

Labour mayors, regional industrial strategies and education

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It is 2027, and the Mayoral Ministerial Council is meeting in Leeds. Formed in 2025 to support the implementation of the new devolution legislation, it brings Government Ministers and the Metro mayors together every three months to discuss the implementation of coordinated public services. This meeting will discuss the forthcoming education plan, which will merge universities and FE colleges to create a new tertiary education sector.

Tracey Brabin, West Yorkshire mayor, was reflecting on how the policy environment had changed since the 2024 election. No one was sure that a new Labour government would be able to address the parlous state of public services and deterioration of public institutions effectively. The first year was a roller-coaster of initiatives combined with some significant new policies..

What was most noticeable, following 14 years of Conservative governments, was the powerful sense of coordination across government. Sue Gray, now Head of the Civil Service, had played a leading role in directing the prime minister to work closely with the Metro mayors. The 'Take Back Control Act' (2025) provided new devolution legislation and effectively gave the Metro mayors more scope to deliver public services in their combined authorities.

Although the Labour Party did not have any significant plans for education in the 2024 election campaign, the financial crisis in the higher education sector that resulted from declining numbers of International students and a dysfunctional fees system forced the government to consider new ways of delivering post-16 education. This represented a major break with previous education policies.

Where the Metro mayors played an important role was in bringing new industrial strategies, transport and energy policies together, They became aware that to implement these policies a new system of education would have to be introduced that was to meet the needs of a more locally focused economy or 'foundational economy'. It will build on many of the partnerships between universities and FE colleges which had been set up during the university financial crisis. These often started with joint apprenticeship programmes but had grown into wider partnerships for research to inform new industrial strategies. They had been supported by the newly created National Climate and Bio-diversity Service, set up to coordinate net-zero government policies.
