

Gathering public views on potential options for Wales's constitutional future

Concluding deliberative qualitative research findings: views on the Commission's three preferred options for Wales

Prepared for
The Independent Commission on
the Constitutional Future of Wales

Prepared by
Beaufort Research

August 2023



beaufortresearch



Gathering public views on potential options for Wales's constitutional future

Concluding deliberative qualitative research findings: views on the Commission's three preferred options for Wales

This work was commissioned by the Independent Commission for the Constitutional Future of Wales. For more information visit <https://www.gov.wales/independent-commission-constitutional-future-wales>

Beaufort Research, 2 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BG
029 2037 8565, enquiries@beaufortresearch.co.uk, www.beaufortresearch.co.uk
Agency contacts: Fiona McAllister, Adam Blunt, Catrin Davies

Unless otherwise agreed, the findings of this study remain the copyright of Beaufort Research Ltd and may not be quoted, published, or reproduced without the company's advance approval.

Approval to quote or publish will only be withheld on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

Any approved publication must detail: Beaufort Research Ltd as provider, sample size and field dates.

© Beaufort Research Ltd 2023

Produced in accordance with ISO20252



Contents

1. Executive summary	4
2. Situation and background to the work	7
3. Research objectives and method.....	8
3.1 Research objectives	8
3.2 Research method and sample	8
3.3 Discussion guide, analysis, and reporting.....	9
4. Overall preferences.....	11
5. Views on devolution strengthened and secured	14
5.1 Overview	14
5.2 Benefits that stood out for participants with devolution strengthened and secured ..	15
5.3 Drawbacks that stood out for participants with devolution strengthened and secured	17
6. Views on a federal structure	21
6.1 Overview	21
6.2 Benefits that stood out for participants with a federal structure	22
6.3 Drawbacks that stood out for participants with a federal structure.....	25
7. Views on independence.....	27
7.1 Overview	27
7.2 Benefits that stood out for participants with independence	29
7.3 Drawbacks that stood out for participants with independence.....	32
8. Alternative options to the three discussed	36
9. How to involve and engage more with the public.....	37
9.1 Increasing engagement.....	37
9.2 Helping participants develop a more informed opinion	38
Appendix	40

1. Executive summary

Introduction

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales is engaging with the Welsh public and civic voices to ascertain views and gather ideas to feed into the preparation of a report on the potential options for Wales's constitutional future.

Beaufort Research was commissioned to feed into this process using qualitative and quantitative research. In its [interim report](#), the Commission identified three preferred options for how Wales could be run in the future: **devolution strengthened and secured**, a **federal structure**, and **independence**. Beaufort was tasked with gathering qualitative feedback from members of the public on these three possible options.

This concluding qualitative research stage consisted of eight face-to-face deliberative¹ sessions across Wales, with 112 participants taking part in total from a wide mix of backgrounds and with varying levels of understanding and familiarity with the topic at the start of the research process. Fieldwork took place from late May to late June 2023.

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative investigation is not, by its nature, designed to be statistically representative. It is intended to be illustrative and to allow for in-depth exploration of the diversity around the topics of interest.

Key findings

The Commission's three preferred options

There was some consistency between option preferences among participants in the qualitative stage and the nationally representative quantitative survey for how they would like to see Wales run in the future. **Devolution strengthened and secured** was most popular in the survey followed by a **federal structure** and then **independence**. In the qualitative stage, **devolution strengthened and secured** was voted for most frequently but a **federal structure** proved less popular than **independence**.

Participants in the qualitative stage had the benefit of several months of engagement on the subject and in-depth discussion on the potential advantages and disadvantages of each of the Commission's three preferred options. We saw, for example, some participants initially being interested in a federal structure but then changing their mind when debated further.

In the concluding qualitative stage, there was still a sizeable proportion who were not keen on any of the three options. They voted 'something else' and to a lesser extent 'don't know' which was also reflected in the quantitative survey.

Across the options, better decision-making for Wales and more autonomy were broad themes that stood out for participants in this concluding qualitative stage as potential positives. Potential drawbacks tended to focus on practicalities such as costs / funding, complexity, bureaucracy, risk, and confusion.

¹ Deliberative research focuses upon participants' viewpoints after they have been presented with the opportunity to 'deliberate' the issue(s) in question. The sessions involved exploring current unprompted views before presenting a range of information and encouraging differing points of view and perspectives to be presented, after which more considered decisions were sought.

Even so, concerns about Welsh Government performance continued to colour some opinions as well regarding more powers for Wales; and some maintained that Wales would be more secure and stronger as part of the Union.

The following tables give the more prominent perceived advantages and disadvantages singled out by participants for each of the Commission's three preferred options.

Devolution strengthened and secured

Devolution strengthened and secured: potential benefits	Devolution strengthened and secured: potential drawbacks
It would stop the UK Government overriding Welsh Government decisions	It would mean even more expense and bureaucracy – and how would Wales fund more powers?
An evolution of a tried and tested model – and could work as an achievable step to further powers and beyond	Wales has enough (or even too many) powers as it is and doesn't perform well
The least expensive, least complex, least disruptive, least risky option	More devolution would mean more cross-border complications and confusion

A federal structure

A federal structure: potential benefits	A federal structure: potential drawbacks
It would mean better decision-making and a fairer arrangement for Wales and beyond	It would be too complicated, time consuming and expensive to set up
It would clarify the limits and responsibilities of each level of government and with more accountability	England and other nations would not want it
	Different laws or policies in different regions would be confusing and divisive
	It would be difficult to get all regions / nations to agree on matters, affecting relationships

Independence

Independence: potential benefits	Independence: potential drawbacks
It would mean full control over decisions that affect Wales and policies tailored to Wales	Wales would not be able to fund itself and is too small to be independent
It would mean Wales could apply to rejoin the EU	It would be too complicated to set up e.g. Wales would face significant challenges with cross-border issues like currency, defence, immigration, and exports
Wales could manage financially if independent - it would encourage Wales to grow, be more innovative and progressive	It would be too much of a risk and too many unknowns (e.g. on funding and calibre of politician to deliver it)
Other small nations manage successfully to be independent	

The deliberative approach

This final face-to-face stage, combined with previous stages, equipped many participants with the information they needed to have a more informed opinion on how Wales is run. The deliberative approach also saw many participants become more engaged with the subject on their journey with us over several months. This was especially the case for some younger participants who felt the process had opened their eyes to a subject they had given little thought to previously.

With the emphasis on the Commission's three preferred options in this final stage, participants were relatively more focused on structure, rather than government performance, and engaged in debating the merits or otherwise of each.

Even so, there were some who maintained that they would not consider alternative structures for running Wales until they saw perceived improvements in how Wales is run using the powers already available.

With engagement in mind, it is worth adding that the quantitative survey found that fewer than half of those surveyed felt they had seen or heard much about how Wales is run in the last 12 months. Participants at the face-to-face qualitative events regularly called for more proactive efforts to educate the general public on the matter, with some believing that school and the new curriculum would provide an ideal catalyst for improving awareness and understanding of how Wales is run.

2. Situation and background to the work

The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales is an independent body established by the Welsh Government to engage in a national conversation with Welsh citizens about Wales' constitutional future.

The commission has two broad objectives. The first is to consider and develop options for fundamental reform of the constitutional structures of the United Kingdom, in which Wales remains an integral part. The second is to consider and develop all progressive principal options to strengthen Welsh democracy and deliver improvements for the people of Wales.

To help inform its work, the Commission is engaging with the Welsh public and civic voices to ascertain views and gather ideas to feed into the preparation of a report on the potential options for Wales's constitutional future.

In December 2022, the Commission prepared an [interim report](#) based on a range of activities including its national conversation which was launched in March 2022. The Commission has also launched a Community Engagement Fund to encourage involvement from a diverse range of communities across Wales. A final report is due to be published at the end of 2023 which will encompass all the different strands of its work.

Beaufort has been commissioned to help with gathering the views of the public in Wales to further inform the Commission's work. The approach involves:

- Face-to-face deliberative² qualitative sessions across Wales to explore current understanding and views
- Online qualitative engagement with participants from the face-to-face sessions
- A quantitative survey of a representative sample of the Welsh adult population
- Reconvened face-to-face deliberative qualitative sessions to explore three future options.

This document reports on the reconvened deliberative qualitative sessions which were the final qualitative stage of research carried out by Beaufort.

² Deliberative research focuses upon participants' viewpoints after they have been presented with the opportunity to 'deliberate' the issue(s) in question. The sessions involved exploring current unprompted views before presenting a range of information and encouraging differing points of view and perspectives to be presented, after which more considered decisions were sought.

3. Research objectives and method

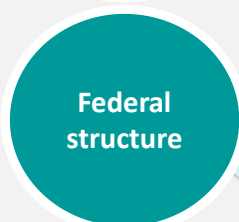
3.1 Research objectives

The following main objectives were set for this final face-to-face qualitative stage:

- Encourage discussion around the Commission's three preferred options for how Wales could be run in the future: entrenched devolution ('strengthened and secured'), a federal structure, and independence. The summaries given to participants are below
- Gauge overall preferences for how Wales should be run and why



This means making sure that the powers Wales has to make its own decisions cannot be taken away by the UK Government. It could also mean extending the responsibilities that Wales has. For example, to include the justice system and policing.



This means political change across the whole of the UK with a written constitution setting out the role and responsibilities of each level of government, including devolved bodies within England (similar to how the USA is governed). The UK Government would be responsible only for UK-wide policies like defence and overall economic policy. England would have its own Parliament or possibly separate parliaments for different regions of England.



This means Wales becoming an independent country. Wales would make all its own rules and laws and collect taxes and manage its own money. Wales would take responsibility for all financial matters and would not rely on UK Government support.

3.2 Research method and sample

The research method repeated the approach used in the first deliberative qualitative stage. It consisted of **eight extended face-to-face discussions** across Wales with each session lasting around 2.5 hours. Most of those attending this concluding stage had taken part in the first qualitative event and the online engagement exercise in-between the events. They had therefore been on a journey of around six months with the project.

The purposive sample was designed to ensure a mix of gender, age, socio-economic grouping, and life-stage across the discussions.

There was also a mix across the sample recruited for the project in terms of how much participants felt they knew about how Wales is run, levels of engagement with politics (including those who doubted they would vote or would not know who to vote for at the next Senedd elections) and a range of different political parties supported. Also within the

sample were Welsh speakers, minority ethnic participants, disabled participants and LGBTQ+ participants. In total, 112 people attended across the eight concluding sessions. Fieldwork took place 31 May to 28 June 2023.

3.3 Discussion guide, analysis, and reporting

The key content for this stage was the summary description of each possible option for how Wales could be run in the future (see 3.1) and accompanying potential benefits and drawbacks (see appendix). For consistency, they were the same as those used in the quantitative survey and in the preceding online engagement platform.

To help with engagement levels in the sessions, Beaufort commissioned a design and brand content agency to develop a [video animation](#) for the options in Welsh and English. The Commission Secretariat led on the development of the animation by providing the script and worked closely with the agency and Beaufort in developing the content.

Beaufort drafted the topic guide for the sessions in partnership with the Secretariat. The sessions used a Commissioner Chair video as part of the introduction. Printed information on the options was available to participants on arrival as well. Before breaking into groups for further discussion, participants voted on which if any of the Commission's three preferred options they thought would be best for Wales. Once in the break-out groups, facilitated by Beaufort, participants were shown the first section of the animation (which covered devolution strengthened and secured). This was followed by discussion of the option's potential benefits and drawbacks, first spontaneously and then with accompanying potential benefits and drawbacks to hand. The process was repeated for the remaining two options.

After this discussion and a break, participants were asked to vote again on which if any of options would be best for Wales. They were then divided into groups based on their votes and asked to note down in their groups what they believed were the persuasive factors that would best put the case for that option. Subsequently, these factors were presented back to the group for any further debate.

At the end of the sessions, participants were offered an information sheet to take away that addressed some of the questions they had posted for the Commission during the online engagement platform stage.

An inductive approach to the analysis was used whereby the researchers categorised the data to develop themes that emerged from the content of the discussions. The categories and themes were broadly framed within the key research objectives and topic areas.

Bold text is used in the report to identify themes and change of topic. Anonymous verbatim comments made by participants are included in the report in *italics*. These comments should not be interpreted as defining the views of all. Instead, they give insight into individual views on the points identified.

For context, we include within the report references to findings from our quantitative survey with a nationally representative sample of adults in living in Wales conducted in May / June 2023. They are mainly provided within this graphic, right.

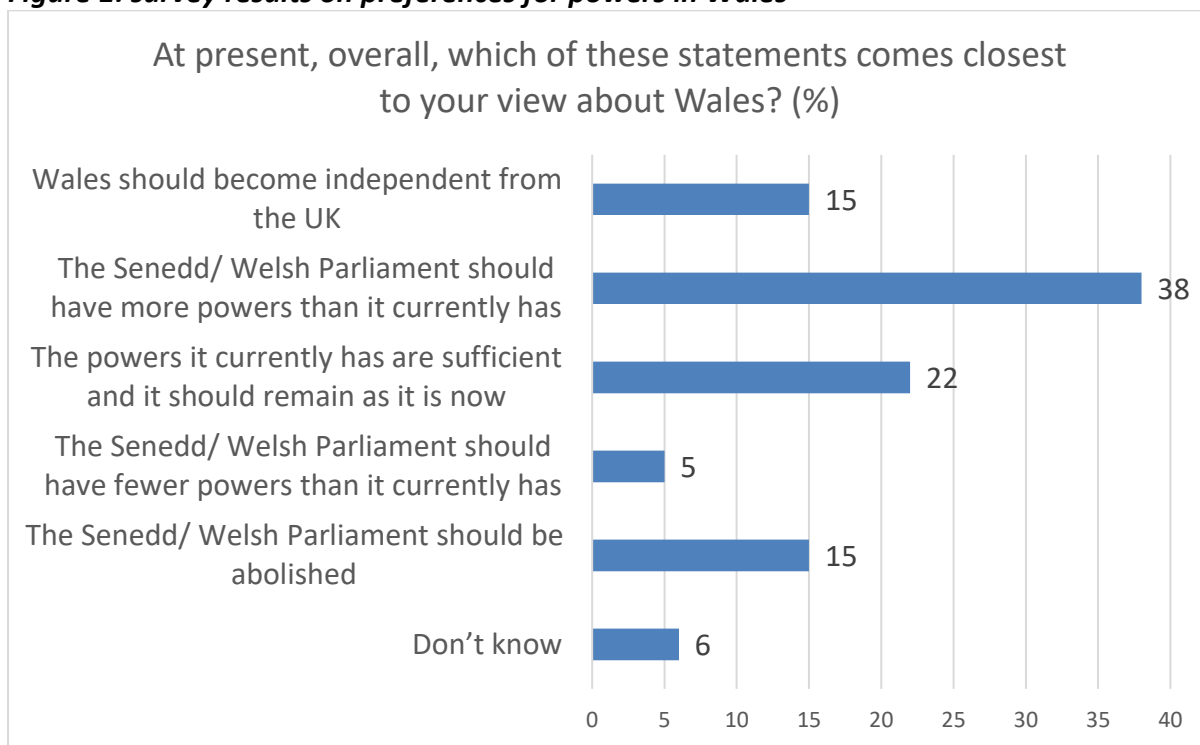


RESEARCH FINDINGS

4. Overall preferences

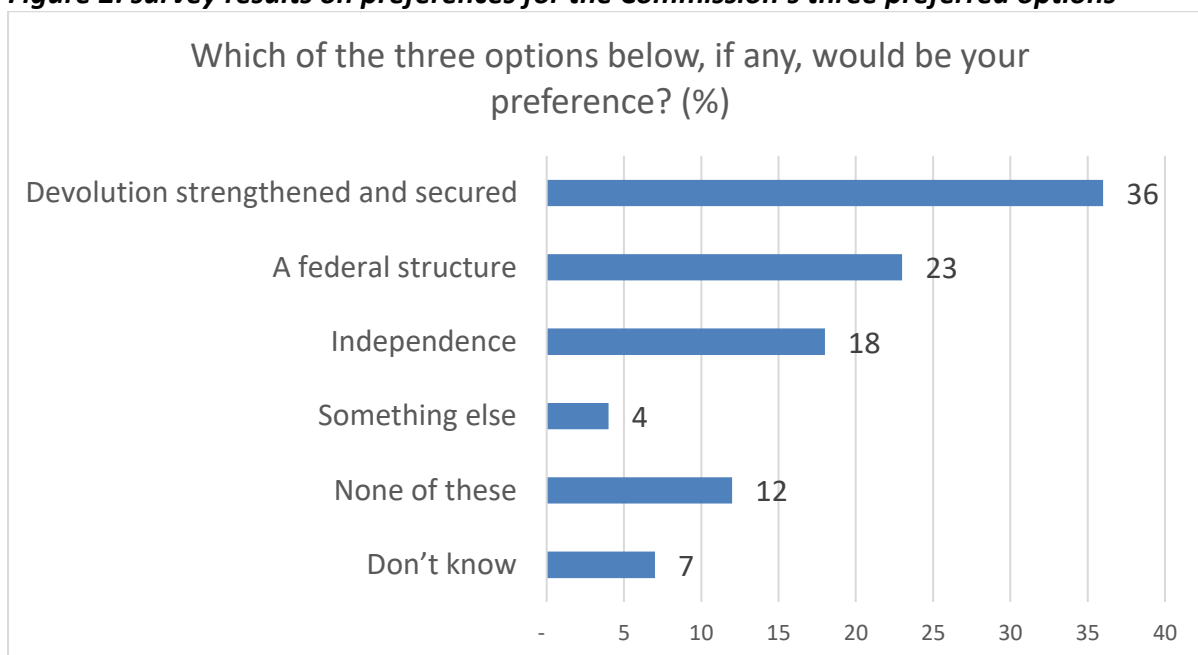
To provide some context for the overall preferences captured during this qualitative stage, the **quantitative survey** found that just over one in five adults surveyed were content with the status quo in Wales, around half wanted more powers or independence, and one in five wanted fewer powers or the Senedd abolished (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: survey results on preferences for powers in Wales



Base: (all in the quantitative survey) 1,596

The quantitative survey subsequently asked specifically about the Commission’s three preferred options. This established that **devolution strengthened and secured** was chosen more frequently (36%) than a **federal structure** (23%) and **independence** (18%). Nearly a quarter (23%), however, chose none of these options (via ‘something else’, ‘none of these’, and ‘don’t know’). (See Figure 2 overleaf.)

Figure 2: survey results on preferences for the Commission's three preferred options

Base: (all in the quantitative survey) 1,596

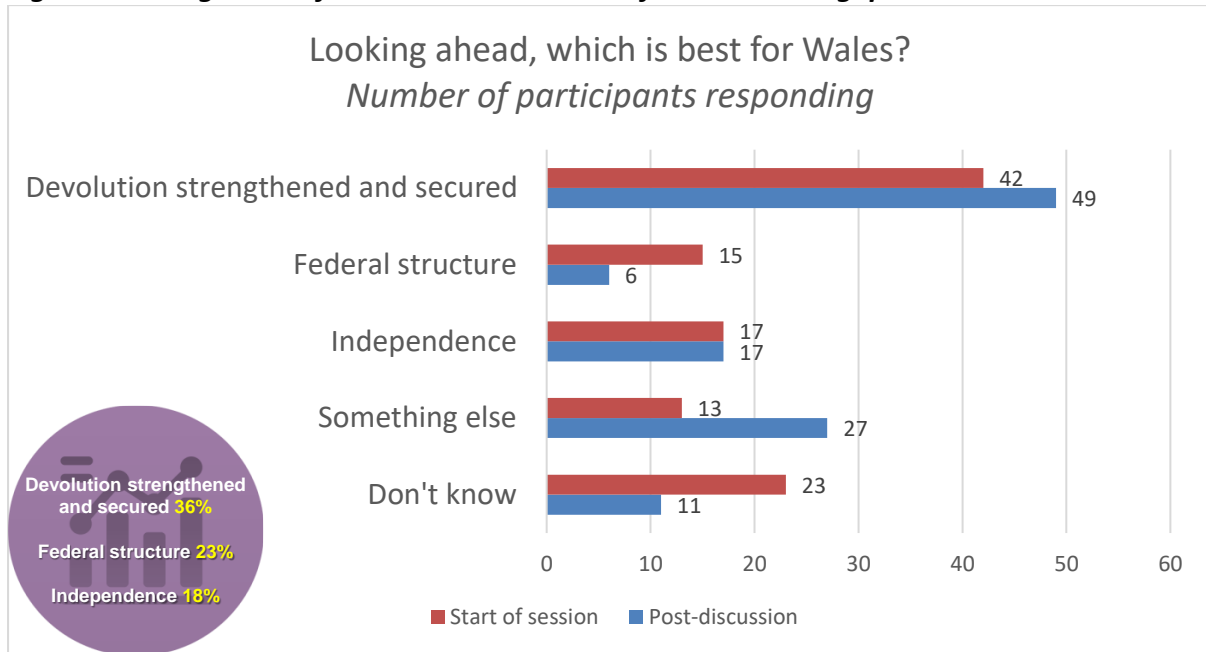
Participants in the concluding deliberative qualitative events were encouraged to vote at the start of the session on which if any of the Commission's three preferred options of **devolution strengthened and secured**, a **federal structure**, or **independence** were best for Wales looking ahead. They also had the option of choosing 'something else' and 'don't know'. We then repeated the vote with them once we had discussed the options in more detail in the breakout sessions.

Echoing the quantitative results, participants in both votes in the qualitative stage were more likely to choose **devolution strengthened and secured** over the other two options (see Figure 3 overleaf). A **federal structure** was least popular but it should be borne in mind that participants in the qualitative research had spent a good deal of time discussing the options and exploring the potential benefits and drawbacks. This is illustrated by fewer participants choosing a federal structure on the second vote because they had been given time to discuss it.

Similarly, fewer participants chose 'don't know' in the final vote, following more in-depth debate. Survey participants did not have this benefit.

Additionally, similar proportions in the survey and qualitative stage chose options other than the Commission's three preferred structures (nearly a quarter). The qualitative feedback from those who chose 'something else' is provided in section 8.

Figure 3: voting results from the start and end of the concluding qualitative sessions



Bases: start vote 110, post-discussion vote 111

The emphasis in this concluding qualitative stage was to give participants the opportunity to discuss and debate the potential benefits and drawbacks of the Commission’s three preferred options. The remaining sections of this report therefore focus on participants’ opinions on the three options.

5. Views on devolution strengthened and secured

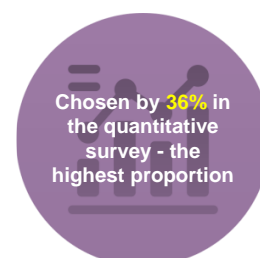
In this chapter, we provide feedback from participants on **devolution strengthened and secured** which was the first option discussed. They were given the following summary as a reminder, as well as being shown the [video animation](#).



This means making sure that the powers Wales has to make its own decisions cannot be taken away by the UK Government. It could also mean extending the responsibilities that Wales has. For example, to include the justice system and policing.

5.1 Overview

Through a combination of the spontaneous and prompted discussions for each option and the subsequent concluding debate, the factors overleaf (Table 1) were highlighted by participants as what they deemed to be the strengths and weaknesses of devolution strengthened and secured.



The factors are given broadly in order of prevalence from this qualitative stage and the more prominent themes are highlighted in bold.

Interestingly, two of the more prominent factors at the qualitative stage for putting the case for entrenched devolution were raised unprompted:

- An evolution of a tried and tested model – and how it could work as an achievable step to further powers and beyond
- Being the least expensive, least complex, least disruptive, and least risky option.

Similarly, the more prominent potential drawbacks were raised unprompted:

- It would mean even more expense and bureaucracy – and how would Wales fund more powers?
- Wales has enough (or even too many) powers as it is and doesn't perform well

Table 1

Devolution strengthened and secured: potential benefits	Devolution strengthened and secured: potential drawbacks
It would stop the UK Government overriding Welsh Government decisions	It would mean even more expense and bureaucracy – and how would Wales fund more powers?
An evolution of a tried and tested model – and could work as an achievable step to further powers and beyond	Wales has enough (or even too many) powers as it is and doesn't perform well
The least expensive, least complex, least disruptive, least risky option	More devolution would mean more cross-border complications and confusion
It would have the reassurance of continued support from the UK Government	It would preserve a funding formula that doesn't work for Wales
It would provide a more stable foundation for how Wales is run	It lacks substance
It would maintain or encourage better working relationships between governments	It would adversely affect relations between governments
Justice as a devolved power seems to work for Scotland	It wouldn't go far enough e.g. it wouldn't make any difference to Wales's influence at a UK level
	Wales should still have some kind of checks and balances in place on its decisions
	The UK Government should still be able to overrule in times of emergency or crisis

Note: the more prominent themes voiced are in bold.

5.2 Benefits that stood out for participants with devolution strengthened and secured

It would stop the UK Government overriding Welsh Government decisions

This factor was often persuasive for participants. It was considered very important that decisions made by the Welsh Government should not be at risk of being delayed or overturned by the UK Government. The example was given with the situation in Scotland with its deposit return scheme being halted by the UK Government which reportedly cost many businesses in Scotland dearly. Also, argued a few, what was the point of having a devolved government if the UK Government could still override its decisions?

It does stop central government being able to repeal the existing powers that have been given to the Welsh Government, which in all honesty I didn't realise was still a possibility, and that is important, that's the one thing for me that actually made me change my mind. (Pembroke Dock)

Wel, 'san ni wedyn yn medru gwneud ein penderfyniadau ein hunain heb iddyn nhw droi o rownd neu rwystro fo. . . . 'Di o jyst ddim yn deg, na'di, os 'di'r bobl sy'n byw yma 'di penderfynu un peth a bod 'na rywun o wlad arall yn deud, 'Na, dach chi'm yn cael'. Mae o'n mynd yn erbyn democratiaeth, (Well, we can then make our own decisions without them overturning it or blocking it. . . . It's just not fair, is it, if it's the

people who live here who decide one thing and that there is someone from another country saying, 'No, you can't'. It goes against democracy.) (Caernarfon)

Wel, y fantais yw bod e'n dod â grym i pobl sy'n byw yng Nghymru, dyfe. Mae 'da ti fwy o lais wedyn. (Well, the advantage is that it brings power to people who live in Wales, I think. You have more of a voice then.) (Aberystwyth)

A few added that, with the right government in place, this option could mean **better decision-making** for Wales as well.

Maybe it could be better for Wales if we had just more powers and more say in what happens in Wales. (Abergavenny)

Having this certainty in place would also create a sense of **stability** and greater **confidence** for Wales, anticipated a couple of participants, because decisions could not be interfered with by the UK Government. There would also be increased accountability for decision-makers in Wales which would be welcomed.

I think possibly because if you think you're going to have your decisions taken away from you, perhaps you don't go wholeheartedly into making these decisions. Whereas if you know it falls solely on you then those decisions have got to be right. (Abergavenny)

Evolution of a tried and tested model

Some arguing the case for this option felt that Wales was currently **not doing too badly** so relatively small, **incremental changes** would make sense, resulting in an enhanced arrangement. This model was also closest to the **status quo** which some favoured while others saw it as a **stepping stone** to more powers and even independence but in a more manageable way. If successful, it could help to build the case for independence and change minds, envisaged a few participants.

We put down it's tried and tested so it's something that's been going on for the last 24 years. The country is not in that bad a state really, so . . . if it isn't bust, don't fix it. (Cardiff)

Hefyd dwi'n meddwl i'r bobl sydd yn meddwl am annibyniaeth a ballu, mae hwnna ella y bridgo'r gap hefyd rhwng y bobl sydd ddim yn credu bod Cymru yn ddigon cry' i bobl sydd isio. 'San ni'n cael mwy o bwerau a bod ni'n cryfhau yna, ella bod hynna'n newid meddylfryd pobl. (Also, I think for the people who are thinking about independence and stuff, this can maybe bridge the gap between the people who don't believe that Wales is big enough for people who want it. If we get more powers and we get stronger, maybe that'll change people's mindset.) (Caernarfon)

Least expensive and complex option

This model was also expected to be the **least expensive and complex option** and cause the least disruption. References were made to current financial challenges facing the UK through the cost of living crisis, UK Government policy, and supporting the war in Ukraine.

People 'did not need more financial pain' and this option would still mean more power for Wales.

Devo max, the way forward, strengthen and secure. It won't cost a lot, that's one of the most important things. We're in the middle of Brexit, post-COVID, Ukraine, everything, Conservative government, we don't need more financial pain at the moment, so there's less risk involved if we just secure a stronger devolution.
(Aberystwyth)

It also seemed the **most realistic option** of the three as it would not require changes for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This was considered a powerful argument by a few participants listening to others make the case for this option.

One or two acknowledged that they voted for this option because they were **uncomfortable with change**, and the worry of unintended consequences, rather than because they identified positive factors compared with other options.

Devolution strengthened and secured was also attractive on occasion because of the perceived stability of **continued funding** from the UK Government and the reassurance of **support from the UK Government** on certain major issues, for example relating to defence.

I think you've got the backup of the UK which is strength really in all sorts of financial ways as well as in other ways. (Newtown)

We'll still get money from Westminster, it would be the least amount of change but still in a positive way, given all the chaos that's currently going on in the world.
(Wrexham)

Better working relationships

The Welsh Government, envisaged a few participants, would need to take responsibility for its actions and performance and not blame Westminster when issues arose which could **reduce arguments** over who was at fault for certain issues.

5.3 Drawbacks that stood out for participants with devolution strengthened and secured

Additional expense and bureaucracy

Some thought the drawback of **additional cost** and **bureaucracy** of this option, along with further devolved powers, would overshadow any potential benefits. It would add more red tape to an already overly bureaucratic arrangement in some participants' eyes. Some who came from a position of being sceptical about the effectiveness of the Senedd and Welsh Government were keen to stress this point. The option summary referred to potentially devolving more powers like justice. It was not easy for participants to envisage any benefits of devolving this power, and it sometimes affected their overall reaction to the option.

A fi'n meddwl dylai fe aros [yn San Steffan] achos mae fe jyst yn rhoi lefel ecstra o gymhlethdod mewn i pethau. Justice system, bydde'n rhaid ni setio rhywbeth lan ein hunain? Sai'n siŵr. (I think it should stay [with Westminster] because it just adds an

extra level of complexity to things. Justice system, we would have to set something up ourselves? I'm not sure.) (Aberystwyth)

They're on about the Ministry of Justice and I've looked at that and the online research and I firstly can't see many benefits weighed up against what are the consequences, the costs, the bureaucracy and everything like that. (Cardiff)

Some also wondered how effectively Wales would be able to take on and **fund** those additional responsibilities.

Financial structure ar ddiwedd dydd. Mae o i gyd yn dod lawr i hynna os mae Cymru'n gallu neud o fatha'r gwledydd eraill. (Financial structure at the end of the day. It all comes down to that, whether Wales can do stuff like the other countries.) (Caernarfon)

Wales has enough powers already

Some participants struggled to see any benefits to this option because they remained preoccupied by the Welsh Government's perceived **poor performance**. Wales did not seem to be doing a very good job with its current powers so it would be better to **wait to see improvements** before considering more devolved powers. If devolution was entrenched, they were concerned that the Welsh Government would make more poor decisions and make changes just for the sake of it without any scrutiny from the UK Government.

Why should we have more responsibilities when we can't look after what we already have? (Abergavenny)

With this point in mind, Westminster / the UK Government was believed by a few to have **more expertise** than the Senedd / Welsh Government.

Cross-border complications

Some participants anticipated that devolving further powers could lead to **complications and confusion**, especially for those living on the **Wales and England border**. Some were reminded of their experiences during the coronavirus pandemic with different rules in Wales and England.

It's not that I'm against devolution, it's that I would like clarity and I wouldn't like to push too far on things that I think are of interest for all nations and not just Wales. (Rhondda)

The justice system should be the same right throughout the country, you can't have it different in one place to the other, that doesn't make sense at all. The same with education. (Cardiff)

As indicated earlier, some felt that **continuity across nations on justice**, which was given as an example in the option summary or a further devolved power, would be preferable as it would bring clarity and avoid confusion. A reduction in the ability of the Westminster

Parliament to have a final say over how all parts of the UK are run, therefore, was an issue for some.

There might also be situations, thought a few participants, where the UK Government might need to have the **power to overrule** devolved nation governments, for example during emergencies and crises.

It would not help Wales financially

The opinion was voiced by some that devolution strengthened and secured was **unlikely to improve the situation** for Wales in terms of its funding. The Barnett Formula was unfair on Wales, said some, so choosing entrenched devolution would only preserve this form of funding allocation which would not benefit the nation. Also, **how would Wales manage financially** with even more powers and would its budget be increased to account for more devolution?

It all depends on the budget that is given over here. I think we all know that every year Wales is always given the least, and I just think with the decisions that Wales tries to make, it's the money holding that back. The ideas are all there, it's the money holding them back. (Aberystwyth)

A perceived lack of substance

The potential benefit statements **did not sound convincing** or strong to some participants. A few also challenged or disagreed with certain statements, such as how exactly the option could provide a more stable foundation for how Wales is run, and that stopping the UK Parliament and Government from making changes to Wales's powers without the agreements of the Senedd / Welsh Parliament would result in Wales making unchecked and poor decisions. Additionally, statements that talked about how they 'might' benefit the country could sound quite weak.

I think there definitely needs to be some sort of a stronger statement to actually make us maybe see a future in that rather than . . . Because we're just going off past experiences of what's already happened. We need to know it's actually going to be beneficial to everyone that lives here. (Cardiff)

There were also doubts occasionally voiced in that there was **no awareness of any instances where the UK Government had interfered** with decisions made or plans formulated by the Welsh Government. Furthermore, it was argued that it was highly **unlikely** the UK Government would take any 'drastic' steps that overturned laws in Wales. The need for entrenched devolution, therefore, did not seem very persuasive.

It would adversely affect relationships between governments

More devolution, anticipated some, would mean **more tension** and worsening working relationships between the Welsh and UK Governments with a reduction in common ground. Confusion and differences between Wales and England over COVID rules were still quite fresh in some participants' minds. During the pandemic, it had felt like political point-scoring rather than doing what was best for the UK, according to a number of participants.

In a couple of cases, participants described **Scotland** as being further on than Wales in its devolution journey and yet relations between the Scottish and UK Governments did not look very healthy.

Well you can still see the tension there is between Westminster and Scotland and presumably they've done this strengthening bit I think because they're always a little bit further down the devolution [route]. (Newtown)

Some therefore believed the UK was **better off unified** (e.g. with the pandemic experience in mind) and did not think this option would lead to a more stable foundation for how Wales is run.

I see Wales, again looking back to what's happened over the last few years, as run very separately to the UK Government and I feel like I want it to be more of one unit rather than divided. (Abergavenny)

Also, Wales needed **stronger leaders** concluded a few participants, if it was to have even more powers so that it could stand up to the UK Government more robustly when required.

It would not go far enough

Building on the funding issue point raised above, a small number of participants felt devolution strengthened and secured would not do a great deal for Wales. For example, this option would continue to mean uncertainty for Wales as they expected that the UK Government would still find ways to overrule the Welsh Government. Recent cases with the Scottish Government being overruled emphasised this uncertainty for one participant. Even if devolution was entrenched, the participant did not think that the UK Government would show any interest in further powers for Wales, despite her understanding that there was a need to devolve justice to ensure fairer outcomes for Welsh citizens in the system.

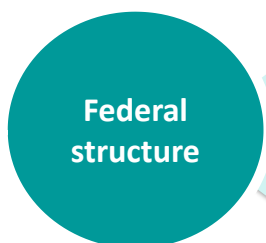
My counter to [this option] would be there is need for drastic change, there is, in the whole UK there is need for drastic change, and if we don't start believing in values and people and all of those things, there is no point in spending money on anything else. (Pembroke Dock)

The report said unanimously that there are huge discrepancies in fairness to Wales and that the kind of sentences we get, the places that people get incarcerated, there's huge discrepancies and we ought to have our own justice system. Now as a government report, it reported to government that we should have our own and it should be devolved but they haven't done anything about it. (Rhondda)

Another participant added that, under this model, Wales would still have **little influence** over decisions made at a UK level that affected Wales, for example with the universal credit increase during the pandemic that Wales had wanted to keep in place. The reduction in Welsh MPs through boundary changes was given as a further reason for doubting that this option would make much difference.

6. Views on a federal structure

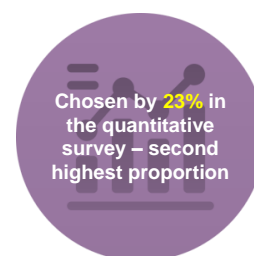
This chapter covers participants' opinions on a **federal model** for Wales which was the second option presented. They were again given a summary as a reminder, and were shown the relevant section of the [video animation](#).



This means political change across the whole of the UK with a written constitution setting out the role and responsibilities of each level of government, including devolved bodies within England (similar to how the USA is governed). The UK Government would be responsible only for UK-wide policies like defence and overall economic policy. England would have its own Parliament or possibly separate parliaments for different regions of England.

6.1 Overview

Table 2 overleaf highlights the factors that participants perceived to be potential benefits and drawbacks of a federal structure. There were fewer potential benefits identified with this structure versus the other two discussed. It generally proved more difficult for participants to fully comprehend this option.



Unlike the other two options discussed, the key potential benefits participants identified were not so prominent in the discussions. This fits with how a federal structure was the least popular option overall.

There was widespread consensus, however, that a federal structure would be complicated, time-consuming and expensive to set up and that it relied on other nations wanting to follow the same path. The factors overleaf are given broadly in order of prevalence and the relatively more prominent themes are highlighted in bold.

Table 2

A federal structure: potential benefits	A federal structure: potential drawbacks
It would mean better decision-making and a fairer arrangement for Wales and beyond	It would be too complicated, time consuming and expensive to set up
It would clarify the limits and responsibilities of each level of government and with more accountability	England and other nations would not want it
It might result in better working relationships	Different laws or policies in different regions would be confusing and divisive
Wales would not have to look after all policy areas – and it would provide some consistency across nations	It would be difficult to get all regions / nations to agree on matters, affecting relationships
Positive examples of federal structures exist elsewhere	The UK doesn't seem large enough to adopt a federal system
	It might be even harder for Wales to have a voice with competing regions in England
	Too many unknowns over what would be controlled by the UK Government to be able to form a clear view

Note: the more prominent themes voiced are in bold.

6.2 Benefits that stood out for participants with a federal structure

Better decision-making and a fairer arrangement for Wales and beyond

Some thought that a federal structure would deliver **better and fairer, more tailored decision-making** for Wales as well as other federal regions because of the increased autonomy. There would also be the reassurance that it would prevent the UK Parliament and Government from making changes to Wales's powers without the agreement of the Senedd.

Ar hyn o bryd, it's a bit of a power struggle. O leia' os 'di'r pedwar on an even keel, 'sa neb yn uwch na'r llall, ella fydda hynna'n golygu fwy o weithio'n well hefo'i gilydd rather than, 'I'm telling you what to do'. (At the moment, it's a bit of a power struggle. At least if the four are on an even keel, no one is higher than the other, maybe that means working better with each other rather than, 'I'm telling you what to do'.) (Rhondda)

I didn't really understand it until I saw the video, but it does explain, so you'd seem to have a lot more powers with that. . . . It would give you a lot more power in your own country. (Pembroke Dock)

In a few cases, participants wondered if **Wales itself could be divided federally** as part of this option, for example with North and South Wales regions. This could mean more tailored decisions to meet more regional needs which some participants had raised as concerns in previous stages of the research.

The **cost and effort would be worthwhile**, continued one group making the case for this structure, as it would deliver a fairer arrangement all round.

Anything that's marked with, 'It would be difficult and cost a lot of money', that would probably lead to the best process. You have to invest, you have to invest in people in order for people to live and work better together. . . . We need something that works, we need something that's fair, we need something that's transparent and we need people in government to take responsibility for their actions and decisions, and that's the clearest way we could see of that working. (Pembroke Dock)

It could mean a fairer system **financially** across the different regions and nations as well, suggested a few participants.

My understanding from the video, with the federal structure we would try to be a bit fairer about where the money was split up. (Newtown)

There was also a view expressed that this arrangement would help to give people in all the different regions of the UK **more of a voice**.

'Sa fo'n rhoi mwy o lais i ni. Ar y funud dan ni'n cael ein bodd i yn San Steffan. (It will give us more of a voice. At the moment we are being drowned out in Westminster.) (Caernarfon)

As a counter to the argument that it would be politically impossible to deliver (described in 6.3), a small number thought that **England's regions and other devolved nations may be interested** in this option. English regions outside the South East might think that they did not get enough support while those in the South East might think that they did not need to support the 'poorer areas' with levelling up funding, for example. Citizens in England might also like the idea of devolved nation MPs no longer being able to vote on England-only matters.

Mae o 'di bod yn boen i bobl Lloegr ers blynnyddoedd bod pobl Cymru a'r Alban yn gallu voteio am bethau sy'n mynd ymlaen yn Lloegr. (It's been an irritation for the people of England for years that the people of Wales and Scotland can vote for things that go on in England.) (Aberystwyth)

Clarity of responsibilities and greater transparency

Some were drawn to this option because it would deliver **greater clarity over limits, roles and responsibilities** than the current arrangement. Also, the reference in the prompted potential benefits to greater transparency for how Wales is run sounded appealing to a handful of participants, including some who held negative views of the Welsh Government and its performance.

Everyone wants transparency, don't they? At the moment, I don't really know who's in government in the Welsh Government, I don't know a lot about it. When it comes on the news, you listen to it, you don't really feel a part of it. It's all mixed in with

what's happening with the UK Government and what they're doing. I think if it's more transparent in Wales, I think people would pay a lot more attention. (Cardiff)

Some felt that this improved clarity could mean **better working relationships** between governments because, with a written constitution, there would be fewer grey areas that could lead to division. However, some doubted that this would be the case in reality, given England's dominance.

I think the working relationships could be a point because they will all know what their roles are and what they can and can't do, so that would make things better. (Wrexham)

A lot more autonomy for these different areas to go their own way, potentially. But you would still have something on top which keeps them together in some policy areas, and which would also clarify how they have to work together to come to common decisions on some things. (Pembroke Dock)

Additionally, having one government overseeing certain areas would deliver some **consistency**, which appealed to a few participants who were uncomfortable with the other two options discussed.

One set of rules across everybody and then like you say, little bits here and there. . . . That's just what caught my eye. (Abergavenny)

Furthermore, a couple of participants, clearer lines of responsibility and therefore greater accountability might attract a **better calibre of politician**.

In governments in our country in general there's a distinct lack of responsibility and we felt that if we had a federated structure we would have clear and defined roles and responsibilities, so power would equal being responsible for that power, not just wielding it. We hoped that that might bring about a better calibre of leader who was willing to accept responsibility in the process. (Pembroke Dock)

Not having to be responsible for all policy areas

According to a small number of participants, Wales could still make its own decisions in many areas but not have to worry about 'larger' policy areas. This would also mean the **reassurance** of support on serious matters like defence and therefore still a degree of **unity** within the UK.

Positive examples of federal structures elsewhere

A few participants felt that a federal structure should not be dismissed out of hand because Germany, Austria, and Canada seemed to be run quite well.

There are positive federal states, like Germany is one of the most prosperous countries in the world, isn't it? (Wrexham)

6.3 Drawbacks that stood out for participants with a federal structure

Too complicated, time consuming and expensive to set up

Participants widely believed that a federal structure would be **too complicated, time consuming and expensive** to set up including all the bureaucracy involved. These drawbacks they felt sure would **outweigh any potential benefits**. The UK could not afford to do it, they concluded, and there were currently more important areas on which to spend money, for example the NHS. The arrangement reminded one participant of the expansion of the number of local authorities in Wales which in their mind had only delivered duplication of operational tasks.

Mae'n mynd i gymryd lot i setio rhywbeth fel'na. A does dim pres. Does bosib. 'Sa well gyda fi bod nhw'n sortio'r NHS allan yn lle bod nhw'n twlu pres mewn i neud structure fel hyn. (It's going to take a lot to set something like that up. And there is no money. Definitely. I'd rather they sort the NHS out instead of throwing money into making a structure like this.) (Aberystwyth)

I'm concerned again [about] the bureaucracy, we've got more AMs now so how many people would you have managing this system in the future and what benefit have you got against the bureaucracy and the additional powers and things like that? (Cardiff)

A few also wondered how Wales would be able to **sustain itself financially** with this arrangement and whether the country might end up worse off. If Wales and the regions were still to receive some central funding, there was a concern occasionally voiced that Wales would not get its fair share, with England dominating other parts of the federal structure. A further finance related concern was expressed among those who lived near the border with England: what would happen to healthcare provision given the current reliance in some places on English hospitals?

How would the finances be split up between the bigger and smaller areas? There's going to be another formula again, so that's why I think it's unfair. (Rhondda)

Anticipation of complications extended to the potential for **confusion** with different regions having certain different laws or policies. A few concluded that the UK was **too small** to warrant attempting to set up a federal structure when compared with nations where it was already in place.

England and other nations would not want it

This drawback, along with the one above, were key to most participants reaching the conclusion that a federal structure could never be achieved. Some were convinced that this arrangement would not work because it relied on England and other nations agreeing to enormous change which would never happen in their eyes.

'It might be politically impossible to deliver.' I just feel that that's half an hour I'll never get back, absolutely pointless talking about it because it isn't ever going to

happen. . . . If every person in Wales got on board with it, it would never happen still because it's out of our hands. (Wrexham)

I actually was heading towards this except it's pie in the sky, because until England and everybody else, the rest of the UK, say what a whoopy idea it is, it's not going to get off that sheet of paper. (Pembroke Dock)

It would adversely affect relationships with other parts of the UK

When better working relationships was mooted as a potential benefit, participants tended to expect the opposite. Instead, some anticipated that this option would likely prove more **divisive** than the current arrangements, especially if there were multiple regional parliaments across England and where they had to reach agreement on certain issues. Referencing the topical situation in the USA regarding abortion laws, some participants thought that encouraging different laws and policies in different regions would add to the sense of **division** and confusion. A few also foresaw increased division, stalemates, territorialism, and greed as different regions tried to outdo each other. These types of concern reflected some participants' perceptions of a '**dysfunctional**' USA. They did not want to move towards its way of governing.

But then getting all those similar size groups to decide on an outcome for a single thing is just going to be, it would never happen. . . . They'd all be complaining about it, rather than thinking of strategies to make it better. (Newtown)

It's just going to completely divide everyone and it's just going to cause this massive ruckus. . . . I think it's just going to cause more confusion, it's going to cause just divergence if we're splitting things up. (Wrexham)

Further concerns voiced less frequently were that:

- It might be even harder for Wales to have a voice with competing regions in England
- There were too many unknowns regarding what would be controlled by central government. It was therefore difficult to have any confidence in this option.

7. Views on independence

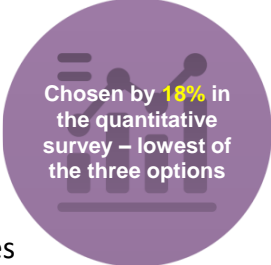
The third option discussed with participants was **independence** for Wales, described in this chapter. The same approach was used as for the first two options in terms how the discussion progressed. It was summarised for participants as follows, along with the [video animation](#) which provided more detail.

Independence

This means Wales becoming an independent country. Wales would make all its own rules and laws and collect taxes and manage its own money. Wales would take responsibility for all financial matters and would not rely on UK Government support.

7.1 Overview

Table 3 overleaf covers the potential benefits and drawbacks of independence for Wales that participants focused on when debating the merits or otherwise of this option. The factors are broadly ordered by prevalence and the more prominent themes are highlighted in bold.



Chosen by **18%** in the quantitative survey – lowest of the three options

This concluding face-to-face stage found that tailored policies for Wales was a top perceived benefit of independence. The deliberative process meant that there had been a good deal of focus on funding and this featured among potential benefits with some more nuanced observations than had been made in earlier stages of the research. However, the feedback saw funding issues and complications like cross-border matters as significant barriers to independence.

Table 3

Independence: potential benefits	Independence: potential drawbacks
It would mean full control over decisions that affect Wales and policies tailored to Wales	Wales would not be able to fund itself and is too small to be independent
It would mean Wales could apply to rejoin the EU	It would be too complicated to set up e.g. Wales would face significant challenges with cross-border issues like currency, defence, immigration, and exports
Wales could manage financially if independent - it would encourage Wales to grow, be more innovative and progressive	It would be too much of a risk and too many unknowns (e.g. on funding and calibre of politician to deliver it)
Other small nations manage successfully to be independent	It would likely cause further division between governments
There would be no confusion about government responsibilities and accountability	Joining the EU would limit devolved powers and still mean following European laws
It would strengthen Wales's identity, culture, profile, and international standing	
St David's Day would be a Bank Holiday	

Note: the more prominent themes voiced are in bold.

Before discussing the potential benefits and drawbacks that were singled out, it is worth noting that participants sometimes responded that they **liked the sound of independence and the potential benefits** they were shown but could not see how they could be delivered practically. This was also the case for a few participants who had little faith in Welsh politicians across the different parties.

*Well it is a wish list, isn't it [in the prompted potential benefits]? There's nothing that you wouldn't want is there, to be honest, when they're wrote down like that.
(Newtown)*

*We're not strong enough, I can't see a lot of money coming from Wales to be honest.
. . . I don't think it would work. It would be nice, it would be really nice. (Wrexham)*

However, some came to the conclusion that independence could be achieved via **incremental steps over time**, for example beginning with entrenched devolution. They might not see it in their lifetime, felt a few, but they would like to see their children living in what they anticipated could be a fairer Wales. There was also acknowledgement among those interested in this option that the transition period would be 'really difficult' but lessons could be learned from Ireland, added one participant.

You build your way up there first. You'd start with whatever that first one was called and then build your way up and then if [it works], that's when you take the stabilisers off and have a go. (Wrexham)

The reason why I'm thinking I want this is because I've got kids, I want a better Wales for them and if they're going to be bringing up their families it would be better to have a fairer throw of the dice. (Rhondda)

In contrast, some remarked that the potential disadvantages, on reflection, were **much more persuasive** than the potential benefits. There did not seem to be a need significant enough to warrant independence and there were **too many other current issues** to deal with that were a greater priority.

[The potential disadvantages] all say to me don't do it. Just don't do it. (Wrexham)

7.2 Benefits that stood out for participants with independence

Full control over decisions affecting Wales

Participants in favour of this option were drawn to the potential benefit of Wales having more flexibility to put in place policies **specifically tailored to the nation's needs** and to determine how public services are funded - and delivered - without being compromised by any UK Government influence. For a small number of participants, Wales's response to the pandemic had shown how Wales cared for its people whereas England appeared to care more about money (but a few participants disagreed with this point of view).

Dwi'n meddwl bod o jyst yn gyfle da i Gymru gallu cael y Cymru dan ni isio, dim be dan ni 'di gorfod cael. Dwi'm yn meddwl bod Cymru erioed 'di voteio am Conservative government, ond Conservative governments dan ni 'di cael y rhan fwya' o'r amser. Dan ni'm yn cael cyfle i adeiladu ar ein economi ni achos mae San Steffan yn rhwystro ni rhag neud rhai penderfyniadau. Fatha Airport Caerdydd, dwi'n meddwl oedden nhw isio lleihau y dreth maen nhw'n rhoi ar airlines, wedyn 'naeth San Steffan ddeud, 'Na, dach chi'm yn cael'. (I think it's just a good opportunity for Wales to be able to have the Wales we want, not what we have to have. I don't think Wales has ever voted for a Conservative government, but we have Conservative governments most of the time. We have an opportunity to build on our economy because Westminster is preventing us from making certain decisions. Like Cardiff Airport, I think they wanted to reduce the tax they put on airlines, then Westminster said, 'No, you can't'.)
(Rhondda)

Self-determinism is important because the people of Wales will be able to make decisions that affect them specifically and not be hostage to fortune to the UK Government. (Aberystwyth)

I think independence is the only one that has the potential to actually change the country for the better. I think the other two options are just more of the same which obviously isn't working. (Abergavenny)

Additionally, it did not make sense to a couple of participants why a country would be content for **another country** to have final decision-making powers over it rather than being able to make its own decisions.

Pam ddylai gwlad arall gael y final say am be sy'n digwydd yn y wlad yma? 'Sa 'na'm un wlad arall yn y byd isio neud hynna, felly dwi'm yn deall meddylfryd rhai pobl o Gymru sydd isio San Steffan gael y final say. (Why should another country have the final say about what happens in this country? There is no other country in the world that wants to do that, so I don't understand the mentality of some people from Wales who want Westminster to have the final say.) (Caernarfon)

Taking the challenging topic of the **NHS** which was frequently raised, one group argued that an independent Wales could overhaul the NHS more effectively as it currently has to work within the English system with some services provided over the border. This could involve considering how the health system works in Ireland.

The NHS we could change the model more easily and make it far less bureaucratic and manager heavy, which we could do now but the difficulty is we've still got to work within the English system while doing it overall. . . . Or we could look at something like the Irish model which would be that those that can afford to pay a bit do pay a bit, whereas those that can't afford to pay get it all for free. (Newtown)

There was sometimes a belief expressed that, in the short to medium term, it would be extremely challenging to implement and costly, with a few participants citing Ireland's experiences as an example. However they felt that, in the **long term**, Wales would be able to make better decisions for the nation and support itself.

The point was also made that changes to **constituencies in Wales** meant that Wales would have less of a say in Westminster with the planned reduction in the number of Welsh MPs under the current system; so independence was the only real alternative.

It would mean Wales could apply to rejoin the EU

The ability for Wales to **apply to rejoin the EU** was an attractive proposition to some participants, if Wales became independent. For example, it would benefit Wales for economic reasons and there would be the potential to adopt the Euro for currency. Wales, some stressed, would also be free to **secure its own treaties** to deal with questions such as managing defence (e.g. being part of NATO).

Wales could manage financially

Some argued that Wales **could raise revenue** through various means such as its natural resources, renewables, with Crown Estate rights in Wales being devolved and via borrowing. In addition to negotiating new international trade deals, Wales might also be able to follow the example of certain other countries and lower corporation tax to attract businesses to set up there, or develop better business propositions for foreign inward investment in the nation. However, the question was posed regarding what was stopping Wales from doing so now.

We could do what London's done and print our own bonds and buy them and rejig the currency and pump it all that way, so we'd have a huge debt which we'd owe to ourselves just like London does. So potentially we could be richer. (Newtown)

Os ti'n mynd i fod yn dropio corporation tax rate chdi yn is na be fysa fo yng ngwledydd eraill, mae hwnna'n mynd i enticio cwmnïau mawr i ddod i Gymru. So mae pres chdi'n dod o fan'na. 'Di pres chdi'm jyst yn dod o gyflog chdi. Mae pres chdi'n dod o bethau sy'n cael eu stopio ar y funud gan y DU. (If you're going to drop your corporation tax rate lower than what it would be in other countries, that's going to entice large companies to come to Wales. So your money comes from there. The money doesn't have to just come from your salary. The money comes from things that are being stopped at the moment by the UK.) (Caernarfon)

A few believed **defence** and **currency** were significant challenges, but that Wales would find a solution. It could come to some arrangement with England over currency and use the pound, for example, or perhaps eventually move to the Euro if Wales managed to rejoin the EU.

A few remarked that they **did not think the Barnett Formula was fair** and that Wales could do better financially on its own if it were freed from the perceived limitations of the formula. According to one participant, several studies had indicated that independence for Wales was financially feasible. This participant cited Professor John Ball, former lecturer at Swansea University.

If we stay on where we are now, we can never progress because that cap won't change. Our population isn't growing so [the Barnett Formula] won't change. Independence means that we have the opportunity to grow our industry. (Abergavenny)

Additionally, independence would encourage Wales to be more **growth focused and to be innovative** in making independence work for the nation, added some. Smaller nations could also be more agile and get things done more quickly, argued one participant, for example in pursuing green energy generation policies. A few felt that the other two options under discussion would not offer the same potential for Wales to innovate, grow and prosper, although independence was still acknowledged on occasion to be a risky option.

It will encourage growth and ingenuity and all those positive things. . . . I think it would put that fight into our Welsh Government and give them something to prove. (Rhondda)

Our system of devolution since '99 has kept us back I think and if we stay with federal or devolution it will always just keep us on a steady decline. (Abergavenny)

Some of the arguments used above were quite compelling for a small number of participants who had not chosen this option. However, a few who found the concept of independence quite persuasive were not entirely convinced because of **concerns over the quality of politicians** and their ability to deliver and make independence a success.

Other small nations manage

Some participants argued that several independent countries in Europe are smaller than Wales and with smaller GDPs. Other countries also seemed to **manage their borders** well

enough. As highlighted above, Wales would be able to **organise treaties** to help to support itself. It therefore seemed perfectly possible that Wales could successfully be independent, with Ireland sometimes used as an example of what can be achieved over time. Reference was also made to how Iceland manages in this respect, as a small nation.

Does dim byddin 'da Iceland. 'Naethon nhw gael gwared arno fe 200 mlynedd yn ôl, fi'n credu. Ac maen nhw jyst yn dod o dan yr EU, ac wedyn mae NATO wedyn, sydd yn amddiffyn. So does dim angen rili. A hefyd achos ni'n rhannu arfordir 'da Lloegr, be bynnag sy'n digwydd i ni, mae'n mynd i effeithio nhw. (Iceland has no army. They got rid of it 200 years ago, I believe. And they just come under the EU, and then there's NATO then, which protects them. So there's no need to worry. And also because we share the coast with England, whatever happens to us, it's going to affect them.) (Rhondda)

Clarity of responsibility

Some felt that full control of decisions affecting Wales would mean **clarity of responsibility** because the Welsh Government would not be able to blame the UK Government for its inability to adequately address the issues in Wales.

You'd have one lot of people in charge, no one would be able to just pass the buck. (Aberystwyth)

Strengthening Wales's identity, culture, profile and international standing

Some participants believed independence would also deliver less tangible benefits. It could, for example, allow Wales's culture, language and profile to flourish. It might also give the nation more prominence on the international stage and perhaps result in other nations having more 'respect' for Wales.

'San ni'n gallu cael cysylltiadau hefo gwledydd eraill. Ar hyn o bryd dan ni yn dechrau dod ymlaen hefo global recognition a phethau. Ond 'sa fo'n rhoi y cyfle i ni fedru mynd ar y world stage. (We could build relationships with other countries. At the moment we are starting to come forward with global recognition and things. But it gives us the opportunity to be able to go on the world stage.) (Rhondda)

7.3 Drawbacks that stood out for participants with independence

Some participants remarked that the prompted potential drawbacks shown to them looked like **real drawbacks** whereas the potential benefits were not so concrete. Additionally, comparisons were sometimes drawn between the challenges of **leaving the EU and becoming independent**, with more concerns than advantages voiced. The point was also made that the UK Government would **never allow it** so independence simply could not happen.

They're more realistic than the benefits. The benefits are in an ideal world, having plenty of funding and yeah, you can argue that there would be benefits. These are real, the drawbacks. . . . It says it 'might' lead to, it doesn't say it would lead to, does it? (Cardiff)

Dydi hyn ddim yn mynd i ddigwydd. Sbiwch be sy'n digwydd yn Scotland ers blynyddoedd. Maen nhw isio vote arall rŵan. 'Dyn nhw methu cael o. A mae'r Alban dwi'n meddwl mewn well position na Chymru i fynd am annibyniaeth. Mae o'n fwy o wlad, boblogaeth fwt. (This is not going to happen. Look what's been happening in Scotland for years. They want another vote now. They can't get it. And I think Scotland is in a better position than Wales to go for independence. It's a larger country, higher population.) (Caernarfon)

Wales would not be able to afford it

The key barrier participants associated with independence was that Wales would **not be able to fund it**. There were too many unknowns and there were strong doubts that Wales would be able to afford to cover benefits and pensions. There was little enthusiasm for **increasing taxes** in Wales or the country likely taking on more debt to go towards the funding gap, given the **cost of living crisis**. It was also assumed by a couple of participants that Wales would take on a proportion of the UK's debt which would add to already challenging circumstances. Better to be part of the UK's much larger economy, concluded a few.

It just worries me that we don't have enough funding and they're going to privatise the NHS and prescriptions and things like that. (Pembroke Dock)

I'd love nothing more than a free Wales as such but being realistic, we cannot afford it. (Cardiff)

How many people would it push into more poverty? There's enough people struggling to survive at the moment, any more people. (Aberystwyth)

Linked to this argument, Wales was regularly considered **too small** which meant insufficient money raised via taxes and not enough industry. It would be the 'Welsh version of Brexit' concluded one participant negatively.

I think in theory it's a good idea but I think it harks back to the fact that Wales, we're just too small to be independent. . . . There's not enough people here in terms of taxes, there's no industry and trade so I don't know how they'd be self-sufficient in terms of generating finances and that. (Cardiff)

The prospect of Wales being 'on its own' for many years without any support was **daunting** for a few participants as well, and they were reminded of perceived issues arising from the UK leaving the EU.

From time to time, participants were concerned how Wales would be able to **fund its defence** if it became independent; and there were doubts occasionally expressed that Wales would be eligible to join NATO. Furthermore, from an economic point of view, there were worries over how effectively Wales would be able to **negotiate its own trade agreements**. The country was not thought to be in a position of great strength and did not have a great deal to offer.

It would be too complicated to set up

Some remarked that the **complications, bureaucracy** and associated costs involved in Wales becoming independent could not justify the move. Complexities were identified with **borders**, with a few adding that the ongoing situation with the border in Ireland and the EU looked like something to be avoided. England might also make it more expensive for goods that were transported over its border to Wales; and the nation would need to develop a larger airport which would be more expensive, anticipated one participant. Challenges regarding **currency** and organising **defence** were also raised.

Nes i bleidleisio i aros yn Ewrop, ond faint o gymhleth 'sa fo os 'sa Cymru yn Ewrop a Lloegr ddim? Mae hynna jyst yn amhosib. (I voted to stay in Europe, but how complicated will it be if Wales is in Europe and England isn't? That is just impossible.) (Caernarfon)

You can see the issues in Northern Ireland and Ireland, cross border that the big problems with the additional forms now that one's in the EU, one's not in the EU, it's just a nightmare, isn't it? (Cardiff)

Concern was also voiced regarding **access to healthcare** in some parts of Wales where Welsh citizens currently had to attend hospitals in England. It was expected that new agreements would be needed between governments for these arrangements to continue.

You can't have a massive specialist heart hospital in the middle of rural mid Wales because there wouldn't be enough customers. (Aberystwyth)

Additionally, as a small number of participants pointed out, there was **no guarantee Wales's application to rejoin the EU** would be accepted, if it did go down this route.

It would be too much of a risk

A combination of various factors led some to conclude that independence would be **too much of a risk** for Wales to take on, particularly in relation to funding and sustaining the 'pain' involved to achieve the potential benefits in the longer term. Also, some believed there were **too many unknowns** regarding what Wales would look like to have confidence in the option. A few reiterated the perceived issues with **Brexit** which had been positioned in some quarters as significantly benefiting the UK prior to the referendum. Another risk highlighted in one case was that Wales might **lose younger people** looking for better opportunities in England or elsewhere if independence did not work.

But it's the thing about if you become independent you can have things the way you want them but the risk you run is of messing it up. . . . If Wales messes up, it hasn't got the UK to bail them out. (Newtown)

Risky. Dwi'n credu gwelais i ffigwr, pob blwyddyn bydde jyst shortfall o rywbeth fel 13 billion, beth oedd rhaid i ni ffeindio. Mae'n huge. (Risky. I believe I saw a figure, every year there would just be a shortfall of something like 13 billion, that we would have to find. It's huge.) (Rhondda)

In a couple of cases, participants emphasised their **lack of trust in politicians** to be able to deliver and run an independent Wales successfully.

It would likely cause further division between governments

Some anticipated that this option would likely prove **more divisive** than the current arrangements. To make their case, a few highlighted Scotland as an example of continued or even worsening poor relationships where a devolved nation has more power. It was also felt on occasion that Wales would still not be able to negotiate from an equal position with the rest of the UK because of England's size and dominance.

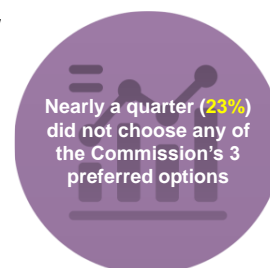
I think it would kind of ruin our relations with them. Look at England and Scotland and there's not really a relationship there. (Newtown)

Powers still limited if rejoining the EU

According to a small number of participants, rejoining the EU would still mean Wales having to follow laws and policies set out by the EU and therefore limitations in this respect.

8. Alternative options to the three discussed

From time to time, participants proposed alternative options for how Wales could be run in the future, for a number of reasons. A few argued that the Commission's three preferred options under discussion would all involve expense that could not be justified under current circumstances and that pursuing them would be **wasteful on resources**.



Until it was completely clear **how the different options for Wales would be funded**, it was difficult for a few participants to reach a conclusion on what would be best for Wales.

A proportion also maintained their position that they **did not have the confidence in politicians** to deliver such changes effectively.

Fewer powers for Wales / abolishing the Senedd

Some preferred the concept of a United Kingdom and **could not see why**

Wales needed to be different from other parts of the UK. These

participants argued that there was **no clear evidence of any benefit**

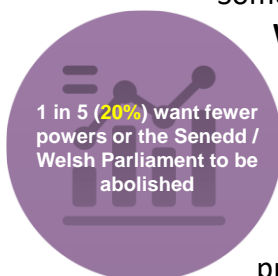
from having the additional tier of government in Wales and that

returning to the UK Government would be the least risky option. It

might also save money because it would remove the bureaucracy and

red tape associated with one layer of government, added some

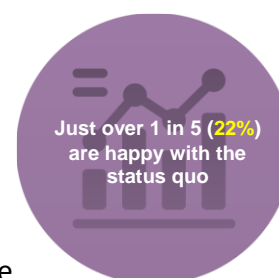
proponents of this alternative.



Some believed that **laws would be clearer** as there would be no differences like those some had flagged relating to pandemic arrangements. It would also remove the perceived difficult working relationship that was thought to exist between the two governments.

Maintaining the status quo


Maintaining the status quo was an alternative put forward on occasion. These participants believed that **Wales has enough powers as it is** and was either not doing too badly or should be doing better. Some also thought that Wales would struggle to manage with further powers, both financially and in terms of having politicians who could deliver them effectively. A few felt that the dust needed to settle after Brexit and the pandemic before considering alternative structures. There was also a concern that changing from the status quo could lead to **more division** between governments.



9. How to involve and engage more with the public

9.1 Increasing engagement

Where there was time, participants were briefly asked for any thoughts they had on how the Commission could continue to involve, and engage effectively with, the public regarding Wales's constitution. Suggestions included:



Fewer than half
(43%) feel they
have seen or heard
much about how
Wales is run in the
last 12 months

- Engage more with **schools** so young people can be more informed on the subject and ensure it is in the curriculum. Also, make sure they become more aware that this topic impacts their future

Well a good place to start, now that they've lowered the age to vote to 16, would be the school. . . . They need to feel invested in it as part of their future. (Pembroke Dock)

I think politics, is from a young people's perspective, it's sort of seen as a bunch of old people arguing in a building. . . . It's not really encouraging is it? (Newtown)

- Increase its own **profile** and **raise awareness** of the subject generally, including using social media more. This could involve sharing the animations about how Wales is run more widely, striving for more Wales based media coverage, and using social media more

Y graffeg ti 'di dangos i ni, faint oedd 'na? Rhyw 10, 20 eiliad mwya'. Mae hynna'n ddigon punchy i symleiddio mwy na dogfennau a thafleuni a stwff trwy'r post, dwi'n meddwl. (The graphics you showed us, how long were they? About 10, 20 seconds more. That's punchy enough to simplify more than documents and leaflets and stuff through the mail, I think.) (Caernarfon)

You know those videos we were shown at the first session where it explains what powers are devolved to Wales and it wasn't political, it was just saying what Wales can do It would be really good to go out as a national advert or something so the whole of the country – and it would just get people thinking, oh all right, I should speak to my Assembly member about that or my MP. I think that would be good. (Wrexham)

- Use celebrities, social media influencers and young people already involved in politics to gain online traction
- More face-to-face direct contact between (local) politicians and the public, so the latter feel like they are being genuinely listened to and understood
- Use as straightforward language as possible
- Ensure all information comes across as neutral and not linked to any political party of the government
- Show how contributions to the discussions will make a difference

A lot of people think they're wasting their time is what I'm saying because they think 'they're not going to listen to me anyway'. (Wrexham)

I believe we've been taught that our voice doesn't really make a difference, that's probably why a lot of people don't get involved. (Abergavenny)

9.2 Helping participants develop a more informed opinion

The understanding and thinking of the majority of participants had often **evolved** from their first involvement in the research process. They were largely focused on the intricacies of each option for how Wales could be run through these final discussions although there was still regular reference to **current government performance** and policies that continued to colour some participants' opinions on how much power Wales should have.

Some went on to explain that the opportunity to be presented with more information and to discuss the options had led to a **shift in thinking** as their understanding developed: 'having a conversation opened my mind to settling on the **federal structure**' summed up one participant.

As a result, some volunteered that their opinions had **changed or evolved** by the end of the discussion because they were now more informed on the subject or had sufficient understanding to be able differentiate between options. Examples included:

- Going from being **undecided** to thinking that **devolution strengthened and secured** sounded like a good mix of further power while remaining connected to the UK. Realising that it meant the UK Government would not be able to make changes to Wales's powers without Senedd agreement had swayed a few as well to change their position

It does sway me. . . . There's some good points made, just some really good points and it's the best of both really isn't it, you've got more power but you're still connected to the UK which for me is very important. (Wrexham)

- Shifting from **independence** to **devolution strengthened and secured** through finding out more about the funding challenges and other potential disadvantages

Trwy COVID, nes i droi mwy a mwy at annibyniaeth. Ond o ran dod i fan'na tro diwetha', maen nhw 'di neud fi feddwl, wel, ydi'n bosib neud o? Mae o 'di newid fy meddwl i ar ôl dod i fa'ma, i fod yn onest. (Through COVID, I turned more and more towards independence. But in terms of coming here last time, it's made me think, well, is it possible to do it? It's changed my mind after coming here, to be honest.) (Caernarfon)

- Moving from '**something else**' or **devolution strengthened and secured** to a **federal structure** after understanding how there would be clear lines of responsibility and accountability, more autonomy, and still some unity within the UK
- Having initially found a **federal structure** attractive but then, having discussed it further, deciding it was far too impractical and unrealistic

I think over time with the federalism thing, . . . I thought it was quite a nice idea because all the good things we all agreed didn't we, it's a nice list. But it is just totally impractical and expensive and it would never happen. (Newtown)

- Being swayed towards **independence** at the prospect of being able to apply to rejoin the EU
- Switching from **devolution strengthened and secured** to **independence** because it seemed in the longer term the most efficient and involved the fewest layers of bureaucracy (and therefore cheaper overall), as well as Wales having control of its own affairs.

Examples of **increased engagement** in the process included some of the final sections of the discussion becoming very vocal and lively as participants spoke up for their preferred option for how Wales is run. They were able to **call on information they had been given** as part of the deliberative process to make their cases and focused more on structure and less on government performance. These sometimes centred on how changes would be funded and why it was not in Wales's interests to continue as things are.

It was interesting to note that a **greater strength of feeling** tended to emerge when participants put the case for independence, versus how participants put the case for the other two options.

Also, a small number of those who expressed strong criticism of the Welsh Government and continued to raise policy issues throughout the research process acknowledged that they might see potential benefits of, for example, **strengthened devolution** but only if they saw **evidence of improved policies** and, in their eyes, more capable politicians in charge. Some therefore concluded that they still needed **more concrete information** on each of the options to be certain which if any would be best for Wales.

I think if we had the right people there, the right experts, we were going the right way and over the past few years, if they've brought things in that I thought were worthwhile, then I would think that was great. But I haven't seen that so I don't think that would be a benefit. I feel like I've got more faith in the UK Parliament. (Abergavenny)

Does 'na'm cweit digon o gig ar yr asgwrn i bobl neud barn bendant ar unrhyw un o'r rhain ar y funud. (There isn't quite enough meat on the bone for people to form a definite opinion on any of these at the moment.) (Caernarfon)

Appendix

Potential benefits and drawbacks for each option

The following points were used to prompt further debate among participants on the Commission's three preferred options.

Option 1: Devolution – strengthened and secured

Potential benefits

- It would stop the UK Parliament and Government from making changes to Wales' powers without the agreement of the Senedd / Welsh Parliament.
- It would provide a more stable foundation for how Wales is run.
- It would not require changes for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland which might not be supported by people there.
- It might result in better working relationships between governments by creating more structured working arrangements.
- It might allow the Senedd and Welsh Government to make more decisions that affect Wales, for example about policing, if strengthened devolution came with further policies devolved to Wales.

Potential drawbacks

- It would reduce the ability of the Westminster Parliament to have the final say over how all parts of the United Kingdom are run.
- It might result in worse working relationships between governments because there could be stalemate between the Welsh Government and the UK Government.
- It would mean that the UK Government could not fund some things in Wales which some Councils and people wanted but which the Welsh Government opposed, for example in transport schemes.
- It would lead to greater divergence between how Wales is run and how the rest of the UK is run, creating the potential for tensions between the nations of the UK.
- It does not go far enough.

Option 2: A federal structure

Potential benefits

- It would stop the UK Parliament and Government from making changes to Wales' powers without the agreement of the Senedd.
- It would clarify the limits and responsibilities of each level of government.
- It would provide a more stable and transparent foundation for how Wales is run and put the UK nations on an equal footing.
- It might result in better working relationships between governments by creating more structured working arrangements.
- It might allow the Senedd and Welsh Government to make more decisions that affect Wales, for example about policing.

Potential drawbacks

- It would be complicated, time consuming and expensive to set up.
- It would need major changes across the other nations of the UK which people in those nations might not want e.g. there would need to be a new, separate, parliament for England, or several regional parliaments across England or more powers for the Assembly in Northern Ireland.
- There is a risk of stalemate over important issues like how to address climate change between the Welsh Government and other UK Governments.
- It would mean that the UK Government could not fund some things in Wales which some Councils and people wanted but which the Welsh Government opposed.
- It might be politically impossible to deliver if, for example, people in England were opposed to a federal system of government for the UK.

Option 3: Independence

Potential benefits

- It would give Wales more flexibility to put in place policies specifically tailored to Wales' needs and to determine how public services are funded and delivered.
- It might lead to better relationships with the Government of the rest of the UK, because the two Governments would be negotiating from an equal position.
- There would be no confusion about which Government was responsible for what and the Welsh Government could not blame the UK for things which were not working.
- It would give Wales the opportunity to re-join the EU.
- Wales would be able to negotiate their own trade deals, and decide which international conventions and international bodies to join.
- It would give people in Wales long-term control over their future.

Potential drawbacks

- It would be complicated, time consuming and expensive to set up.
- It would involve major decisions on things like what currency to use and immigration policy.
- It would be difficult to raise enough money from taxes in Wales for public services – taxes might need to go up or services be cut.
- It would be difficult to put a national border in place between Wales and England without causing problems and expense for businesses and people in Wales – particularly if Wales re-joined the EU.
- Wales would still need to collaborate with England and the rest of the UK on cross-border matters such as transport, with the possibility of services, imports and exports breaking down if the countries cannot reach an agreement.
- Wales would be a small player on the global stage and would still be subject to significant pressures e.g. from global markets, not to put in place radical policies about matters such as employment rules, environmental standards, government subsidy for businesses and so on.

