British Academy Governing England conference 5th July 2017

Summary

Recent political developments have led to a greater focus on the governance of England and its place within the United Kingdom. The question of English identity has become a particular focus for debate, partly due to the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. The Governing England conference brought together experts and practitioners in various areas related to the governance of England in order to explore these issues. Key questions considered included identity, governance and political institutions.

The first session of the conference discussed how metro mayors have been established to help economic growth, but that they might also play a role in terms of renewing political and democratic engagement, and fostering a sense of 'area patriotism'. Metro mayors and the combined authorities have been set up on a bespoke basis and the governance of England is now a patchwork with some areas administered by combined authorities and others not, while the powers of these newly created authorities vary considerably. Questions arising from these developments include whether these changes will prove popular in the long term and whether devolution will be extended in future.

The second session of the conference addressed the issue of the representation of England within political institutions, primarily Parliament. The panel discussed the English Votes for English Laws reform, and whether that or other alternatives address how those who identify as English wish to be represented. While English Votes for English Laws is an attempt to allow English MPs to veto legislation affecting England only, with which they do not agree, it does not provide a visible institution or mechanism which can be said to 'speak' for England.

The third session showed that political parties have largely struggled with the issue of identity, although the Conservative party has been more successful at securing the support of those who identify as English, and Labour with those who identify as British. National identity becomes more important as more people cast their vote in line with others who share their identity, rather than class or age. Political parties are vehicles to express identity and political preference, and they appear to be evolving as they seek to articulate both.

The fourth session of the conference heard that the government's commitment to devolution within England appears to have waned since the EU referendum, as well as concerns expressed that Whitehall had yet to adapt sufficiently and was still inherently sceptical about relinquishing control of major public services. It was also pointed out that, given the long history of centralisation within England, the significance of the progress made in recent years toward devolution to city regions and other parts of the country should not be discounted, even if most of the country remains outside of areas with devolution deals.

The fifth and final session discussed Englishness, and what kind of national identity it constitutes. Identity is changing and evolving, with many different elements playing their part. English identity is no different, and it seems to now be emerging as multiculturalism and immigration have prompted many in England to consider their identity as never before. However, English identity is still ill-defined, so many are struggling with how to best represent England and the English, and English identity is often seen more negatively than other, more inclusive, national identities such as Britishness.

The issue of identity ran through each session. English identity may be felt by many people to be difficult to define and articulate, but identity is central to questions of governance. Many of the institutions of English and British politics are being reshaped in order to better take account of, or capture, English identity, without general acceptance of who the English are and what they want.

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First session: English Regions, City Regions and Mayors

Panel: Professor Tony Travers, Sir Peter Soulsby, Lord Jim O'Neill of Gatley, Dr Sarah Ayres, Professor Iain McLean, Professor Vernon Bogdanor

The first session of the Governing England conference covered mayors and devolution within England. The devolution programme, which resulted in six metro mayors taking office in May 2017, has been controversial for several reasons. For one, the office of the directly elected mayor has been backed by political leaders over and against the wishes of others including local politicians. The directly elected mayor is seen as an American-ism which concentrates too much power in the hands of one person and is thus contrary to British political tradition.

One argument made in favour of mayors is that of the personal mandate. One speaker stressed that the authority derived from the mandate is more important than the powers on offer in devolution deals, allowing mayors to take decisions and undertake actions that council leaders cannot. Mayors having a mandate means they can develop and deliver a vision for an area and be held accountable for it, taking risks that council leaders cannot. The post of council leader, by contrast, is significantly different. Council leaders have 'one-year contracts' from one AGM to the next and are incentivised to trade patronage for the continuance of their office

So far, the metro mayors have yet to engage the public. One argument made in favour of devolution has been to encourage 'local patriotism' and thus that political engagement and identity can coalesce around political institutions. One speaker considered whether counties already play this role, with identity linked to having cricket teams and regiments. However, turnout for local government elections is low and has always been low, even when local government had more powers than it currently enjoys. It remains to be seen whether this will change over time.

Geography, coherence, boundaries

The issue of geography has proved very important for the success or failure of devolution deals. Tensions exist between economic and administrative geography and this has resulted in difficulties. One example is around Sheffield, as areas outside of Sheffield such as Chesterfield are part of the Functional Economic Area of Sheffield, but are not administratively part of Sheffield. This situation resulted in one authority (Derbyshire County Council) taking the matter to court leading to a delay of at least a year in the deal coming into effect.

The coherence of the proposed devolution deals has been a significant factor in their success. Manchester was said to have been the best deal 'offered up to Government', hence the greater progress there. Some have attributed the success of the Manchester deal to the area having worked together for two decades.

The coherence of the deal is also relevant to the powers devolved. Many of those involved in devolution deals felt that government had favoured a 'one size fits all' model, but this has been disputed. One speaker gave the example of Leeds, which received devolution via a City Deal. Another speaker argued that the lack of guidance from central government resulted in areas looking to the Manchester precedent,

giving the appearance of a 'one size fits all' approach, while some regions were being prevented from discussing deals with other areas. It was claimed this had been unhelpful, and the alleged lack of guidance has led to all places looking at Manchester and assuming that model was all that was on offer. Clearer guidance from government may thus result in better deals in the future.

The politics of devolution

Advocates have described devolution as a process rather than an event. Generally, the government has favoured a bespoke approach rather than an approach based on a framework. Advocates of the bespoke approach point to the flexibility which allows deals to be suited to the areas to which they are applied.

The bespoke nature of the devolution deals has resulted in unequal powers across England. One speaker felt that further devolution to new areas is unlikely given that Brexit means that government has other priorities. The conference also heard that some devolution deals have been deliberately undermined. It was claimed that at least three more deals (Yorkshire, East Midlands and Solent) would have been successful if not for concerted efforts by some Conservative Members of Parliament.

The current devolution deals were devised to improve economic performance, and advocates have spoken in favour of doing this based around urban areas. One speaker set out that the northern powerhouse is focused on four cities: Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool. This speaker stressed that the crucial elements within the northern powerhouse are infrastructure, business development and retention, education and skills, devolution and political support. If mayors are to address issues such as infrastructure, then they are needed not only in the north of England. Other areas such as Cambridge and Oxford also have issues around housing affordability and availability; Cambridge now has a metro mayor but Oxford does not.

One key question that remains regards those areas which have not received devolution deals, such as Oxford. England is now a patchwork of those areas with metro mayors (around one third of the population of England) and the rest. There was widespread support on the panel for areas without devolution deals to become unitary authorities to maximise their effectiveness given the reduced likelihood of further devolution deals.

The welfare state

One key point around devolution is the link between accountability and power. If central government is held accountable for the delivery of services then it is almost inevitable that central government will seek to retain control over them. Thus, there is an enduring tension between calls for decentralisation and concerns over uneven service provision, with one speaker pointing out that public demands for service improvement led to the centralisation of education.

One speaker raised the wider issue that devolution may come to undermine the welfare state. This could come about by a weakening of the national solidarity which underpins the idea that all 'benefits and burdens' are to be distributed on the basis of need. One key question is whether standardised provision

is compatible with devolution. Alternatively, devolution may result in people being willing to pay more for a service if they are more engaged with it, such as their local GP practice.

The future

Cornwall has secured a devolution deal without either a mayor or a combined authority. One speaker outlined that some London boroughs are in discussion to receive metro mayors as the enabling legislation is a framework and can be applied flexibly via secondary legislation. This raises further questions: can places that are not part of a metro area strike devolution deals? Are other areas able to follow the Cornwall precedent? Can further non-unitary areas get devolution?

Overall, some key questions regarding the future of devolution remain unanswered: what powers are suitable for devolution and which are not? What can be devolved and what must be retained centrally? What scale and structure of devolution is most appropriate?

Finally, the question of financing sub-national government has not been adequately addressed: the focus has generally been on the spending of money, not on raising it. One speaker stressed that local government received funding from two "appalling" taxes: council tax and business rates. Meaningful devolution must address the issue of funding and how areas raise and receive money, not only spend it.

Second session: Voice or Veto - England In the UK Parliament

Panel: Professor Dawn Oliver, Professor Lord Norton, Rt Hon Frank Field MP, Professor Michael Kenny

Recent events have begun to give rise to questions around what it is to be English, and how to represent England and the English people. One speaker claimed that many people in England now identify themselves as English rather than British and that some feel that political institutions do not adequately recognise and reflect this. The devolution undertaken by the Labour governments of 1997-2010 was said by one speaker to have been more an exercise in national recognition than purely administrative decentralisation. As England did not receive either a Parliament or national assembly it has not received the same recognition, which some feel that it should. The issue is complicated because, as one speaker felt, English identity is largely defined by what it opposes, in this case the perceived favouring of the other nations of the UK.

A number of options have been suggested to better address the question of the representation of England. One option is to reduce the number of MPs from the devolved nations, as has happened with Scotland. Another alternative is an English parliament, which would transform the UK into something closer to federation of four nations. What has been enacted so far in Westminster is English Votes for English Laws (EVEL).

English Votes for English Laws

There are two elements to EVEL: to stop the collective wishes of English MPs being overridden and thus having policies being imposed on them, and to provide England with an equivalent to devolution in order to provide a forum to discuss issues of interest to English politicians. One speaker stressed that the principle behind EVEL, that law in England is made by English MPs, is largely supported by the public, though the measure itself is largely unknown. EVEL is very complex and often poorly understood even by many Members of Parliament.

The EVEL policy which has been adopted is a veto system rather than votes on English laws by English MPs. Under this measure, English (or English and Welsh) MPs may veto bills or clauses of bills that relate only to England (or England and Wales). But English MPs are not able to make their own laws and remain subject to the collective wishes of non-English MPs in some cases. On [foxhunting](#) and [Sunday trading](#), for example, the will of English MPs was overridden by non-English MPs. Under EVEL, the grand committee stage of parliament is an attempt to recreate aspects of devolution to give England a 'voice', but this has not been fully utilised. One speaker advocated an English affairs committee as a possible measure to address the lack of an institution that captures and expresses the will of England.

At the time of writing, EVEL has not yet been tested under stress as the UK government has had a majority in both the UK and England. Having lost its majority and been forced to reach agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the government may come to wish that a vote-based, rather than veto based, policy had been adopted because, under EVEL, legislation which applies only to England or England and Wales must be passed by all UK Members of Parliament. Across the UK as a whole the

government has a small majority, and that only due to its deal with the DUP. In terms of both English seats and English and Welsh seats the Conservatives have comfortable majorities.

English parliament

The UK parliament has long served as the parliament of England as well as of the United Kingdom, but devolution has led to the rise of questions about where England sits, how it is represented and how English people can best express their collective political wishes. The belief that a stronger sense of English identity is emerging has caused some to question how best to represent this, while legislation on foundation schools and tuition fees resulted in policies which affect England being passed over the objections of English MPs.

In order to address these questions of representation and political expression, some have called for an English parliament to both represent England and to make laws for it. However, any discussion around an English parliament needs to address the question of size as England forms 85% of the population of the United Kingdom.

One solution advocated at the conference is to have a parliament for each nation under a senate for the UK as a whole. Within this senate could be an arrangement ensuring that England would depend on reaching agreement with representatives of the other countries, but could not be outvoted itself. Such a position raises questions as to the arrangements of the UK government. How could the UK government be arranged if different areas had different majorities? Further, others strongly question whether there exists sufficient popular demand for an English parliament.

One speaker outlined that the public appear to want an English dimension to politics, but not an additional tier of politicians, although Scotland and Wales appear to have accepted their Parliament and Assembly. Another speaker suggested that those who identify as English seek recognition and respect similar to that which they feel Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have received, rather than new political institutions.

Third Session: The Future of The Political Parties in England

Panel: Sue Cameron, Dr Richard Hayton, Professor Rt Hon John Denham, Professor Rob Ford, Professor Rosie Campbell

Since 2010, each nation of the UK has been governed by a different party or parties, although devolution to Northern Ireland is currently suspended at the time of writing. Likewise, a different party won a majority of seats in each nation in the 2015 and 2017 general elections. The 2015 general election seemed at the time to be a high watermark for national distinctiveness (notably the SNP success) but the long-term picture remains unclear. The SNP remains the largest party in Scotland despite their June 2017 losses; in England, Labour recovered somewhat but their support remains concentrated in a small number of mainly urban areas. The north of England remains predominantly Labour, the south outside London largely dominated by the Conservatives.

English identity and political preferences

According to one panellist, there has been no recent upsurge in the number who identify and primarily or exclusively as English, but the picture has changed over recent decades. Reported national identity has historically been of relatively limited importance and in 2001 Labour's vote was similar across the groups who identified themselves in different ways. This has now changed, and Labour does far worse amongst those who identify as English than amongst those who identify as British. Those 'more British' are about twice as likely as those who identify as 'more English' to vote Labour. This is important as identity correlates strongly with certain political preferences, especially on Brexit.

One pressing question is how best to represent political and national identity. One speaker suggested that people primarily want to be respected for their identity, and thus the failure to recognise those who identify as English has fed feelings of disaffection with decision makers, and led to politicians being viewed by some as out of touch.

One speaker outlined that, historically, all of those who live within the UK have dual identities, but that England is different. This speaker felt that that English identity has tended to be subsumed to British identity in a way which has not happened in other nations, though nationalists in those nations may feel differently. According to one panellist, British identity was deliberately forged as a political tool to create a unifying state for an empire which included and subsumed England. This speaker posited that British identity is the chosen identity of the British social and cultural elite as British identity is seen as civic, pluralist and open, making it well suited for multiculturalism. However, building an identity around those values has strengthened another identity (Englishness in this case) amongst some of those who do not share, or may even reject, elements of those values.

One speaker outlined that English identity is often seen as less pluralist and emphasising ancestry, culture and descent. This speaker stressed that English identity is more socially conservative and more politically radical as a result of being held by those who feel marginalised. This speaker outlined that four factors are seen as having led to the rise and strengthening of English identity:

1) Devolution to the nations within the UK other than England.
2) Socially liberal, multicultural, consensus politics has left out those who do not subscribe to these values.
3) A high level of immigration has resulted in rapid social change, community instability and economic insecurity while public concerns have been dismissed.
4) Europe being perceived as an outside sovereign force, which has become entangled with immigration.

There are numerous value and political issues which are correlated with national identity, most strikingly relating to the decision to leave the European Union.

Brexit and the Conservative Party

One speaker felt that the type of Brexit proposed by Prime Minister Rt Hon Theresa May MP was designed to appeal to Leave voters in England and Wales by focusing on reducing immigration, removing the primacy of the European Court of Justice and leaving the customs union in order to strike trade deals and increase ties with the 'Anglosphere' of English-speaking countries. The Conservatives successfully increased their share of the vote in England in June 2017 and, while Labour gained far more votes than was expected, the Conservatives won a majority of 61 seats in England.

One speaker cited post-election surveys showing that nearly 70% of June 2017 Conservative voters were Leave voters, that many Labour voters want to stop Brexit and that most Conservative voters backed that party's ability to deliver Brexit. The Conservative party has not been able to resolve its differences over Europe, and now splits are emerging over the form Brexit will take, such as Scottish Conservatives who appear to have a different mandate from their English colleagues. One panellist outlined that the Conservative Party has been successful at capturing the support of those who primarily identify as English, despite being an explicitly unionist party. This is in part because English identity has often been channelled in to Euroscepticism. Some dismiss this view as 'little England' while others promote it as a positive and outward looking global Britain, looking beyond Europe.

The Labour Party

One speaker stressed that the Labour party needs to win a majority in England for two reasons: as it can no longer rely on votes in Scotland and Wales to build a UK-wide majority, and as having a UK majority without one in England risks raising questions of legitimacy. Labour has historically been less successful at gaining the support of the majority of those who identity as English, and thus needs to address the place of England within the union.

One speaker outlined that, historically, Labour has been seen as fearful of English Conservativism and some in the Labour party in Scotland and Wales, plus other English regions, saw an element of their role as working together to oppose southern English Conservatism and wealth. This was exemplified by the March 2017 proposal of Rt Hon Gordon Brown for a federation whereby Scotland would have power over foreign policy but England would have limited administrative devolution. Labour has started to

recognise England by proposing a First Minister of England in their manifesto for the June 2017 general election but has not developed further proposals, leaving questions around England unanswered.

As one speaker noted, Labour has historically been a centralising party and has not tended to support devolution in England. Labour must therefore come to a decision on its position on devolution and centralisation, especially on public services. The Conservative Party, especially during the time that Rt Hon George Osborne was Chancellor, has enacted devolution while the Labour party has tended to appear lukewarm on the issue and allowed the Conservatives to lead the way.

English political parties?

Some have advocated the major UK political parties creating English elements to them, both because many policy positions are specific to England and in order to better capture English identity. However, one speaker feared that a focus on England and Englishness might in fact turn off those who identify far more as British than exclusively English.

This issue is of particular concern for the Labour party. One speaker stressed that Labour has historically been poor at reaching those who identify as English but do not support many of the more 'bigoted' elements that can be associated with English nationalism. Welsh and Scottish nationalists have been able to use Britishness as something to define themselves against. That is harder in England, but there is still opposition to issues such as Scotland receiving more public money although the salience of constitutional issues is usually low. This may change in the coming months because of the deal between the Conservative government and the DUP which has gained relatively little public traction despite the sums of money involved and the reliance of the UK government on the votes of MPs from outside England. These issues may gain greater public salience in the future, or it may be that voters are less opposed to the Conservative and DUP arrangement because the DUP (and Scottish Conservatives) want to be part of Britain whereas the Scottish National Party do not.

For questions of identity, one speaker feared an overreliance on statistics, with a lack of understanding of the stories and differences that make up identities. Another speaker outlined that identity is significant in politics because people in the same areas, of the same class with the same economic needs and relationships with the state vote differently, in line with others who share nothing other than their reported national identity.

Fourth Session: Devolution: Challenges for Whitehall Within England

Panel: Alun Evans, Dr Jo Casebourne, Sir John Elvidge, Tom Walker

Since the EU referendum some ambiguity has arisen as to whether devolution in England remains a Government priority. Changes of personnel have seen many of the main advocates of devolution leave government such as Rt Hon George Osborne and Lord O'Neill of Gatley. Mr Osborne created strong political momentum for devolution, and used the power of the Treasury to overcome objections elsewhere in Whitehall, bringing about the greatest amount of devolution to and within England thus far. One speaker outlined that it now appears more likely that greater powers will be granted to existing mayors than that new ones will be created.

UK Devolution

Concerns were raised as to the approach of Whitehall to devolution, especially about an absence of joined-up thinking across departments. The approach within Whitehall before 1999 was characterised by one speaker as being dominated by an explicit 'control psychology' in which the needs of England were prioritised. The speaker told that, before UK devolution, there existed 'comply or explain' provisions where the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices had to follow the same policy unless they were able to convince officials of a superior alternative.

According to one speaker, the devolution which occurred under the Labour government resulted primarily in concern with the degree of control which would be retained by Whitehall. After 1999, the desire within Whitehall for control was said to have been accompanied by indifference towards the devolved administrations themselves. This approach, the speaker felt, indicated a lack of joined up thinking within Whitehall towards the governance of the UK. So far Whitehall has considered issues on an 'issue by issue' basis despite being capable of 'network thinking' – considering all issues in the round. This approach is compounded by a lack of interest in thinking of England as a separate entity. Future success may depend on the ability to adopt a 'system wide' approach, which one speaker suggested would require a change of culture.

Devolution and England

Devolution within England may force a change of approach from Whitehall. Initially, devolution was proposed as a catalyst for economic growth based around urban centres, such as the Northern Powerhouse. Many of the metro mayors who have now taken office have called for greater powers for themselves, so one speaker feared that the shortcomings of the Whitehall approach to devolution, of not considering all issues and places in the round, may be repeated.

The devolution deals within England have been undertaken in a deal-based, bespoke way. This has led to different regions having varied levels of powers, and one speaker highlighted that Whitehall will have to maintain a pragmatic approach. While devolution has been justified as a way of boosting economic growth, questions have been raised as to the relative importance of service provision in devolution deals, as against competing priorities such as economic growth or political representation.

So far, some of the combined authority and other devolution deals include experimental reforms, for example the devolution of the skills budget and transport funding, as the government's devolution policy is based on a bespoke approach rather than a strict framework. One speaker stated that the belief in the necessity for a bespoke approach stems in part from the 2004 North East referendum, which demonstrated public opposition to top-down imposition of devolution. One speaker supported this approach as they felt that 'joined up thinking' best occurs in the places to which power is devalued, thereby overcoming centralised siloed thinking.

Brexit

One speaker expressed fears that Brexit has the potential to expose tensions within government and Whitehall machinery over devolution. One speaker expressed concern that too few people in Whitehall reflect upon whether they are acting as the government of the UK or of England alone. This has challenges for intergovernmental workings on Brexit, particularly with regards to UK-wide frameworks over areas of devolved competences, for example, agriculture, fisheries and the environment. The tensions concern differences between those who view the UK as having governments for each component part (a nationalist view) and those who see the UK government as acting for the UK as a whole (the government view). So far, government opinion seems to be that powers will return from Brussels to Whitehall then, if appropriate, be devolved further.

Finance

One more significant area with regards to devolution within England is financing. The way in which local government in England is financed is set to change, as the rate support grant was set to be removed and all financing was to come from business rates and council tax. However, changing governmental priorities have resulted in these measures being dropped as the Local Government Finance Bill was not in the Queen's Speech and a great deal of resource in the Department for Communities and Local Government has been redirected to responding to the Grenfell Tower disaster.

The panel expressed widespread acceptance that more tax raising powers are likely to be devolved in time, but also that the uneven tax base in the UK may exacerbate the issue of a 'postcode lottery', which would make the further devolution of tax raising powers controversial. One speaker stressed that, if 100% of business rates were retained, there would be a need for redistribution within and across regions, due to the significant differences between the ability of various areas to raise revenue.

Fifth Session: Is A Political English Identity Emerging?

Panel: Professor Rt Hon John Denham, Professor John Curtice, Rt Hon Gisela Stuart, Mr Sunder Katwala, Dr Julia Stapleton.

One speaker highlighted survey data showing that English identity was emerging before the devolution of the late 1990s. The speaker outlined that data showed people in England reported that they increasingly identified as mostly or exclusively English and decreasingly as mostly or exclusively British, although overall more people in England identify as British than English. Questions have thus been raised as to the nature of the English identity to which many subscribe, and how it should be represented within political institutions, if at all.

However, the speaker also pointed out that around 50% of respondents support the current parliamentary arrangement rather than governance through an English parliament or regional devolution. The speaker felt that these survey results gave encouragement to both sides: on one hand only half the population support the current arrangement, but on the others hand, there is no clear public support for any single alternative. There is no significant difference between those who report themselves as identifying as English or British as to how they wish to be governed. One measure that has clear support is the principle of English Votes for English Laws; that English laws are made by English MPs strikes many people as common sense.

Devolution and identity

In addition to broader questions of national identity, identity is often also about places, occupation and family. Devolution within England, outside London, has, one panellist said, so far failed to give people what they want. This is because it has failed to address how people feel about themselves in terms of the role that place plays in identity and this was said to have resulted in a disconnect from politics.

British and English identity

Putting British and English debates on national identity in a wider context, one speaker stressed that mainland Europe has had to deal with destructive nationalism, while the UK has not. The speaker felt that Britishness has been seen as a unifying, progressive force that can overcome destructive nationalism, and that the EU plays the supranational role for continental Europe that Britishness does in the UK.

British identity has often been interwoven with English identity, though increasing attention is now paid to them separately. One speaker highlighted that, for many years, many people did not know or care about the difference between Englishness and Britishness. The confusion surrounding Englishness and Britishness is embodied by nationalist and radical right parties such as the British National Party which are linked to English nationalism and extremism, but expressly call themselves British. However, the speaker noted that the link between ethnicity, i.e. being white, and identifying as English has declined.

One speaker outlined that, in order to accommodate this changing picture of identity, two categories of identity have become established. The 'British English' are those within England who identity as

primarily British and are more likely to hold the views associated with British identity: support for British membership of the European Union, multiculturalism and socially progressive values. Those who do not subscribe to this are known as the 'English English': those in England who report their identity as primarily English and who are more likely to hold socially conservative values and support leaving the European Union.

Another speaker highlighted that, around 2004, the difference between 'British English' and 'English English' became starker, yet overall the duel identity is embraced and most people appear to be happy to be both as most survey respondents report themselves as both English and British. The other nations of the UK have dual identities, and the two-nationalities model appears to work well. However, another felt that English-ness is not sufficiently represented as, for example, there are only three explicitly English institutions: the football team, rugby team and cricket team. Thus, some wonder whether more must be done to represent England and those who identify as English both culturally and politically.

English stories

English identity has often proved elusive and difficult to define. One panellist spoke of being born in a Yorkshire hospital, the child of a man born British in what became India and of a woman born in Cork, Ireland, who met while working in a south London hospital, and that this a typically British story of empire, decolonisation and the National Health Service. One speaker felt that having a 'conservation' about identity had not required when Britain was largely monocultural. However, this speaker was concerned that, as multiculturalism has come to dominate, many people feared and avoided having conversations on identity. Trying to avoid questions of what being English is, and how minority identities fit in, have caused some to feel excluded and marginalised. One panellist felt it to be crucial that, if identities are recognised, that the identity held by the majority is recognised as well.

Immigration

Immigration appears to have been a significant factor in both English and British identity. One speaker stated that immigrants who were given British passports were asked to be British, without anyone knowing what that meant, highlighting that British identity is accepted and important, though not well defined.

The high level of recent immigration to Britain has resulted in many more people thinking about their English identity more than has been the case historically. One speaker expressed concern that the EU approach to freedom of movement sees people as only 'units of production' in the same way as factory equipment. However, people have languages, cultures and traditions so having a large influx inevitably makes people consider their culture(s) and identities. In trying to create a harmonious society, the identity that was deliberately forged as a multicultural force was Britishness, but this has only really happened in England. Therefore, when immigration brings about rapid social change it should not be surprising that English people would have noticed this and reacted.

Another speaker stressed the one aspect of national identity that is sometimes underappreciated is the role it plays in the welfare state, as all those within the nation are part of a group. People are more willing

to pay to support those they know and feel solidarity with. Thus, a shared identity, in this case being British, underpins the solidarity upon which the welfare state rests. Without that willingness to pay in and support that structure, the welfare state cannot exist. This speaker felt that the desire to avoid difficult questions around identity may have significant consequences for the welfare state in the long term.

One speaker felt that many of those who identify as primarily or exclusively English crave recognition more than representation and constitutional upheaval. This speaker felt that, once recognised, the English may want to be represented, but until they are recognised it is difficult to say. This speaker felt that solving both aspects of this question will be significant in answering questions around the governance of England in the future.