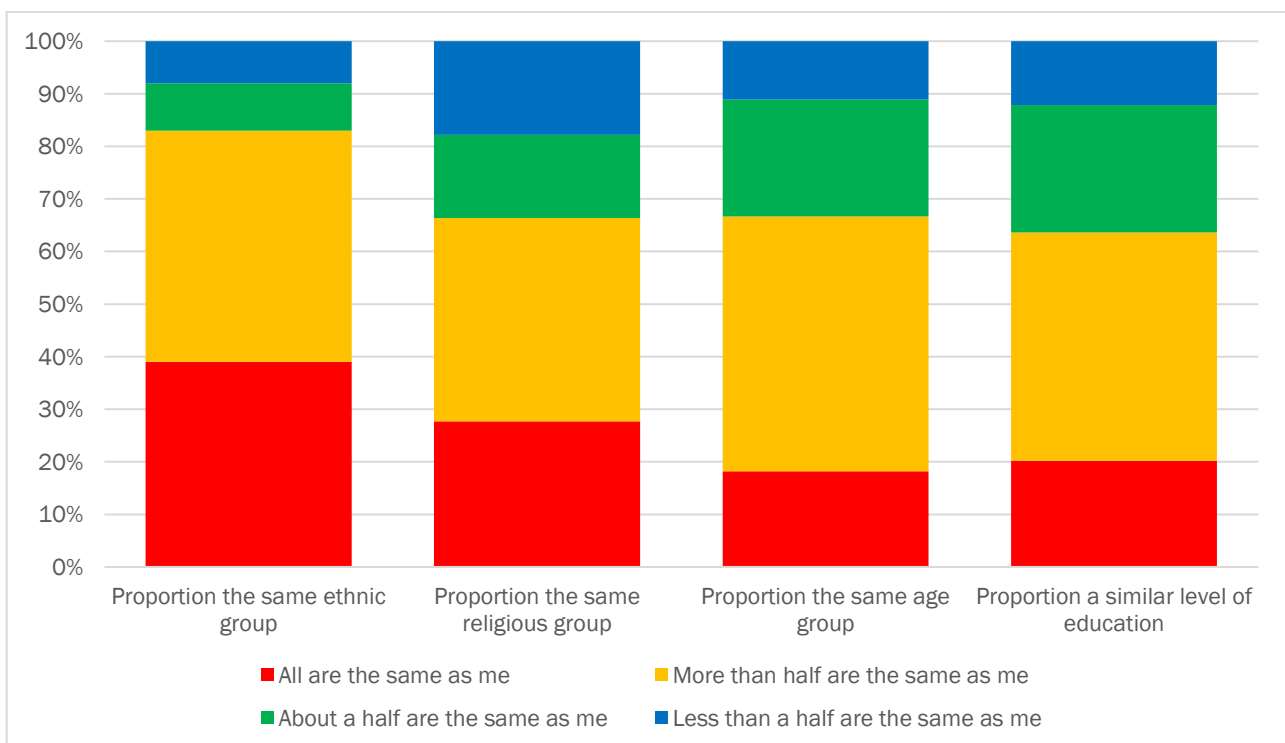
1. What do you consider to be the values and symbols of the UK?
2. What do you consider to be the advantages of the UK to its component nations?
3. How might we encourage schemes that facilitate younger people mixing more across the UK?
4. How might we build on the NCS and educational schemes such as the Turing Scheme, including at primary school level?
5. How might transport, business, the arts and media be used to strengthen ties across the UK?
6. How might our common defence and global influence be used to strengthen ties across the UK?
7. Is there any other observation you would like to make?

Recent Government Action & Plans

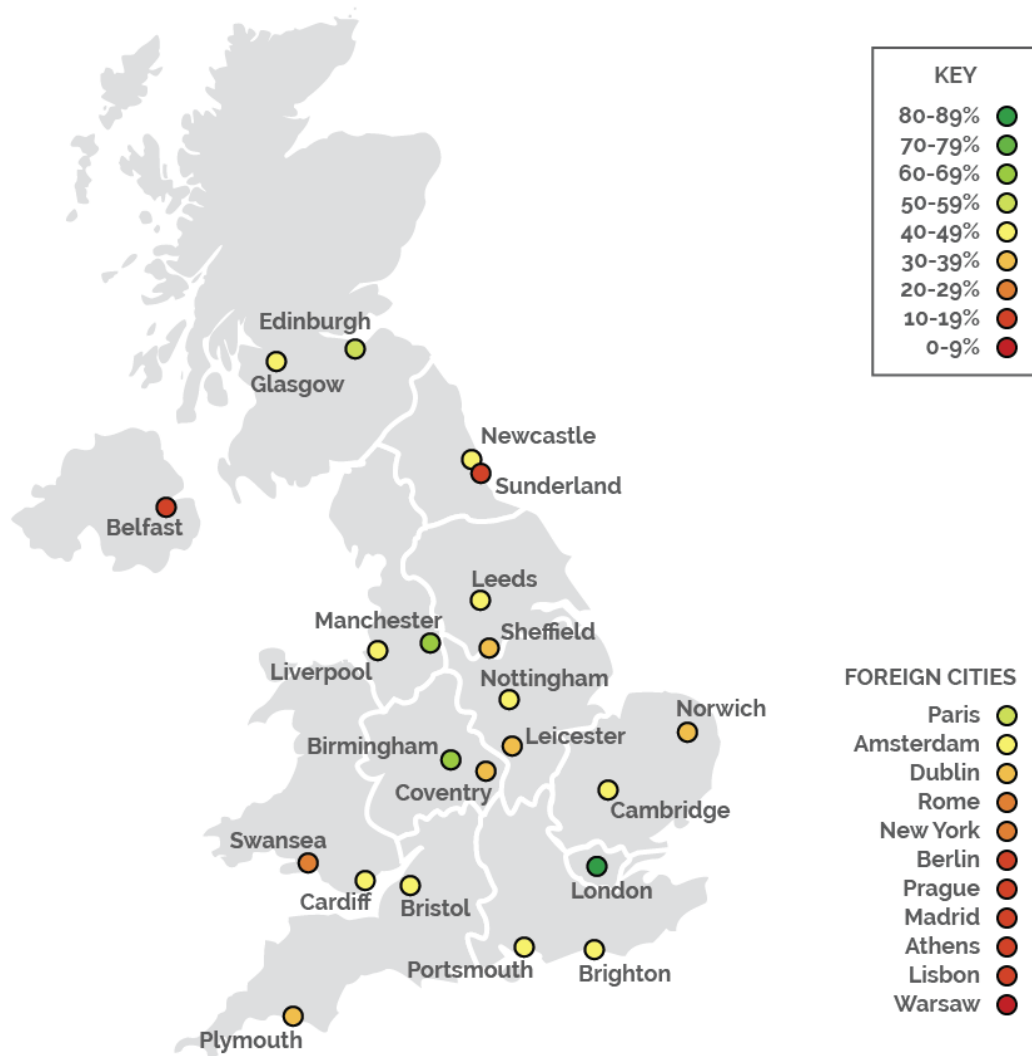
- The Levelling Up White Paper set out how the UK government will work with the devolved governments to spread opportunity and transform the whole United Kingdom. This includes 55 new Education Investment Areas and turning Glasgow City-Region into an Innovation Accelerator.⁷
- The landmark Intergovernmental Relations Review set out new structures as to how the UK and devolved governments will work closely together to deliver for people across the whole of the United Kingdom, with a new council chaired by the Prime Minister and Ministerial groups designed to strengthen our joint response to the opportunities and challenges we face.⁸
- Providing the biggest funding boost to the devolved administrations since devolution began, spreading prosperity to every corner of our country. Our Autumn Budget increased the Scottish Government’s budget by £4.6 billion a year, the Welsh Government’s by £2.5 billion a year, and the Northern Ireland Executive’s by £1.6 billion per year.⁹
- Funding local projects through our UK-wide growth funds, improving opportunity and reviving communities across the UK. The first round of the Levelling Up Fund is granting bids worth £171 million in Scotland, £121 million in Wales, and £49 million in Northern Ireland. The UK Community Renewal Fund will allocate £18 million to Scotland, £47 million to Wales and £12 million to Northern Ireland.⁹
- Setting out a new foreign policy approach, backed by record spending on defence and science, to engage with and support the rest of the world. The Integrated Review—the largest ever review of our defence and foreign policy—sets out our vision for a stronger, more secure, and more prosperous UK outside of the EU.¹⁰
- Securing free trade deals with over 70 countries plus the EU, signalling to the world we are once again a sovereign free trading nation, prioritising the interests of the British people and their businesses for the first time in almost 50 years.¹¹
- Modernising our armed forces to make them fit for the threats of a more competitive age and the opportunities of Global Britain, continuing to exceed the NATO target of two per cent spending of GDP on defence, with the biggest increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War.¹²

Context: Charts and Data

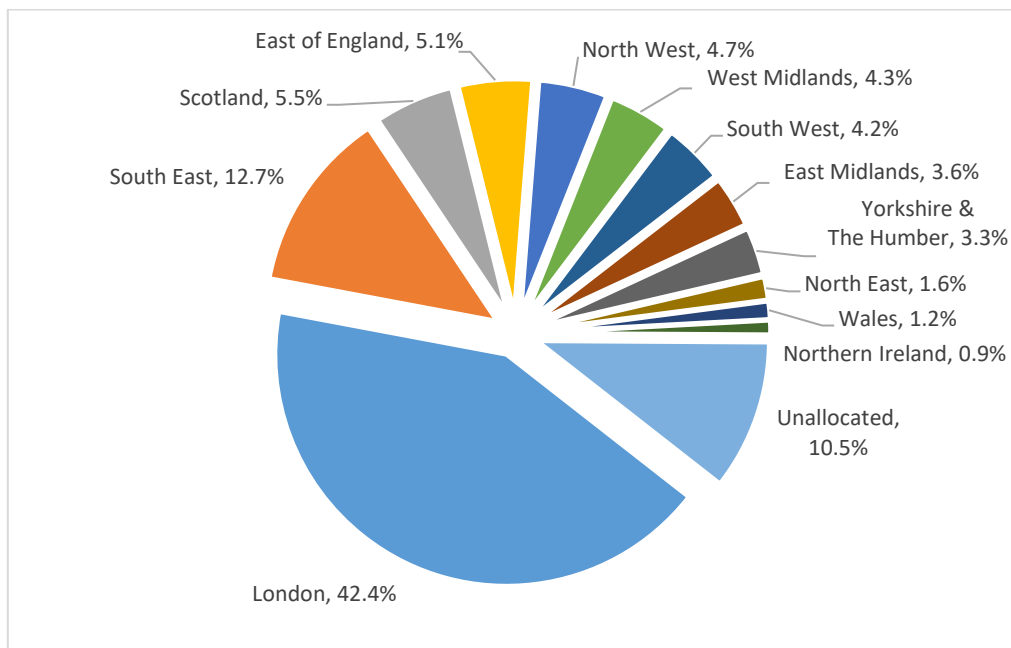
A. Diversity of friendships across England⁶



B. The proportion of Brits who have ever visited various UK and foreign cities²



C. Experimental inward foreign direct investment (FDI) positions by International Territorial Level 1 country and region, 2019, percentage of UK total¹³



Sources and Further Details

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- ² *Brits are more likely to have been to Paris than Edinburgh*, YouGov, 30 August 2017, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/08/30/brits-are-more-likely-have-been-paris-edinburgh>
- ³ *Almost 50% of British public have 'never visited a Scottish Castle'*, The Scotsman, 14 December 2017, <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/almost-50-british-public-have-never-visited-scottish-castle-1435148>
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- ⁵ *Two thirds of UK children have never visited London*, ITV, 28 May 2014, <https://www.itv.com/news/london/update/2014-05-28/two-thirds-of-uk-children-have-never-visited-london/>
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- ⁷ *Union connectivity review: final report*, Department for Transport, 26 November 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/union-connectivity-review-final-report>
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- ¹¹ *Prime Minister pledges to build on Brexit achievements in 2022*, Prime Minister's Office, 31 December 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-to-build-on-brexit-achievements-in-2022>
- ¹² *Defence secures largest investment since the Cold War*, Ministry of Defence, 19 November 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secures-largest-investment-since-the-cold-war>
- ¹³ *Foreign direct investment, experimental UK subnational estimates: October 2021*, Office for National Statistics, 18 October 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/foreigndirectinvestmentexperimentaluksubnationalstatistics/october2021>