

# Talking about the Future of Wales

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales



# Hello!

All over Wales, people are joining a conversation about the future of Wales, because how our nation is governed makes a big difference to our lives.

**i** To govern means to rule over and have the power to make decisions.

## Wales is a devolved nation

Devolution means that instead of all power being with the UK Government, some powers have been transferred to the nations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

**It means some laws and decisions are made in Wales, by politicians elected by the people of Wales.**



## Senedd Cymru — Welsh Parliament

Wales has its own Senedd (Welsh Parliament) and Welsh Government with a First Minister chosen by the elected members. The Senedd makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account.

The Welsh Government makes decisions, proposes new laws and makes sure they are implemented. It decides the budget for organisations such as the NHS and local authorities.



The Senedd and Welsh Government are responsible for these matters in Wales:

- Health and social care
- Education and training
- Local Government (Councils)
- Agriculture, forestry and fisheries
- Transport
- Some taxation
- Sports and the arts.



Some things are controlled by the UK Parliament and Government:

- Justice and policing
- Defence
- Foreign affairs
- Immigration
- Trade policy
- Constitution
- Broadcasting.

## The future of Wales

In 2021, the Welsh Government set up an **Independent Commission**. The Commission is reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of devolution, finding out what people think, and exploring options that could improve the future of Wales.

**i** A commission is a group of people trusted by an organisation or government to investigate something.



**This summary report tells you what we've found so far, and what we plan to do next.**

## About us

This Independent Commission is led by Professor Laura McAllister and Dr Rowan Williams. It also includes nine commissioners from different backgrounds, who all have different views. We are all committed to work together and run a fair investigation.

## Our aim

We want to:

- find out what people think about how Wales is governed
- understand the structures of government across the UK nations and how they work
- see how devolution works in Wales
- find ways to strengthen democracy in Wales
- explore options for change that will improve people's lives.

## Timescale

**In 2021** — Independent Commission work begins.

**March 2022** — We started collecting evidence and engaging with people across Wales.

**Now**  
**December 2022** — This is our first report explaining what we found and what people are saying so far.

**Going forward** — The inquiry hasn't finished so we will keep collecting evidence and talking to people across Wales.

**End 2023** — We will write a final report and make some recommendations.

## Our values

All our work is based on:



**Agency:** everyone has the power to influence policies and decisions in as many ways as possible.



**Equality and Inclusion:** everyone is treated fairly and has the same opportunities to be involved.



**Accountability:** everyone can hold the government to account and see how things work.



**Subsidiarity:** decisions are made as close to the people affected by the decisions as possible.

The Commissioners



## Involving people

We want to give people as many opportunities to get involved as possible. In the first phase, we've already done a lot.



We're running an online consultation called **Dweud eich**  
**Dweud: Have your Say.**

★ So far, there are over  
**2000** responses.



We set up online surveys and opinion polls.



We joined different events across Wales.



We held **15** sessions to collect **evidence**.



We ran **24** meetings and workshops with different groups and forums.



We held **5** workshops with professionals and experts.



We talked to groups, members of **civic society** and **academics**.



We partnered with **11 community groups** across Wales.

## Expert Panel

The Welsh Government also set up an Expert Panel. It's a group of professionals who are experts in government, finance and law. They give us support, advice and check what we're doing to make sure we don't miss out anything important.

## What's next?



We will set up a **Citizens' Panel** of people from across Wales, from different backgrounds and who cover a broad range of opinions.



# What people are saying about devolution

This is only the first stage of talking to people and collecting evidence. But it's already clear that **devolution is under pressure** because:

⚠️ The UK Government doesn't always respect devolution and has made decisions affecting the Senedd's responsibilities without its agreement.

⚠️ The UK Government decides when and how they engage with the Welsh Government, which makes it hard to build trust and good relationships.

⚠️ The UK Government doesn't talk to the Welsh Government as much as it should when it comes to devolution.

⚠️ The UK Government still has the power in many areas that affect Wales and is not willing to consider proposals for change, even when these are recommended by experts.

⚠️ The UK Treasury rules make it difficult for the Welsh Government to manage its budget effectively.

⚠️ The UK Government decides the budgets for the devolved nations, but this is based on the budget for England, rather than looking at what the devolved nations need.

⚠️ Voting in elections doesn't give Welsh people enough of a say over decisions.

⚠️ There isn't enough information about why decisions are made, or how to hold governments (at all levels) to account for the things they do.

⚠️ The future of the Welsh economy is uncertain, and we don't know what difference changing the constitution would make.

⚠️ The UK Government and Parliament decides the powers and responsibilities of the Senedd and Welsh Government. Even if we make recommendations for change, the UK Government can ignore it.

**Even with these pressures, most people believe that devolution has improved people's lives in Wales and is worth protecting.**

## Some comments we've heard about devolution:

- 🗨️ The Senedd and the Welsh Government take the right actions for Wales.
- 🗨️ It is easier to hold the Welsh Government to account than the UK Government.
- 🗨️ It helps protect the Welsh identity, culture, and language.
- 🗨️ We need more decisions about Wales... in Wales!
- 🗨️ The Senedd understands Wales and what Wales needs.
- 🗨️ Devolution means extra expense for taxpayers.
- 🗨️ Cardiff Bay feels as remote as London for me.



# Making sure Wales is ready for the future

Government and society are changing in Wales, as in the other parts of the UK. There could be changes in Scotland and Northern Ireland that would affect us in Wales.

It's important we think about what we want for the future of Wales. We don't think letting things stay the same or getting rid of devolution are good options.

From talking with people, we have developed  
**3 possible options** for the future.

## Option 1: Entrenched devolution

**i** This would firmly fix and expand the Senedd's powers. It would make sure the powers Wales has to make its own decisions are protected.

This option **would aim to:**

- give the Senedd and Welsh Government more respect and stability
- protect Wales from the UK Government making decisions without consulting the Senedd
- promote better working relationships between governments
- make sure more decisions affecting Wales are made by the Senedd and Welsh Government.

This option **would not:**

- take a lot of resources or time to do
- mean big changes that would have to be agreed by the rest of the UK.

## Some comments we've heard about this option:

- ☞** This is the only way that Wales can remain within the Union long term.
- ☞** The Senedd should have power over more areas (justice, policing, broadcasting, taxation).
- ☞** A Conservative led government having power over Wales isn't fair when Labour has formed the largest party in the Senedd since 1999.
- ☞** There are too many issues with the areas that are already devolved (for example, poor NHS outcomes and lack of infrastructure investment) and poverty rates in Wales are high.
- ☞** More decisions about finances, economy and budgets need to be devolved to Wales as the UK's economy is focused too much on London and England.
- ☞** Decision-making needs to move locally, even closer to local government, not the Senedd.



## Option 2: A federal structure

**i** Changing the UK constitution so that power is shared between the UK Parliament and the Senedd, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly.

This option **would:**

- involve changes to the constitution of the whole UK
- mean a legal separation of powers between the UK Parliament and the Senedd
- mean the UK Parliament would lose its supremacy over the other parliaments of the UK
- need the UK Parliament and Government to separate their responsibility for England from their responsibility for the UK
- need decisions to be agreed on who has financial responsibility for things like welfare benefits and other welfare issues.

This option **would not:**

- be quick or easy to do.

## Some comments we've heard about this option:

 Britain could survive federation but not independence.

 England would need to be divided into regions so the federation is equal and fair.

 A federal UK could protect devolution.

 This would take a lot of time and resources to negotiate across the UK.



## Option 3: Independence

**i** Making Wales its own sovereign state, independent from the UK

This option **would:**

- make Wales a sovereign country that could apply to join the United Nations
- need Welsh taxpayers to fund all public services and government borrowing in Wales
- need Wales to set up new ways of working with the world and the rest of the UK
- need new agreements on borders and trade.

This option **would not:**

- be quick or easy to do
- be what most people want at the present time, according to most surveys and polls. But there is some evidence that support for independence is growing, especially with younger people.

## Some comments we've heard about this option:

 People don't trust the Westminster Parliament and Government and want independence.

 Independence is not an option in the modern world.

 Identity, culture, and language are good reasons for independence.

 People are worried about what independence would mean for their identity as 'British'.





## Next steps

### Wales is an incredible place to live.

We want to make sure that all decisions improve people's lives and protect the future of Wales as a nation. The three options are not static, each may be more or less possible depending on what happens in Wales, the other devolved nations and across the UK in the future.

## Thanks for reading this

There's lots to think about and the conversation hasn't stopped. We'd like to know what you think.

**So go on — join in.**

**It's your future — your Wales!**

Get in touch:

 [constitutioncommission@gov.wales](mailto:constitutioncommission@gov.wales)

To read our full Interim Report:

 [gov.wales/independent-commission-on-the-constitutional-future-of-wales-interim-report](https://gov.wales/independent-commission-on-the-constitutional-future-of-wales-interim-report)

