

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

Stage 1 deliberative qualitative research findings

Prepared for
**The Independent Commission on
the Constitutional Future of Wales**

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beaufortresearch



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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. This report is concerned with qualitative findings that explored levels of understanding of how Wales is run currently and perceptions of how well Wales is run. We avoided 'constitution' and 'governance' in our communications and questions where possible as we sought to make the topic accessible to people. The research also began to explore how participants would like to see Wales run in the future. This latter topic will be covered in more detail in the second qualitative face-to-face stage of research.

The research consisted of eight face-to-face deliberative¹ sessions across Wales, with 127 participants taking part in total from a wide mix of backgrounds and with varying levels of understanding and familiarity with the topic. Fieldwork took place in January and February 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

Awareness of how Wales is run

- Many participants were not clear on how Wales is run – there was also some confusion on government roles and responsibilities.
- Despite participants often responding that they did not know a great deal about the topic, they sometimes knew more than they realised regarding which powers are devolved when given the opportunity to discuss them.
- Democratic engagement was not very strong, with participants feeling disconnected from politics and politicians. There was a widespread sense among those outside South East Wales that their region of Wales was neglected.

Views on how Wales is run

- There were mixed levels of satisfaction with how Wales is run, although some found this difficult to comment on, because of their limited understanding of the subject.
- Some participants' opinions were influenced by finding out, via the deliberative approach, how many powers Wales already has, for example deciding that Wales has enough and should be doing better, Wales seems to be doing all right, or concluding that Wales might not have enough funding to cover all its responsibilities.

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.

- Views on Wales's Labour government performance heavily influenced opinions on how Wales is run. It was difficult for participants to separate these perceptions from opinions on the structures in place to run Wales.
- Even so, the principle of Wales having its own powers was largely considered right, in that the Welsh Government would know Wales better, and could make decisions that benefitted the nation.
- Funding was a common information gap for participants and more understanding on this topic held the key to some participants' opinions on what next for Wales.
- Regardless of viewpoint, participants were sometimes unhappy with Wales's relationship with, and position in, the UK (e.g. believing Wales lacked a positive relationship with the UK Government; and thinking Wales was considered by the UK Government to be an insignificant part of the Union).

Looking ahead

- Participants highlighted a range of values that were important to them regarding how they wanted to see Wales run in the future. More prominent themes were a better communicated and understood system, a fair system that benefitted all regions of Wales, and one that is financially viable and efficient.
- Participants' thoughts on the future for Wales naturally varied given the broad mix of people present – so no dominant themes emerged.
- There was sometimes a desire to see Wales stand on its own two feet, and be responsible for making decisions that affect Wales with less UK Government influence.
- However, questions were regularly raised regarding how Wales could fund itself; and some thought certain decisions were better off being made in collaboration with other nations.
- Some liked or were curious about the concept of independence and how Wales could self-fund, but the feasibility from a financial perspective remained a strong doubt.
- A few participants remained unconvinced that having a Welsh Government delivered any value for the country and its people.

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 deliberative sessions across Wales to explore current understanding and views;
- Online 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 sessions to explore future options.

This document reports on the first qualitative stage of research carried out by Beaufort.

3. Research objectives and method

3.1 Research objectives

The following main objectives were set for this first qualitative stage:

- Explore levels of understanding of how Wales is run currently;
- Explore perceptions of how well Wales is thought to be run currently;
- Begin to explore how participants would like to see Wales run in the future.

This stage also involved giving participants summary information on Wales's constitutional arrangements to elicit more informed views as discussions progressed.

3.2 Research method and sample

A qualitative approach using **eight extended face-to-face discussions** across Wales was adopted to best satisfy the objectives. Each session lasted for 2.5 hours. This approach gave us:

- The ability to explore the diversity around the topics of interest in more depth than would be possible via a quantitative approach;
- The opportunity, through deliberative means, to give participants summary information on how Wales is run, to help inform their thinking on the subject;
- The chance for participants to debate and build on each other's views;
- The opportunity to explore with participants their initial suggestions for how Wales could be run;
- A platform for Commissioners to introduce to participants the Commission's work, stress its importance, and to provide context.

Using a screening questionnaire finalised with the client, we recruited participants via Beaufort's network of qualitative recruiters in Wales. This recruitment approach ('free-finding' participants rather than a 'self-selecting' method) allowed us to find people who would not normally engage or give their views on topics such as this. As a qualitative study, it was not intended to be representative, but to explore people's views and beliefs, using a deliberative approach². (The quantitative stage of the project will provide representative findings from a robust sample of Welsh adults.) The sample was therefore designed to ensure a mix of gender, age, socio-economic grouping and life-stage across the discussions. There was also a mix across the eight sessions 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

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.

speakers, minority ethnic participants, disabled participants and LGBTQ+ participants. In total, 127 participants attended across the eight sessions. Fieldwork took place 23 January to 9 February 2023.

3.3 Discussion guide, analysis, and reporting

In consultation with the client, Beaufort drafted a topic guide to use in the discussions. We began by exploring spontaneous awareness and understanding of how Wales is run, and then began to give participants short pieces of information on how Wales is governed currently. This included providing them with case studies of laws that have been made in Wales and an example of a UK Government decision that affected Wales. Summary information was also provided on how Wales is funded.

Having obtained reactions to this information and further discussion on how Wales is run, we ended by asking participants what was important to them about how Wales is run. It should be noted that participants were keen to talk about what was important to them in their day-to-day lives and therefore conversations often focused on policy areas such as health and transport and how these impacted on their lives. These topics were generally more top of mind and salient than constitutional issues, especially where participants had a limited understanding of how Wales is run. The issues surrounding Wales's constitution and governance are difficult for participants to talk about, unless an individual is politically engaged, which many were not.

Facilitators steered participants back to the theme of governance when participants became overly focused on policy areas. Even so, it was apparent that participants' views on 'how well Wales is run' were often influenced by perceptions of how well the Labour government in power was performing generally, as well as by views on how it was performing on key policy areas such as health and education.

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. These comments should not be interpreted as defining the views of all. Instead, they give insight into individual views on the points identified.

4. Awareness of how Wales is currently run

This chapter explores participants' awareness and understanding of how Wales is run. It should be remembered that these findings are based on a qualitative sample which was intended to have a mix of awareness and understanding.

Key take-outs

- Many participants were not clear on how Wales is run – there was also some confusion on government roles and responsibilities.
- Despite participants often responding that they did not know a great deal about the topic, they sometimes knew more than they realised regarding which powers are devolved.
- Democratic engagement was not very strong, with participants feeling disconnected from politics and politicians. There was a widespread sense among those outside South East Wales that their region of Wales was neglected.

4.1 Overall levels of awareness of how Wales is run and democratic engagement

Widespread lack of awareness and understanding

Across the events, many participants stated that it was **not very clear** to them how Wales is run. It was often deemed confusing, and some admitted that it was not something they took much interest in. The point was also made that how Wales is run and Welsh politics were not topics they heard much about. Younger participants reported that the subjects were not covered at **school**, with one young participant recalling that 'even coming from a Welsh speaking school, there's like nothing on Welsh politics' that was covered.

Kind of all of it is new to me, I guess. I didn't realise how much I didn't know. Because I don't really think about any of this. So I don't really pay attention to the news. Now I'm 18 and I should probably know this stuff. (Aberystwyth)

Media coverage deemed minimal

More broadly, participants often remarked that they did not encounter a great deal of **media** coverage of the political landscape in Wales, even though some would like to see more.

I love 'Politics Live', I love all the politics shows, [but] you don't hear about Wales on them. I know more probably about what's going on in the UK Government compared to Welsh Government because the media doesn't show it the same. I know more about what's going on in Scotland than I do in Wales. (Wrexham)

'Sgen i'm lot o ddiddordeb, yn enwedig yn Llundain a'r politicians. Ond 'swn i yn licio gwybod mwy am sut mae fy ngwlad i fy hun yn cael ei redeg. Ond heblaw be dach chi'n gweld ar y newyddion neu ddarllen yn y papurau, a dach chi'm bob amser yn deall be 'di hynny chwaith, sut mae o'n gweithio. (I don't have much interest, especially with London and the politicians. But I would like to know more about how

my own country is run. But apart from what you see on the news or read in the papers, you don't always understand what that is, how it works.) (Caernarfon)

Giving an example, a participant in West Wales remarked that regional media like the Western Telegraph or Wales Online seemed to focus on 'sensationalist' content rather than anything with a political perspective. A couple of participants near the border with England commented that they could not get BBC Wales on TV. Adding to the debate, a participant in the Valleys strongly believed that although there might be some local journalism available online, the content lacked quality and important stories were not covered effectively. Also, according to a few in Powys, Welsh media such as BBC Wales did not adequately cover their home region of Mid Wales. 'Everything happens in South Wales', they thought.

Pandemic coverage raised profile of powers and Welsh politics

The perceived notable exception to the usual lack of media coverage of Wales and the Welsh Government had been during the **coronavirus pandemic**. The profile of the Welsh Government, the First Minister and his responsibilities had risen for some participants during this period, given the frequent addresses to the population, the importance of the issue, and widespread media coverage. One younger participant, who reported not knowing much about how Wales is run, explained how she had become aware of who the First Minister was during the pandemic because of media coverage.

Dwi'n meddwl bod Drakeford 'di neud yn dda drwy COVID. . . A dwi'n meddwl bod hynna'n dangos bod ganddyn nhw rywfaint o syniad yn Gymru a'r Alban be i neud. Ac oedd Drakeford yn deud, 'Dach chi'n agor i fyny. Dwi ddim'. . . A dyna be sy'n dda am devolution 'de. Dyna be 'di rheswm devolution. (I think Drakeford has done well during COVID. . . And I think that shows that they have some idea in Wales and Scotland what to do. And Drakeford said, 'You're opening up. I'm not'. . . And that's what's good about devolution. That's the reason for devolution.) (Caernarfon)

Seeing Wales do things slightly differently during the pandemic had also raised awareness of differences between nations for another younger participant who said she knew very little about the subject. It had prompted her to begin to look into the topic of independence and come to the conclusion that Wales probably did not have enough powers because of the influence of the UK Government. However, this spike in media coverage of how Wales is run was thought by some to have only lasted as long as the pandemic was being covered.

Kind of, during COVID it was clear to see that Mark Drakeford didn't completely agree with everything Boris Johnson was doing, and you could see there was a bit of difference there and it kind of confused me. . . They wanted to do one thing one way and we wanted to go at it a completely different way, and that's when I started getting into independence and stuff. (Wrexham)

Low levels of democratic engagement

From a contextual point of view, **democratic engagement** among participants appeared limited. They regularly referred to feeling **disconnected** from politics and politicians, for example only hearing from them at election time, trust issues, and an impression of poor behaviour from politicians. This apathy extended to UK politics as well.

You've got people in charge of Wales in the Senedd who are just, I don't know, seem to be oblivious to the working man. You can go round Cardiff and you can tell, over the last couple of years, the cuts in services as well. (Cardiff)

We only see the AM that represents the constituency. So notionally we have, I think, a Lib Dem and Plaid and a Labour AM, for a wider area for us, but I have no idea who. (Newtown)

Originally, I think I trusted and believed in what politicians and media et cetera were saying, and I'm afraid I've lost that trust now. I believe that policies are put there if there's an election coming up, they promise you everything, and then that goes by and nothing seems to change, same old, same old. (Abergavenny)

Those in North, Mid and West Wales often felt that their regions were **neglected** and did not get the same attention or investment as Cardiff and South East Wales. A lack of health facilities and poor transport infrastructure were sometimes cited as examples of why participants felt their region was neglected.

I know we are not as populated an area as North and South Wales, but there are still people here. In Newtown, there's 20,000 people. We've got other towns like Welshpool, and there is still a decent amount of people living there. So I don't understand why we don't get enough funding [for health]. (Newtown)

However, this perspective on health was challenged by one participant who felt that it was not realistic to expect rural areas like Mid Wales to be able to cater for all serious health conditions. They thought it was understandable that patients would need to travel for specialist treatment, as they had.

Additionally, a couple of participants felt the voting system in Wales was too complicated and deterred people from engaging with the Senedd.

I think the voting system is just unnecessarily complicated...It's not fully proportional representation. The minority parties don't get a look in. I think in a true democracy, even if you totally disagree with a party, if they get a percentage of the vote, they should get a seat in that system. It's very hard to understand, I think. So, you're not going to get people engaging with it. What they don't understand. (Aberystwyth)

4.2 Awareness of devolved powers

When reading this section, it should be remembered that many participants did not know or were unsure what powers were devolved to Wales. There were also many instances where participants' views varied on whether a power was (likely to be) devolved.

Some knew more than they realised about devolved powers

As a simple starting point to explore this topic further, participants were given 15 areas of government responsibility and asked to allot them to either the Welsh or UK Government.

Despite participants often stating that they did not know a great deal about how Wales is run, they **sometimes knew more than they realised**, when asked to identify which powers were devolved and given time to think about the subject in more depth. They were able to work out where a particular responsibility lay through discussion among themselves (for example having heard of the Courts of England and Wales regarding justice and being aware of business support services from the Welsh Government). Without prompting, health and education were regularly identified as devolved powers. Language and culture, housing, and social services were also expected by some to be devolved.

Education [is devolved], in a sense for Wales, because obviously we have different subjects [in the curriculum] than England and Scotland. (Cardiff)

On the whole, and working in groups, participants also knew or assumed that the **UK Government** is responsible for defence, justice, pensions, and benefits.

There were a few surprises for participants, however. For example, **broadcasting** was regularly expected to be devolved. Participants therefore tended to be **surprised** that it was not. Some thought that it should be, as they felt it was important that Wales should ensure its people could receive tailored and accurate news about issues that affected the nation. A few assumed this was part of the reason they did not see or hear much to do with the Welsh Government in the media.

Os 'di hynna yn rheolaeth llywodraeth Prydain, does ganddyn nhw ddim syniad am yr iaith Cymraeg a'r pwysigrwydd i'r cymunedau. (If that is in the control of the British Government, they have no idea about the Welsh language and its importance to the communities.) (Caernarfon)

Similarly, **policing** was often thought to be devolved given that there are separate police forces and some awareness that council tax contributes towards funding the police. For a few participants, policing would be better off devolved so that it could be more tailored to the needs of Wales. Others, however, could not see any benefits to devolving it.

A handful of participants believed that the **UK Government could still influence** decisions made in Wales using devolved powers. (There had been recent media coverage of the UK Government's decision to block the implementation of the Scottish Gender Recognition Reform Bill.)

Through COVID it did show that we did have quite a lot of say, which I didn't realise... but it was quite clear you still had to go to UK Government to kind of get the final sign off on things. (Aberystwyth)

The UK Government gets the final say in my eyes, on everything. Because even if Wales say 'yes, we want to do this', if they're not given the budget for it they can't do it. (Wrexham)

Local councils were associated with council tax, education, environment, fire and rescue services, housing, leisure centres, parking fines, planning, police, roads, social services, speed limits, street cleaning, and waste and recycling. However, some participants were uncertain what responsibilities existed at local government level or else did not know. A few added that they were unsure what was the **difference in powers between local councils and the Welsh Government** as there seemed to be overlap in what they did.

[The Welsh Government] supposedly run the country, but I don't know. I think the local council are doing the same job as the Welsh Government do. (Cardiff)

On a few occasions, participants responded that having **two governments able to make decisions in Wales** meant it was not very clear which powers were devolved and which were not. An example was given of the Welsh Government deciding not to go ahead with the M4 relief road at Newport but apparently the UK Government had stated that they could still fund it.

I'm sure a lot of these things have got grey areas where part of it is Westminster and part of it is [Welsh Government], like transport for instance, motorways are from Westminster, dual carriageways have been mostly local government issues normally. (Abergavenny)

4.3 Awareness of how Wales is funded

Awareness limited of how Wales is funded

Participants frequently had no idea how Wales is funded but some assumed or knew that Wales received much of its money **from the UK Government**. Additionally, a few added spontaneously that they did not think the Welsh Government had much control over how much it has to spend on the country. In isolated cases, participants referred to Wales receiving 80% of its funding from Westminster and to Wales's ability to raise taxes, for example having read about a recent Plaid Cymru policy on the topic.

[The UK Government] are coming up with the pie, they control the pie. (Newtown)

I was just reading about it a little while ago, that Plaid Cymru wants to raise taxes depending on which income strand you are, and put all the money that they're going to raise towards funding the NHS better. Better salaries, better investment. (Pembroke Dock)

There were also infrequent instances where participants assumed that the UK Government influenced the Welsh Government's decision-making on **how to spend** its budget. Views on how Wales is funded are discussed further in section 5.6.

5. Views on how well Wales is currently run

In this chapter, we delve into participants' opinions on how well they think Wales is run, covering reasons for being fairly satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and dissatisfied. The section also focuses on how Wales is funded and participants' views on Wales's relationship with the UK.

Key take-outs

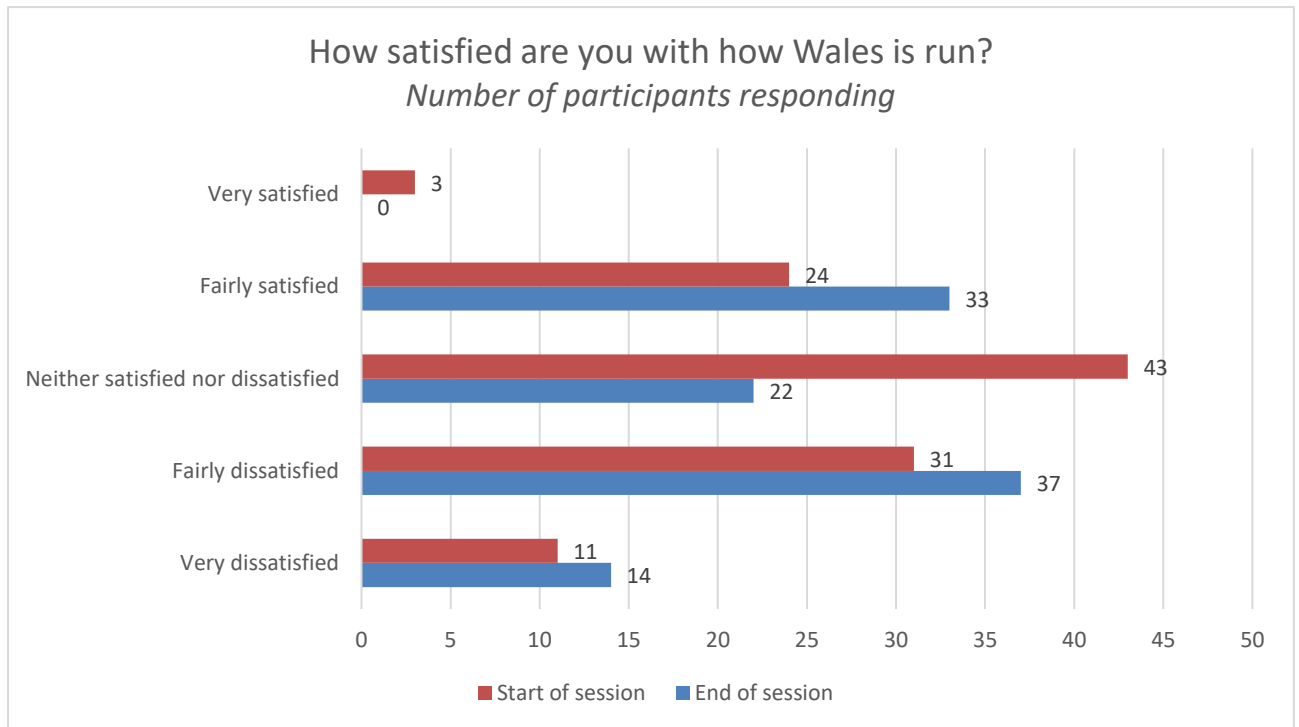
- There were mixed levels of satisfaction with how Wales is run, although some found this difficult to comment on, because of their limited understanding of the subject.
- Some participants' opinions were influenced by finding out how many powers Wales already has (e.g. concluding Wales has enough and should be doing better).
- Views on Wales's Labour government performance heavily influenced opinions on how Wales is run.
- Even so, the principle of Wales having its own powers was largely considered right.
- Funding was a common information gap and held the key to some participants' opinions on what next for Wales.
- Regardless of viewpoint, participants were sometimes unhappy with Wales's relationship with / position in UK.

5.1 Overview

Before the discussions started, and then at the end of the sessions, participants were encouraged to respond to the polling question, 'How satisfied are you with how Wales is run at the moment?'. The figures overleaf should not be interpreted as statistically robust (the sample size was small and the question was asked as part of a qualitative exercise) but indicate for context where the weight of opinion lay.

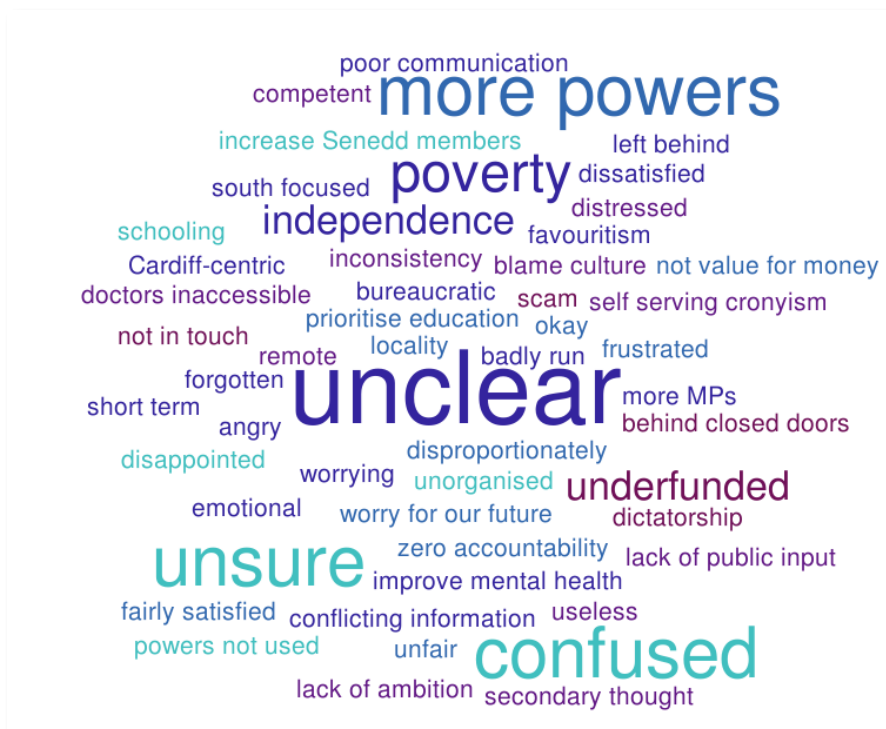
As discussed in the report introduction, and in more detail below, many participants were more focused on **issues with policy areas such as health and transport and government performance** (more so when answering the question at the start of the discussion) than on the constitution or structure of how Wales is run. This was despite efforts to encourage participants to base their responses on views on the structure in place.

Even so, the figures do highlight how, as participants were given more information on the subject, opinions shifted for some. The exercise shows, for example, that providing more information helped some to form more of an opinion by the end of the discussions, having been neither satisfied nor dissatisfied at the start.



Bases: Start vote 112, End vote 106

Adding a further indication of views, the word cloud below illustrates examples of words and phrases participants noted down during the sessions to sum up how they felt about how Wales is run. It reflects the lack of understanding of the current constitutional structure for some, and also dissatisfaction with Labour government performance in certain policy areas.



It was clearly difficult for participants to identify positive aspects of how Wales is run when faced with a range of **pressing issues affecting their day to day lives** for which governments at a UK and Wales level were felt to be at fault. Dissatisfaction or problems with areas such as health, education, housing, employment, and transport were therefore colouring some participants' views of how satisfied they were with the structures in place to run Wales.

5.2 Reasons for being fairly satisfied with how Wales is run

Wales seemed to have enough powers already

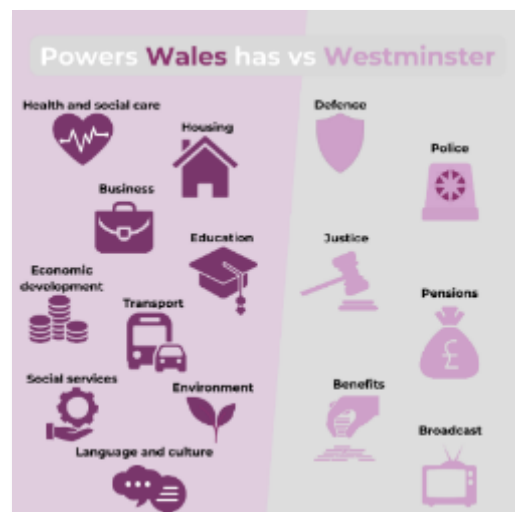
A prevalent theme to emerge was that participants were often **surprised** to learn how many powers Wales already has. On being given this information and discussing it, they frequently concluded that the current **system looked adequate**. Wales had enough powers and the balance looked about right - but many felt **the Welsh Government should be performing better**.

I guess it surprised me how much power Wales actually has. . . If that's the case, then they should be able to do better, if all those powers are in place. (Cardiff)

I like it, I'm surprised we've got that many in Wales, I really am, I thought it would have been the other way around. (Wrexham)

I didn't even realise Wales could like make their own laws. . . But if we have all these, why are things the way they are? (Rhondda)

To unhook all those things on the right [of the powers infographic], I mean to unhook state pensions would be a massive complication. (Newtown)



The principle of devolved powers mainly seen as a good thing

The deliberative approach found that after more considered discussion, supported with case study examples³, and despite the prevalent negativity voiced over government performance, the **principle** of Wales having its own powers was largely considered a **good thing** by participants.

Some participants expected that having devolved powers would mean Wales could **make decisions more quickly** on issues that affect the country that the government deems are important (e.g. introducing restrictions on smoking). Also, said some, the Welsh Government should know its people and the **nation's needs** better than the UK Government, resulting in a more 'tailored' approach to tackling issues.

³ Participants were shown brief summaries of changes made in Wales regarding ending physical punishment of children, free prescriptions, and the default 20mph speed limit as examples of devolved decision-making.

The Welsh Government seem to focus on the right things to fund and the right things to talk about. It always seems like the UK Government is pouring money into the politicians' pockets instead of the communities. (Wrexham)

I still think that some incredible good has come of it. Scotland and Wales have often been way ahead of England when it comes to innovation. . . . Even if it's something as simple as charging for polythene bags. It makes you feel good about the country when they think of something ahead of the curve. (Aberystwyth)

I think they have a better understanding of Welsh issues, the Welsh people. . . . A clearer understanding of traditions, or because it is quite rural for the most part, ruralised, again they better understand what is or isn't appropriate in different places. (Pembroke Dock)

The Welsh Government's performance during the coronavirus **pandemic** was also a source of positivity about the system for some participants (although others disagreed). The Welsh Government seemed to do a better job than the UK Government concluded some.

Other factors that contributed to satisfaction were mostly individually voiced

Further, **isolated** examples for being relatively more satisfied are outlined below:

- Feeling that things seemed to be broadly working in Wales and being unaware of any need to reconsider the situation (voiced by a couple of participants who acknowledged they did not know a great deal about how Wales);
- Free prescriptions;
- Good employment opportunities in Wales;
- HE learners felt they were better funded than learners in some other home nations;
- Political debates in Wales seemed more professional and calmer, and hearing less political scandal than in Westminster;
- Since devolution, the creative sector was thought to have flourished in Wales, with many films and TV programmes now being made in the country;
- The Welsh Government had taken some 'progressive' steps in devolved areas, leading other nations;
- The Welsh Government seemed more open to negotiation on public sector pay which was current at the time of the research;
- The voice of Welsh farmers would disappear if agriculture decisions affecting Wales are made at Westminster.

I know in terms of like students were treated better because I study in England but I'm under Student Finance Wales. . . . It's like a different system where like everyone was surprised about how much more funding I got for my studies compared to like, some of my friends can't even afford their rent. (Wrexham)

We're farmers, they're driving the policies forward. Whether you agree with them or not, I think it would be lost if we were just left as the UK, we would be lost. There's a lot more focus and emphasis on Wales. (Newtown)

These points of view, combined with the opinion that Wales would not be able to self-fund as an independent nation (see 5.6), led some participants to maintain that the way Wales is run currently is **about right**.

Having **local government** powers was occasionally thought to make services and decisions more accessible for those areas local councils were responsible for, such as housing. One participant had liked how their local council had asked residents to try allocating money for different departments they were responsible for. It helped the resident understand the authority's responsibilities, and how difficult it was to decide how the money should be allocated. They and others felt it would be useful to see something similar for the Welsh Government.

5.3 Reasons for being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with how Wales is run

Widespread lack of sufficient knowledge on the subject

Some who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with how Wales is run stated that they **did not know enough** to comment, when focusing on the structures in place. A small number admitted they were simply not interested enough to want to find out more about the subject. This remained the case for some even at the end of the discussions. The lack of understanding added to a sense of **disconnection** with politics and democracy.

Fi ddim yn deall digon amdano fe, so ddim yn gallu cael shwt gymaint o opinion arno, ti'n gwybod. Ni'm 'di cael ein dysgu llawer yn ysgol am ddim byd i neud 'da'r actual Llywodraeth. (I don't understand enough about it, so I can't get much of an opinion on it, you know? We haven't been taught much at school about anything to do with the actual Government.) (Aberystwyth)

A further reason occasionally given for being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied was that on the one hand, it was deemed good for Wales that it had certain powers but on the other hand, the Welsh Government was not doing a very good job; and there seemed to be too much investment in Cardiff versus other parts of Wales.

It's not clear, is it? I think that's the point, it isn't clear, nothing is particularly well disseminated, and nothing is brought to us here at the table. I don't feel part of it, I think that's the important thing, I don't feel part of the system or asked for any particular opinion. (Pembroke Dock)

We probably access most of our services from England, whether it be hospitals or this, that and the other. So yeah, it does feel, as others are saying, disconnected really. We don't feel part of that political decision making, as such. (Newtown)

5.4 Reasons for being dissatisfied with how Wales is run

Government performance a key driver for dissatisfaction

In the main, participants who were **dissatisfied** with how Wales is run often explained their position by referring to perceived issues they attributed to the **Welsh Government's performance**. It proved difficult, therefore, for participants to separate their views on party politics and performance from views on constitution structure itself. There were references to: perceived issues with the NHS in Wales and education; perceived lack of investment in the Welsh regions and no obvious signs that devolution was benefitting areas like North Wales, Pembrokeshire or Mid Wales; seeing families struggle with the cost of living and their lack of resilience; 'wasting money' on things like Cardiff Airport, cycle lanes in Cardiff, and Gilestone Farm; the new 20mph speed limit; whether or not to go ahead with the M4 relief road in South East Wales; the handling of the pandemic; shelving plans for the Circuit of Wales; and increasing the number of Members of the Senedd. A small number of participants did add that the situation with the health service in England was thought to be just as bad as they felt it was in Wales.

People who run it [are the issue]. I think they've got more than enough tools to be able to do the job. I think this country is lacking compared to England and Scotland. (Abergavenny)

For a very small number of participants, the dissatisfaction voiced occasionally extended to **local government's** role and performance. The comment was made that it was important to have it in place as it should have a better understanding of a region's needs, but that this was not necessarily the case.

Dissatisfaction with the structure was not so prominent

Consequently, dissatisfaction with the structures in place to run Wales tended to be at a **lower level** than performance concerns. In some cases, participants were dissatisfied as they believed it was difficult for politicians in Wales to make a difference because of **limited powers** and the **influence of the UK Government**, including over **funding**. Seeing the number of devolved areas, it looked to a few that Wales had responsibility for areas it might not be able to manage effectively and meant the UK Government could absolve itself of responsibility. Having a UK and Welsh Government was thought to **confuse** and complicate matters, felt some, and slow decision-making down.

Welsh politicians, they should be doing more to help. . . But they can't because they have to answer to England, to parliament. So it's a catch 22. (Cardiff)

Other structural factors that contributed to dissatisfaction were mostly individually voiced

Further, **isolated** reasons for being dissatisfied with the structure are outlined below:

- A federal approach to the structure in the UK would be more beneficial to each nation as their governments knew their people best;
- Devolved powers only added another level of cost and layer of bureaucracy, without delivering any value. Illustrating this view, a participant explained how, in their work in the NHS, the legal risk team spent a lot of its time 'copying and pasting' UK regulations

and legislations as Wales was thought to normally follow England, thus creating duplicate work;

- Wales always seemed to be on the back foot because of the current structure, lacked ambition and was not acting to engage with its population;
- Wales had never voted for a Conservative government and yet the country had been significantly influenced by them over many years.

Which is Westminster and which is the Welsh Government? I think for me, the pandemic showed me you can't have both. It's got to be either fully devolved or Westminster. Because you can't have two rules. It's confusing. (Aberystwyth)

I don't really see much evidence of ambition and aspiration, and even down to encouraging young people to engage and develop a strong interest in what's happening around them and understanding politics and decisions that are being made, personally I just see a lack of engagement. (Newtown)

Dwi'n gweld bod ni'n aros yn stond hefyd, bod ni ddim yn trio cael mwy o bwerau 'di cael eu datganoli. Achos pethau pointless dan ni actually yn rheoli ar hyn o bryd yn hytrach na phethau sydd yn mynd i neud gwahaniaeth. (I see that we're also standing still, that we're not trying to get more devolved powers. Because it's pointless things that we're actually in control of at the moment rather than things that are going to make a difference.) (Caernarfon)

A system that compromises accountability

A reasonably common theme to emerge was that the current system meant the Welsh Government was quick to **blame the UK Government** for issues experienced in Wales. It seemed easy to say Wales would do things better if it had more funding, thought some.

There does seem to be, I think, a bit of a blame culture from the Welsh Government. That they do say, well, if Westminster had given us this, rather than trying to solve the problem . . . and Mark Drakeford he could have put tax up and chose not to. (Aberystwyth)

If you listen to Mark Drakeford and he's talking about something, it's almost like he puts the blame on the UK Government. He'll very often say 'I'd like to do this, but my hands are tied' . . . All politicians at the moment do my nut in. (Cardiff)

Devolved powers could mean being different for the sake of it

Some participants gained the impression that Wales sometimes introduced policies or laws different to other parts of the UK just to be different and even 'awkward'. Linked to this point, some living **near the border** with England could not see the point of having different laws within a very short distance of each other. Experiences with the pandemic were regularly raised as an example for holding this overall opinion.

5.5 An example where Wales does not have control

To further widen participants' understanding and encourage more considered thought, participants were shown an example of where the Welsh Government does not have power but wanted it. It concerned the wish to maintain the £20 Universal Credit uplift implemented temporarily during the pandemic.

It may not be fair but how would it be funded?

A regular response to this example was to question how preserving the £20 increase **would have been funded**. If Wales was not funding it, then it was logical that Wales could not then implement a different change in Wales, argued some. Some were glad that the UK Government had control over benefits as they did not think Wales would be able to fund them as a devolved power. A small number also commented that benefits in the UK were quite generous versus the amounts earned by those on low wages. Furthermore, the decision had gone through a democratic process, added a few.

Sut oeddan nhw'n mynd i dalu amdano fo? Mae 'na rywbeth arall yn mynd i ddiiodda. (How were they going to pay for it? Something else is going to suffer.) (Caernarfon)

For some, Wales's stance on the issue sounded more to do with **political point scoring** because they knew the uplift would not be made permanent. Would Wales have taken the same position if it was responsible for benefits in Wales and would it mean the money having to come from other public services, wondered a handful of participants?

However, the argument was also made that it **did not seem fair** that despite what sounded like a majority view in Wales being against stopping the extra £20, Wales was unable to do anything about it, through lack of representation at a UK level. If Wales could afford to take such steps, it should be able to, decided a few participants. One participant stated that seeing this case study challenged their original view that Wales had sufficient devolved powers already and that it was a reasonably satisfactory system. Developing this point, another individual concluded that the example demonstrated how minority voices would never be heard while such decisions were made at a UK Government level because of the lack of representation for Wales at Westminster. Wales would need more power to reduce this perceived inequality. It was also suspected by this participant that MPs would have voted along party lines rather than what might have been best for people on Universal Credit in Wales.

Wel, mae o'n dod yn ôl i lawr i costau byw y ddwy wlad, dynamig y ddwy wlad yn wahanol. So iddyn nhw neud y penderfyniad yna drosom ni, dwi'm yn licio. Mae hwanna 'di bod yn life saver i lot o bobl, yn enwedig dros y pandemig. Ag iddyn nhw jyst dismissio fo fel, 'Does 'na neb yn cael o', 'di o'm yn iawn fod Cymru ddim yn cael rhyw fath o say yno fo. (Well, it comes back to the cost of living of the two countries, the dynamic of the two countries is different. So for them to make that decision for us, I don't like it. That's been a life saver for a lot of people, especially during the pandemic. And for them to just dismiss it like, 'Nobody gets it', it's not right that Wales doesn't get some kind of say in that.) (Caernarfon)

A small number recalled the UK Prime Minister saying he could not keep funding the pandemic furlough for Wales when the lockdown lasted longer in Wales; but when England went back into lockdown furlough payments were offered again. These participants also felt the rise in National Insurance would have impacted more people in Wales because there were more people on low incomes. They therefore felt Wales needed more of a say on taxes and benefits. The UK Government was 'out of touch', these participants concluded, and did not understand Wales.

5.6 Views on how Wales is funded

During the discussions, participants were provided with an outline of how Wales is funded to help them form an opinion on the subject. Views were mixed on how suitable the current arrangement was deemed to be.

The current system is probably adequate

Those who felt the current system was probably reasonable gave a number of reasons for this stance, none of which was a dominant theme:

- Hearing that Wales was well funded compared with other nations;
- It seemed a 'sensible' arrangement for Wales, given its population size;
- It seemed unfeasible for Wales to self-fund and manage fiscal powers like pensions and benefits, plus it did not have enough tax payers;
- There was unlikely to be a better way of calculating funding for Wales.

I think that we get given more than we actually give back, so I think we're quite lucky in a way. (Abergavenny)

'San ni methu neud o. Budd-daliadau, anghofia fo. Mae o'n costio gymaint i'r wlad. A phensiynau 'fyd. (We couldn't do it. Benefits, forget it. It costs the country so much. And pensions, too.) (Caernarfon)

I just read in the paper probably that the money that Wales get is supposed to be 20% more than what English ones get. I don't know how true that is but apparently that's the same for Scotland as well. (Wrexham)

The current system does not seem very fair

Those unhappy with how Wales is funded also put forward a number of reasons for their point of view. The more dominant theme was Wales not being in control, with the country **depending on what the UK Government decides to give it**. A couple of participants likened it to Wales being given 'pocket money' to spend by someone else in control.

We're totally dependent on how much we get though, and that's variable, depending on decisions the government makes. . . I don't think it's very fit [for purpose] because then it's very easy for the UK Government to go back, 'That's not our fault, that's the Welsh Government given a budget and how they use it is up to them' and in that same conversation they don't explain that the budget is lower because they made the decision to give less. (Pembroke Dock)

A less prevalent theme was that Wales did not receive enough funding from the UK Government to be able to tackle perceived issues with health and education because the Welsh Government was having to **spread its funding too thinly** across its responsibilities.

There is not enough money in Wales, because I don't actually blame the NHS at all, I just think there's not enough money as a whole towards even getting mental health support or anything like that at all. (Cardiff)

Further, **isolated** reasons given by small numbers of participants for a perceived lack of fairness are given below:

- Having different political parties in the Senedd and Westminster negatively impacted on funding received in Wales – it was not deemed in the Conservative Government's interests to fund Labour's policies in Wales;
- The Barnett Formula was considered to be out of date. Concerns were also expressed by a small number of participants regarding what would replace funding previously provided by the European Union;
- The Crown Estate was reserved to Westminster, while in Scotland it had been devolved;
- The funding model was believed to be based on 'UK averages' and therefore false equivalence. Perceived differences in Wales, for example with more poverty and more of the population working in the public sector for whom pay was reportedly depressed by the current UK Government, meant an unfair outcome for Wales in this individual's eyes;
- Wales's funding should be based on needs rather than calculations that included population size, given its levels of rurality.

In a couple of cases, participants thought **Scotland** was faring better than Wales as a devolved nation. It was thought to receive more funding, make more use of its tax-raising powers, have more power and to have 'more direction'.

Also from a funding perspective, it was not necessarily clear, said a small number of participants, **how funding moved** from the UK Government to the Welsh Government and on to local councils. Neither was it known how budgets for each local council in Wales are allotted.

Understanding funding remained a key information gap

Discussions on funding revealed a **critical information gap** that often prevented participants from forming a clearer view on what they felt the future should be for how Wales is run. They wanted to know:

- How does Wales's block grant value compare with the amount of tax Wales pays out?
- How would Wales fare financially on its own, including with autonomy over natural resources and renewable energy?

If Wales did pay out more than it received each year in the block grant, some concluded that they would want to see Wales have more control over its budget value.

It'd be interesting to find out how much Wales actually puts in and what it gets out, for me. So, how much tax we pay in Wales and how does that look as an 80% back? . . . To see if maybe it shouldn't be that way and we should just keep our own and distribute it, rather than giving it out to get back in. (Cardiff)

5.7 Wales's relationship with the UK

Widespread dissatisfaction with current relationship

Regardless of viewpoint, participants often expressed dissatisfaction with Wales's relationship with and position in the UK. Some were concerned by what they believed was a **fractured and dysfunctional relationship** between Wales and Westminster. References were made to hearing about a UK Prime Minister reportedly not making any effort to engage with the First Minister. Additionally, Wales was thought by some to be perceived as **fairly insignificant** by the UK Government, the 'poor relation', 'bottom of the pile' and one that was 'trampled on most of the time'. According to some, more UK Government attention was directed towards Scotland than Wales because its natural resources and because of a desire to prevent a move towards independence for the country.

Dwi'm yn meddwl bod 'na lawer o drafodaeth, nag oes. Achos 'naeth Drakeford gwyno, doedd o'm 'di clywed gan un prime minister. 'Sach chdi'n meddwl 'sa hi 'di ffonio rownd pawb. Na, dim byd. (I don't think there's a lot of discussion, is there? Because Drakeford complained that he didn't hear from one Prime Minister. But you'd think she would've rung everyone. No, nothing.) (Caernarfon)

Os na bod 'da ti'r Llywodraeth Lafur yn San Steffan, ti'n mynd i gael tensiwn. (If you don't have a Labour Government in Westminster, you're going to have tension.) (Aberystwyth)

Wales did not help the relationship, added some participants, by **trying to be different**, when working together (for example during the pandemic) would have made more sense.

Some felt that Wales was **stronger as part of the UK** and liked being part of the Union. This included a few who wanted Wales to have more power but did not think it could survive on its own, as well as one or two who could not see a need for the Welsh Government. The argument was also made by some that Wales had the **same needs** as other UK nations. A further point of view voiced which contributed to wanting to remain in the UK was that the Welsh Government did not appear to be doing a very good job.

I think it's important that we do remain as a United Kingdom, I don't agree with separating. I wouldn't like Scotland to go on their own either, I think we're a United Kingdom and that's how we should stay. . . I think for Wales, I think we're too small a nation, and I think we'd really struggle without their support. (Wrexham)

Debating this perspective, one or two participants countered that this point of view was what people in Wales had been **conditioned to thinking**. They argued that there had always been a UK Government (in modern times) and the issues in Wales could be down to Wales receiving insufficient funding from the UK Government, rather than the Welsh Government blaming the UK Government through convenience.

Furthermore, some thought that Wales has **different needs**. The country was believed to have: a distinctive culture; different education needs; proportionally more rurality and infrastructure challenges; proportionally more health issues; and less economic growth, as a country that is poorer than other UK nations. Wales was also thought to be more heavily reliant than England on tourism and agriculture for its economy, added one participant.

Yr iaith yn wahanol. Mae 'na gymaint o bethau yn wahanol. 'Yn ni'n dlotach. Felly mae 'na lot o bethau sy'n gwahaniaethu ni. Ac mae eisiau i ni gael grym. (The language is different. There are so many things that are different. We are poorer. So there are a lot of things that differentiate us. And we need to have power.)
(Rhondda)

Benefits, it would be nice to have Wales have more of a say in that. . . I guess especially in Pembrokeshire there are areas where there are a lot more wealthy people but the majority of it is sort of a bit poor I suppose. So I think if Wales could have more of the power of choosing where they spend their things, it could help.
(Pembroke Dock)

6. Looking ahead

This final chapter considers participants' initial views on how Wales should be run in the future, once more information had been given to them. This topic will form the core of the next qualitative face-to-face events.

Key take-outs

- Participants highlighted a range of values that were important to them regarding how they wanted to see Wales run in the future. More prominent themes were a better communicated and understood system, a fair system that benefitted all regions of Wales, and one that is financially viable and efficient.
- Participants' thoughts on the future for Wales naturally varied given the broad mix of people present – so no dominant themes emerged.
- There was sometimes a desire to see Wales stand on its own two feet and be responsible for making decisions that affect Wales with less UK Government influence.
- However, questions were regularly raised regarding how Wales could fund itself; and some thought certain decisions were better off being made in collaboration with other nations.
- Some liked or were curious about the concept of independence but the feasibility from a financial perspective remained a strong doubt.
- A few participants remained unconvinced that having a Welsh Government delivered any value for the country and its people.

6.1 Values that are important to participants

During the discussions, participants were asked what values were important to them when it came to how they'd like to see Wales run. The range of words and phrases they noted down on the subject are given overleaf.



The themes of raising awareness, communication, fairness, financial viability and efficiency were slightly more prevalent:

- **Raise awareness** of the system and make it easier to understand how Wales is run. Some thought it was important this subject was part of the school curriculum in Wales. One or two participants acknowledged that they did not understand the process of voting, for example, but would like to know more to help with engagement;

Even to this day I don't really understand anything to do with voting, because there is no education on it. . . I have no idea about parties or anything. I've only just found out there's one called Labour. Honestly, I'm so oblivious. . . I don't know anything about voting. I don't know how to do it. I don't know what it means to do. I don't know its value or anything. (Cardiff)

People should have more information. That's the problem [with increasing the number of MSs]. You just get the headline and then you don't get the reasons why they feel they need more. (Aberystwyth)

- Linking several points together, develop **better communications** about the system and be more transparent, explaining how the system works in plain language, listening to and acting on people's needs, and sustaining a conversation with the public;
- Develop a **fair**, inclusive, trusted system that benefits all regions in Wales so that certain regions did not feel neglected. Politicians in Wales should represent the diversity of Wales's population, for example with politicians from different professional backgrounds;

I would say it must put the wellbeing of its people and its environment first. (Newtown)

In the best people's interests. . . Empowerment to feel they belong somewhere. To feel proud of somewhere. (Rhondda)

- Be **efficient, financially viable**, fit for purpose and sustainable and always looking to improve.

The remaining values were **occasionally** raised:

- Be accountable for the decisions it makes;
- Be ambitious, and lead by example. As a smaller nation, Wales should be able to develop an agile system of government;
- Be greener, including Wales having control over its own resources;
- Protect Wales's culture, including its language;
- Think long term rather than relying on 'short term fixes'. This participant believed youth facilities had been cut and that it was crucial to invest to support younger generations;
- Be business friendly and not block infrastructure developments.

To spark further debate and shift participants' thinking further towards the future for Wales, they were asked for their opinions on a number of statements which are discussed below.

It's important that Wales can stand on its own two feet

Some found this statement appealing in that it would allow Wales to **act in the best interests of the country** on its own terms and in its own time. Wales would be able to make more of its natural resources to help fill the funding gap, added some participants, for example with renewable energy generation and its water. Additionally, explained a couple of participants, there were other small nations that managed to be largely autonomous from which Wales could learn, like Ireland. According to one or two others, more powers would help to develop Wales's identity and profile as a nation as well.

We can hit the ground running then, can't we? We don't have to wait around and discuss things for long periods of time. (Cardiff)

We could use more of the renewables in Wales . . . What we have got is rainfall. And so that rainfall is fed out to England through the dams. Do we get paid for it? No. (Aberystwyth)

If you compare it with Ireland, Ireland's done better since it became an independent member of Europe. It used to have a smaller economy than Wales and now its economy is twice as big. It's a poor country with a small population, and the same sort of rural isolation that Wales has, and they're doing all right on it. There are loads of countries around the world that are smaller than Wales or face more significant challenges than we would, and they do okay. (Newtown)

However, as with concerns for some about independence, it was often difficult for participants to see **how Wales could support itself**. More could be achieved working together in the Union, felt a few participants. Additionally, a small number commented that

Wales did quite well out of the Barnett Formula so it would be unwise to move away from the current system. The possibility of having to pay more tax was not an attractive proposition either, envisaged a couple of participants. For one individual, it would feel like a backward step, similar to the decision to leave the European Union.

*It would be nice to stand on our own two feet, but I don't think we could. . . There would be a lot less taxes, money coming in, because we're a small population.
(Wrexham)*

Decisions that affect the people of Wales should be made in Wales

As a principle, participants tended to be **in favour of this statement**, echoing reactions to the statement above. The UK Government has too much influence, felt some. Also, the argument was made on occasion that Welsh Government was more interested than the UK Government in making decisions to help its people, and Wales having more powers would therefore further benefit the country.

Mae'n bwysig bod 'na lywodraeth yng Nghymru. Dim ots be 'di'ch barn chi ohono fo. Achos mae Cymru yn deall Cymru. Os 'di o'n cael ei lywodraethu yng Nghymru, at least mae o'n nabod y bobl a nabod yr ardaloedd. (It's important that there is a government in Wales. It doesn't matter what you think of it. Because Wales understands Wales. If it is governed in Wales, at least it knows the people and knows the areas.) (Caernarfon)

Some, however, did **not entirely agree** with this statement. They responded that it would depend on what the decision related to and that the home nations were not that different. Some had in mind decisions regarding the pandemic in Wales which they did not think needed to be different to England. Some also repeated that Wales sometimes took a different route for political reasons; and some living near the border with England emphasised that divergence between the two nations sometimes did not seem to make much sense to them. The opinion was also reiterated that Wales needed to be able to financially afford to make its own decisions which was deemed unlikely by a couple of participants.

Wales would not be able to survive as an independent country

Although some liked, or were curious about, the idea of Wales being independent, participants mainly believed that Wales would **not have the financial resources** to be able to support itself or had not heard enough convincing arguments for independence. The country would have to take on more responsibilities, making sufficient funding seemingly impossible to achieve. Also, the prospect of potentially having to pay more tax if Wales became independent did not appeal. Furthermore, some wondered how the system would work regarding defence, currency, trade and, for those living near the border, health given that they currently travelled to England for some treatments.

Dan ni yn wlad fach, so bydde fe'n anodd i fod yn annibynnol. Mae fel cryfder gyda'r gwledydd eraill. (We are a small country, so it would be difficult to be independent. There is a strength being with the other countries.) (Aberystwyth)

In addition to the perceived funding challenges, some who were not in favour of independence thought such a move would only be **divisive** and mean more unnecessary bureaucracy.

However, a few believed **Wales could become independent**, but that it would be a very long, difficult, and expensive process in the short and medium term. As discussed earlier in this report, participants wanted to know what the financial implications would be of Wales funding itself.

Of course we could. But it would be very painful, and it would be very difficult, I mean in terms of currency we would have to keep the pound and then if you don't have your own currency do you really have your own country? (Pembroke Dock)

Some participants in Caernarfon felt Wales **lacked the confidence** to be independent, as people were saying 'we are too small'. They argued that other similar sized nations were independent. Without trying, it was hard to know if Wales could succeed. A few participants felt Wales had to look beyond England and increase its profile in other countries before becoming independent. Also, the point was made among participants in the Rhondda that Wales could work towards independence over time, step by step. They did not believe any country was truly independent as nations still work together.

Dwi'n meddwl 'sach chdi'n gofyn i bob un wlad maint Cymru sydd yn annibynnol, 'Fysach chi'n rhoi rhai o'ch pwerau chi i'r wlad drws nesa fod in charge o?' fysan nhw jyst yn chwethin yn eich wyneb chi. (I think if you asked every single country the size of Wales that is independent, 'Would you give some of your powers to the country next door to be in charge of?' they'd just laugh in your face.) (Caernarfon)

The UK Government has too much influence on what happens in Wales.

This statement **chimed** with some participants' perception that the UK Government does not understand or appear to care a great deal about Wales. Additionally, as participants had often learned in the discussions, the UK Government controlled Wales's funding, which did not seem fair to some.

Bydde ti'n meddwl bydde rhywun sy'n byw yng Nghymru gyda mwy o syniad sut i redeg Cymru na rhywun sydd ddim yn byw yng Nghymru. Jyst common sense yw hwnna 'de? (You'd think that someone who lives in Wales would have a better idea of how to run Wales than someone who doesn't live in Wales. That's just common sense, isn't it?) (Aberystwyth)

However, others believed that the influence was **needed** because of the funding situation, because there was very little difference between the two nations in reality and, for some, because they felt so disconnected from the Welsh Government and 'Cardiff'. A small number believed Wales already had plenty of its own powers now that they were aware of all the devolved powers for Wales, so disagreed with the statement.

6.2 What participants want to see happen in the future

Participants' thoughts on the future for Wales naturally varied given the broad mix of citizens and opinions present. Consequently, **no dominant themes** emerged, with preferences mainly ranging from keeping things as they are through to independence.

Keep the structure as it is: participants tended to reach this opinion either because they felt the Welsh Government had sufficient powers already and should be doing a better job, or because they felt that everything seemed to be functioning reasonably adequately. A concern was voiced that if Wales did have more powers, citizens would see their taxes increase for the Welsh Government to be able to take on and manage those powers. Some concluded Wales was better off receiving the current block grant than attempting to go it alone.

It all seems to be spread out fairly well. It could work. . . It's about finding the right people in the right places. (Pembroke Dock)

More powers for Wales: these participants wanted to see Wales having more powers to make decisions that affect Wales. More powers could mean being able to make better decisions in Wales for those most in need and, thought some, Wales being able to stand up for itself more. The redrawing of constituency boundaries was expected to further reduce Welsh MPs' influence at Westminster, warned a couple of participants.

If we want things to get better, things can't stay the same. Staying the same at the moment is probably the worst thing that can happen. (Rhondda)

I think with more devolved power, I think Wales could really crystallise a better and more progressive vision for Wales. (Newtown)

A related future preference for some was to see **more funding** for Wales. The Welsh Government would be able to make a significant difference to people's lives. Some wanted to see how else Wales could generate funding (e.g. through natural resources and energy, and devolving Crown Estate powers in Wales).

More powers at a local level: from time to time, participants suggested improvements related to more local power. This could involve having more local councillors or local people involved in influencing decision-making. According to some in Newtown, a local government with more power would see more action to meet the county's needs, for example splitting the county of Powys into two. A few others felt that the necessary powers were there at a local level, but that more needed to be done to ensure local voices were **heard** and needs met more effectively. However, some argued that local government could not be trusted to make cost effective decisions.

Datganoli mwy o gyfrifoldebau i gynghorau lleol yn rhywbeth pwysig i fi. So mae 'na fwy o pŵer yn dod lawr i fan hyn oherwydd nhw sy'n gwranddo ar broblemau pobl yr ardal yna. Ond mae problemau ni yng Nghaernarfon yn wahanol i broblemau s'gen rhywun yng Nghaerdydd, er enghraifft. Yr un fath bod problemau pobl yng Nghymru

yn wahanol i broblemau sy yn Lloegr. (Decentralising more responsibilities to local councils is something important to me. So there is more power coming here, because they are the ones who listen to the problems of the people of the area. But our problems in Caernarfon are different to problems someone has in Cardiff, for example. In the same way that people's problems in Wales are different to problems in England.) (Caernarfon)

Independence for Wales: these participants felt that it could be done and believed it would show ambition and minimise the influence of Westminster.

I think the people who have been in charge i.e., the Labour Government, they've done what they wanted to do and ultimately, they believe that we should still be attached to Westminster anyway. So there's a complete lack of ambition for Wales there. (Rhondda)

Broader themes emerged which participants anticipated would help Wales's shift to a better future. The more prevalent themes were:

- More **communication** and better engagement with the public on how Wales is run and how it spends its funding, including when consulting on new legislation and involving and listening to people in the regions. Schools could also do a better job of informing learners about how Wales is run, felt some participants;
- More **investment outside Cardiff** and the South East of Wales;
- Develop a better relationship with the UK Government. The two governments should collaborate and work more in **partnership**. For some living on the borders, this would include having more consistency between Governments on policy areas. There should also be more collaboration between political parties for the benefit of Wales;

I think we need a different system of governance that is fairer because all the mudslinging, screaming, shouting and self-interest, I've had enough of it. But I've had enough of it for a long time it isn't just current, but I would like to see a difference in the structure because none of us are happy with it. We have the power to change it if we co-operate, that's the missing link, isn't it? Party politics, I think we have to look different at the system. (Pembroke Dock)

Isolated references were also made to:

- More focus on longer term planning than short termism and 'in-fighting';
- Politicians to be from more diverse backgrounds with experience of working in other sectors.

Turning the question on its head, some participants explained what they thought would be the **worst way Wales** could be run. These included:

- To **stay as it is**, although some were still allowing perceived performance of the current government in Wales to influence their view;
- For the **UK Government** to have full control - and with decisions made by people who have no stake in Wales;

- Moving towards more devolution and independence **without a cast-iron case** for doing so;
- For the **needs of Wales not to be taken into account** in decisions made that affect the country.

7. Participants' queries

Questions emerged from participants throughout the discussions, with **funding the dominant theme**:

- How does the amount of money Wales receives from the block grant compare with how much it pays in taxes?
- How does Wales's spending breakdown by policy area?
- What are the alternative ways of funding public services in Wales, if the current method is deemed insufficient? How realistic is it for Wales to stand on its own two feet?
- Do other devolved UK nations receive proportionally more funding than Wales?
- How do other devolved nations fare with funding received?
- How is funding allotted to Wales's local authorities? It feels as though more rural areas don't receive as much as more urban areas.
- Can Wales decide how to spend its budget?
- Does Wales receive much of the revenues generated by its natural resources?
- Does the cost of increasing the number of Members of the Senedd come out the budget Wales receives for funding public services?
- What can we learn from other small, independent nations like Ireland?
- Why is broadcasting not devolved?
- Does the UK Government have the potential for any influence at all over devolved decisions?
- Why there are going to be 36 more Members of the Senedd and why did there not appear to be a public consultation on the matter?
- How do the different powers work between town councils, local government, Welsh Government and UK Government?

Several participants commented at the end of the discussions that they had **learned a good deal** from the sessions and that it had sparked an interest in finding out more.

Mae 'di creu diddordeb hefyd achos nawr mae'r gaps yna, mae 'di actually rhoi diddordeb i fi mynd gartre a dechrau darllen. Achos mae'r wybodaeth mas 'na, dwi'n siŵr. (It's also created interest because now there are those gaps, it actually gave me interest to go home and start reading. Because the information is there, I'm sure.) (Rhondda)

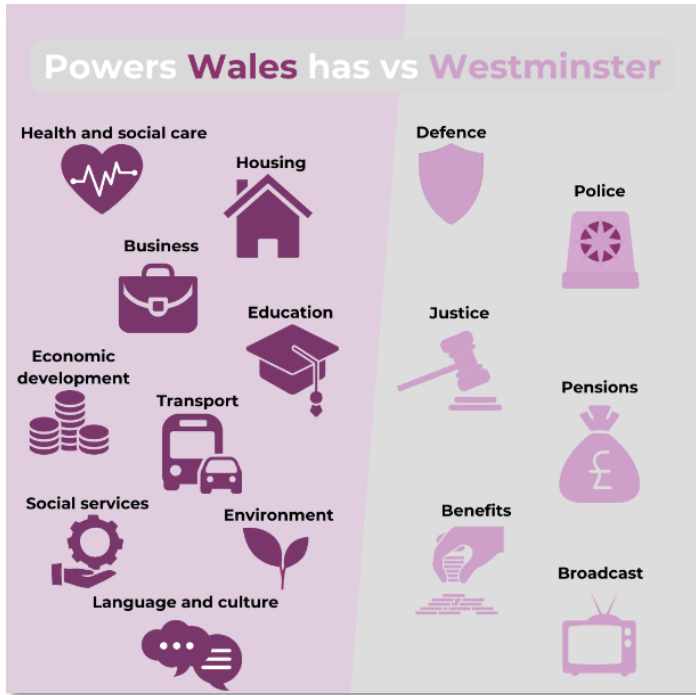
We're all intelligent, but we've all learned a heck of a lot tonight. So, education. This should be in schools. It should be in every Sixth Form in the land. (Aberystwyth)

I think the fact that you've given me perhaps information to look at things from a different perspective or a different point of view and I think that's just made me look at things a bit more objectively than what I was in the beginning because I have knowledge now that maybe I didn't have [then]. (Abergavenny)

Appendix

Stimulus material introduced to participants during the deliberative events in chronological order

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXz3vI3ni_U



Rhoi terfyn ar gosbi plant yn gorfforol

Ar 21 Mawrth 2022, cafodd cosbi plant yn gorfforol ei wneud yn anghyfreithlon yng Nghymru. Mae'r gyfraith yn diogelu hawliau plant, a'r bwriad yw anfon signal clir nad yw cosbi plant yn gorfforol yn cael ei oddef yng [Nghymru](#).

Ending physical punishment of children

On 21 March 2022, physically punishing children was made illegal in Wales. The law protects children's rights and is intended to send a clear signal that physically punishing children is not tolerated in [Wales](#).



Lleihau terfynau cyflymder i 20mya

bydd y terfyn cyflymder rhagosodedig yn y rhan fwyaf o ardaloedd preswyl yng Nghymru yn lleihau o 30mya i 20mya o fis Medi 2023. Gall cynghorau lleol wneud cais am derfynau uwch, ond y pwynt cychwyn yw 20mya. Bwriad y gyfraith yw lleihau damweiniau, gwneud strydoedd yn fwy diogel, gwella llesiant a'r amgylchedd, ac annog rhagor o gerdded a [beicio](#).

Reducing speed limits to 20mph

The default speed limit in most residential areas in Wales will reduce from 30mph to 20mph from September 2023. Local councils can apply higher limits, but the starting point is 20mph. The law is intended to reduce collisions, make streets safer, improve wellbeing and the environment, and encourage more walking and [cycling](#).



Presgripsiynau meddygol am ddim

Yn 2007, diddymwyd tâl presgripsiwn y GIG ar gyfer pobl yng Nghymru. Mae gan bob claf sydd wedi'i gofrestru â meddyg teulu yng Nghymru, sy'n cael eu presgripsiynau gan fferylllydd Cymreig, hawl i bresgripsiynau am ddim.

Free medical prescriptions

In 2007, the NHS prescription charge was abolished for people in Wales. All patients registered with a Welsh GP, who get their prescriptions from a Welsh pharmacist, are entitled to free prescriptions.



Penderfyniad a wnaed gan Lywodraeth y DU

Mae penderfyniadau am y rhan fwyaf o **fuddion llesiant** yn cael eu gwneud gan Lywodraeth y DU yn San Steffan oherwydd nid yw hwn yn faes datganoledig. Ar ddechrau'r pandemig Covid ym mis Mawrth 2020, penderfynodd Llywodraeth y DU ychwanegu £20 at y swm a dalwyd i bobl sy'n derbyn Credyd Cynhwysol am gyfnod penodol o amser. Parhaodd y mesur hwn tan fis Medi 2021. Roedd y Senedd, Llywodraeth Cymru a'r rhan fwyaf o Aelodau Seneddol Cymru yn San Steffan eisiau i'r cynnydd £20 fod yn barhaol. Fodd bynnag, cafodd y penderfyniad i roi diwedd ar y cynnydd ei gefnogi gan y rhan fwyaf o'r holl Aelodau Seneddol o ledled y DU.

Decision made by the UK Government

Decisions about most **welfare benefits** are made by the UK Government in Westminster because this is not a devolved area. At the beginning of the Covid pandemic in March 2020, the UK Government decided to increase for a fixed period of time the amount paid to people on Universal Credit by £20 per week. It lasted until September 2021.

The Senedd, the Welsh Government and most Welsh Members of Parliament in Westminster wanted the £20 increase to be made permanent. However, the decision to end the increase was supported by a majority of all MPs from across the UK.



How Wales receives funding

The Senedd and the Welsh Government can decide how spending on these devolved areas is shared out. About **80%** of the money it gets comes from the **UK Government**, from tax revenues from the whole of the UK. The Welsh Government makes its own decisions on how to use that funding.

The amount Wales gets is based on several things including how much the UK Government decides to spend on public services and how many people live in Wales.

The Welsh Government also gets funding from **money raised from taxes devolved to Wales** (for example, tax paid when you buy a house, or a contribution of the tax paid on people's income).

