



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Reforming our Union

The Welsh Government first published *Reforming Our Union* in October 2019, when the UK was leaving the European Union.

We have updated this important document, which puts forward a series of suggestions about how the UK can be made stronger and be made to work for the good of everyone living in the United Kingdom.

This includes re-setting the relationships between the four elected governments in the UK – the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government.

We have updated *Reforming Our Union* now because a lot has changed since 2019, including:

- The UK has left the European Union.
- The UK Government is trying to turn back the clock on devolution, centralising powers and funding in London which should be available to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

- The results of the Scottish Parliament elections in 2021 mean there is a majority for a second independence referendum.
- The political situation in Northern Ireland has been de-stabilised by the post-Brexit Withdrawal Agreement.
- In Wales, the result of the Senedd election 2021 shows there is support for more devolution – not less – within the United Kingdom.

The union of the United Kingdom has never been so fragile – David Lidington, the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, said in May that the United Kingdom is “in greater peril than at any moment in my lifetime”.

We believe the Union can be strengthened. We believe Wales’ future is best served by having strong devolution – so decisions about Wales are made in Wales – and by being an equal partner in a strong and revitalised United Kingdom.

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Reforming Our Union sets out 20 ways in which the UK can work for all nations – some which already happen and others which are new ideas:

Basic principles

1. The United Kingdom is a voluntary union of four nations – England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales – which come together to share resources and risks.
2. Devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a permanent feature of the United Kingdom and cannot be undone, without the agreement of the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
3. It is very difficult to explain – and justify – the differences between the devolution settlements of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Powers should be held at the most local level possible.

Law-making powers

4. Each parliament in the UK – whether that's the Senedd, the Scottish Parliament, Stormont in Northern Ireland or the House of Commons – should be able to decide its own size and how its members are elected.
5. The UK Parliament should not normally make law in relation to matters, which are decided on in another part of the UK without express consent. These arrangements must be properly set out.
6. A new, centralised source of funding should be found to pay for the running costs of the Senedd, the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly, similar to how the UK Parliament is funded.
7. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should continue to be represented in the House of Commons. But the House of Lords should be reformed to reflect the make-up of the United Kingdom and be given the job of protecting the constitution and devolution.

Relationships between governments

8. The relationship between the four governments in the UK – the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive – should be based on a partnership of equals, mutual respect and be fair.
9. Ministers in every part of the UK should carry out – and be held to account for – their responsibilities in their own country, without being challenged by Ministers from another government. The UK Government should not fund other governments' responsibilities without their consent.
10. There should be well-organised and regular opportunities for governments to work together on shared issues for the good of all people in the UK.
11. Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should have a say in the UK's approach to international relations and trade because these decisions have an impact on decisions made in all parts of the UK.
12. When UK-wide bodies are being created or reformed they must work for the whole UK – not just one part of it.
13. A single civil service should continue to support the Welsh, Scottish and UK governments, and work closely with the Northern Ireland civil service – provided its values of independence and impartiality are guaranteed.

Finance

14. Funding levels should be based on need – this will mean a fair level of funding is available across the UK for all. The UK Government should not be able to make funding available outside these arrangements without consent.

15. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be funded by a combination of a needs-based grant from the UK Government and funding raised by devolved and local taxes and through borrowing.

16. A new independent public body, which is accountable to all four UK governments, should oversee these funding arrangements, instead of the UK Government.

17. Each government should determine its own tax and spending priorities and be held to account for these decisions.

Justice and the Courts

18. Justice and policing should be devolved to Wales as it is already is to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

19. The membership of the Supreme Court should reflect the make-up of the United Kingdom.

The constitution

20. A Constitutional Convention should be set up, with membership from all parts of the UK, to properly consider changes to the way the UK is governed and the relationship between the four nations.

What happens next?

We are setting an independent commission to consider the constitutional future of Wales, this will include a national conversation with the public about how decisions are made in Wales; about future devolution and relationships with Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

It will look at the reforms that would be necessary to achieve changes to empower and benefit Wales, to increase prosperity and improve quality of life and wellbeing.

If you want to read more, *Reforming Our Union* is available here gov.wales/reforming-our-union-shared-governance-in-the-uk-2nd-edition