



Cabinet Office

# **Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Report**

Quarter 1 2021

24 March 2021





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**The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**

**Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and  
Minister for the Cabinet Office**



**Chloe Smith MP**

**Minister of State for the Constitution and  
Devolution**

## Foreword

Almost every day ministers and civil servants from each department of the United Kingdom government are in touch with their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, discussing joint decision-making and pragmatic ways to work together. Whether these dealings take place at a formal meeting or ad hoc; via a telephone call or in person; or on a bilateral or multilateral basis, they come under the umbrella description of ‘intergovernmental relations’ or IGR. The purpose is to achieve better outcomes for UK citizens.

Ever since powers were devolved, IGR has supported better collaboration, coordination and cooperation between the UK government and devolved administrations. But for too long a great deal of this positive contact has gone under the radar, the many achievements unheralded and citizens largely unaware of what is being worked on in their interests. This new report on IGR – the first in a regular series of quarterly updates to be published by the UK government – seeks to put this right. And it could not be more timely.

Over the past 12 months, regular engagement between the UK government and devolved administrations has been particularly important and complex. The country’s resilience has been tested primarily by the fast-moving COVID-19 crisis, the greatest challenge in peacetime, but also by the need to agree our new trading relationship with the European Union (EU). I could not think of a better moment to open up our IGR to public scrutiny. To set out, department by department, full details of the UK government’s engagement as reassurance that it is being carried out in the interests of the whole UK, and with fairness, trust and accountability at its heart. I believe that the more attention is paid to IGR, the more collaboration will result, encouraging administrations to work together more productively.

This new report is part of a wider culture shift in our approach to IGR and efforts to formalise engagement in the long term with new structures and processes. Day-to-day responsibility for constitutional integrity of the union falls to me as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

The establishment of quarterly, and also, annual reports into IGR activity are part of a range of measures that I announced in November 2020 to support greater transparency, reporting and parliamentary engagement. Other UK government steps to improve IGR transparency include a new GOV.UK page<sup>1</sup> and publishing communiqués about meetings held through a range of intergovernmental fora. The new arrangements, guided by draft principles published in July 2019, reflect the UK’s constitutional context today and changes in IGR since devolution, in line with the needs of the devolved administrations. Most notably, these include the devolved administrations’ increased powers and responsibilities and also the powers regained by all governments over domestic policy outside the EU.

This government is steadfast in its commitment to protect and champion the shared history, beliefs and interests embodied in our union – the most successful political and economic partnership the world has seen. For it to thrive, it must continue to deliver for each part of the UK, taking into account the many diverse interests. As the COVID-19 response showed, we are at our strongest when we work as one union, prioritising the needs of all our citizens. Turning the spotlight on our IGR will help us all to build back better, as one United Kingdom.



**The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
**Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for Cabinet Office**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/intergovernmental-relations>

# 1. UK government's approach to intergovernmental relations

## 1.1 UK government's transparency commitments

The UK government (UKG) deeply values the core principles of transparency of IGR, recognising that accountability and effective parliamentary scrutiny of the government's participation in intergovernmental structures will support administrations to work together effectively on behalf of all citizens across the UK.

The government announced in November 2020 a number of measures by written ministerial statement in both Houses of Parliament to support transparency, reporting and parliamentary engagement on IGR. These included the creation of a new GOV.UK page<sup>2</sup> to improve public access to principal documents, such as records of formal intergovernmental meetings, the Memorandum of Understanding on Devolution<sup>3</sup> and quarterly reports on all IGR activity. This increased transparency will be complemented by regular statements in UK Parliament by UKG ministers on IGR, appropriate appearances before select committees, and a report on IGR activity laid annually in the UK Parliament. The measures are intended to support Parliament's capacity to scrutinise the UKG's role in IGR with the DAs. The measures do not place any obligations on other administrations to report to their legislatures, although they mirror the approaches taken by the Welsh and Scottish governments.

This document is the first quarterly report to be published since these measures were announced. It includes details of meetings between UKG ministers with the Welsh and Scottish governments, and Northern Ireland Executive, in both bilateral and multilateral settings. It is not, however, an exhaustive list: there are many other fora in which the UKG and the DAs engage, including within Cabinet Committee structures and bodies such as the British-Irish Council, as well as the significant engagement at official level. These meetings are not covered in this report.

The report is being published slightly ahead of schedule, so as not to coincide with the UK Parliamentary recess or the pre-election period for Scottish and Welsh parliamentary elections. Thus it covers ministerial engagement between 1 January - 28 February 2021, rather than a full quarter of the year. In light of the shorter reporting period, it is supplemented by introductory commentary on the overall nature of engagement and relations between administrations since 2019. In addition, certain departments have outlined activity that took place in December 2020 to further enhance transparency.

## 1.2 The review of intergovernmental relations

The IGR review was jointly agreed by the UKG and DAs to ensure intergovernmental structures remain fit for purpose in the current context. The aim is to revise and build upon the current structures for engagement and the dispute avoidance and resolution process, set out in the Memorandum of Understanding on Devolution.

A progress update on the review, published alongside this first transparency report, explores options for joint reporting. Whilst work will continue to strengthen intergovernmental engagement structures through the IGR review, the UKG recognises the immediate benefits of enabling appropriate parliamentary and public scrutiny of the UKG's participation in intergovernmental

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/intergovernmental-relations>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/devolution-memorandum-of-understanding-and-supplementary-agreement>

meetings. This report therefore covers engagement between the UKG and the DAs through existing intergovernmental mechanisms.

### 1.3 Principles for intergovernmental relations

Draft principles for IGR were developed jointly by the UKG and the DAs as part of the review of IGR and published by the UKG in July 2019. The UKG is committed to ensuring effective joint working according to the following principles:

1. Maintaining positive and constructive relations, based on mutual respect for the responsibilities of the governments and their shared role in the governance of the UK
2. Building and maintaining trust, based on effective communication
3. Sharing information and respecting confidentiality
4. Promoting understanding of, and accountability for, their intergovernmental activity
5. Resolving disputes according to a clear and agreed process.

Since 2019, these principles have guided the review of IGR. They have also supported the UKG's approach to engagement with the DAs through existing mechanisms.

### 1.4 Context of intergovernmental working and future reporting

It is important to recognise the extent to which the IGR review, coupled with the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) and the joint response to COVID-19, have been catalysts for increasing engagement between the UKG and the DAs. All UKG departments have undertaken a wide range of intergovernmental meetings at both official and ministerial level, ranging from ad hoc to regular established working groups, senior official discussions, and ministerial fora, to consider significant policies and operational decisions prior to 2021. Some highlights between July 2019 and November 2020 include:

- over 50 meetings between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) ministers and the DAs through the Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) and through bilateral engagements on a range of important issues, including delivery of common frameworks, matters relating to the UK's exit from the EU, and a wide range of regulatory issues across the EFRA sectors
- over 50 meetings between the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) ministers and the DAs, and near constant communication with the UKG Secretary of State for Health and Social Care since March 2020, to advance the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to prepare for the end of the transition period
- 22 meetings chaired by UKG's trade ministers on trade policy, export and investment leading up to the end of the transition period
- Cabinet Office ministers hosting, chairing and attending meetings on developments in EU negotiations, preparations for the end of the transition period and the IGR review, including 8 meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations), and many other bilateral and multilateral meetings
- the Department for Education (DfE) ministers engaging their DA counterparts 84 times, with discussions predominantly focused on education recovery from COVID-19, between the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and November 2020
- the Department for Transport (DfT) engaging in 66 ministerial meetings to discuss a range of cross-cutting issues, including the UK's exit from the EU, COVID-19 travel restrictions, effects on the sector, and wider transport issues

- the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) engaging in over 70 ministerial meetings on a range of issues including, but not limited to, delivering net zero, unleashing innovation, supporting business through the pandemic and recovery, and backing long-term growth.

Relevant ministers across administrations have also met to consider further COVID-19-related matters, the UK's exit from the EU, and wider policies to provide support and deliver services. This includes military assistance and the repatriation of nationals during the pandemic and considerations relating to sport, tourism, employment and welfare, justice, and security and asylum matters. The range of this engagement across areas of both reserved and devolved competence is testament to the importance of intergovernmental cooperation for the whole of the UKG.

The Territorial Offices also play an important and unique role in engagement between the UKG and the DAs. They are both the UKG's voice in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the voice of the respective parts of the UK in Whitehall. They frequently support and facilitate conversations between the UK administrations, working with other departments in the UKG to ensure the particular issues in each part of the UK are fully considered. They also have an important role to play in engaging with stakeholders in each part of the UK and ensuring their voices are heard during policy development and decision making.

This section of the report provides a brief overview of some of the important topics and issues that have been considered jointly with the DAs, in line with the different devolution settlements and the needs of the policy area, to ensure UK-wide alignment and consideration. The aim of the UKG's regular reporting commitments is to continue to ensure full openness, transparency, and accountability over all meetings that take place between administrations. This first report is the starting point in that process.

## 2. Intergovernmental engagement: Quarter 1 2021

### 2.1 Cabinet Office

The Cabinet Office (CO) is committed to working extensively with the DAs through effective IGR. At both ministerial and official level, the CO regularly brings together all administrations to work collaboratively and cooperate on areas of common priority for the governance of the UK and in order to strengthen the union.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office has held regular calls with the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, and the First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland, to help bring about a coordinated pandemic response that is in the best interests of the whole UK. The meetings, supported by a senior officials group, have regularly focused on topical items raised by all attendees. This includes UK-wide data, strategies for improving compliance with non-pharmaceutical interventions, and communications work across all parts of the UK. This is in addition to opportunities for joint working and further collaboration to ensure that the UK-wide COVID-19 response remains as effective as possible.

The Minister for Constitution and Devolution also chaired the first Interministerial Group (IMG) for Elections and Registration with the DAs in February, where terms of reference for the IMG were agreed. This successful and constructive first meeting has been supplemented by further bilateral engagements in the preparations for the May elections. Ministers agreed to meet again following the elections in May, where one of the agenda items will be to review the May '21 polls in England, Wales and Scotland.

The COP26 President Designate chairs the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) DA Ministerial Group, which is attended by climate change ministers from the DAs as well as the UKG Territorial Secretaries of State. The purpose of the group is to ensure effective engagement and collaboration between the UKG and the DAs on the COP26, which is taking place in Glasgow in November 2021. The group met for the first time on 6 November 2020 and will meet quarterly in the run up to the conference.

In partnership with the Ministry of Defence, the CO also engages through the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board (MCVB), an intergovernmental group which includes DA ministerial representation. The MCVB provides a forum to discuss and coordinate the strategic direction of the armed forces Covenant and support for veterans, as the departments implement the Covenant and the Strategy for our veterans, and monitors their progress. The Board is due to meet again in Spring 2021, co-chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State for Defence. Furthermore, Veterans Commissioners from the DAs are invited to attend the Veterans Advisory Board, which provides advice, challenge and diversity of thought to the UKG on a range of veterans issues.

The CO remains in close contact with the DAs on matters relating to the UK's exit from the EU. In December 2020, 2 meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) (JMC(EN)) were convened, chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and attended by ministers from the UKG, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, and Northern Ireland Executive. Upon the successful outcome of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and since the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, engagement has been primarily at official level. The same month, there were also 2 bilateral meetings between the CO Parliamentary Secretary and Welsh Government ministers, the Minister for European Transition and Minister for Finance and Trefnydd, to discuss port infrastructure and procurement reform respectively. Future engagement on issues formerly discussed at the JMC(EN) forum will be in line with outcomes of the IGR review, and reflect the UK's new relationship with the EU now negotiations have concluded. In February 2021, the Minister of State for Efficiency and Transformation in the Cabinet Office and Secretary of

State for Wales also met with the Minister for European Transition in the Welsh Government to discuss Welsh border infrastructure.

In line with the UKG's wider transparency proposals, communiqués from many of these meetings are publicly available on the GOV.UK Intergovernmental Relations collections page. This collection will continue to grow as further structures are formalised.

## 2.2 Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy

Ministers in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have shown a strong commitment to engagement with their DA counterparts. In particular, the BEIS Business and Industry (B&I) Quadrilateral and the Net Zero IMG (formerly the 'Energy and Climate Change' Quadrilateral) have been running for 2 years. The frequency of the B&I Quadrilateral increased from March 2020 to fortnightly where possible in response to COVID-19, with a focus on economic support and recovery.

The department has continued a regular rhythm of both ministerial and senior official engagement with the DAs across the department's portfolio into 2021, with numerous bilateral and multilateral ministerial engagements. These have focused on delivering against the department's priorities – including delivering net zero, unleashing innovation, supporting business through the pandemic and recovery, and backing long-term growth.

The B&I Quadrilateral has met on 3 occasions in 2021, represented by the Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets in the department. The meetings have a rotating chair with Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive chairing the 3 to date this year. Discussions have focused on COVID-19 business support, economic recovery, and the end of the transition period. The quadrilaterals will continue to meet throughout the year. The secretariat supporting this quadrilateral, made up of officials from the UKG and the DAs, meets in the preceding week and collectively sets the agenda for upcoming meetings.

The Net Zero IMG has met once in 2021, with the Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth and Minister for Climate Change and Corporate Responsibility representing the department. This meeting, chaired by the Welsh Government, focused on the setting of Carbon Budget 6 and the forthcoming net zero strategy; the heat and buildings strategy and the design of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. The group will next meet in April.

The frequency of engagement of the ministerial structures will be kept under review, in discussion with the DAs.

In addition to the above engagements, the Minister for Business and Industry's responsibilities changed on 28 November 2020. He now sits across both the BEIS and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and continues regular engagement with the DAs under his DHSC remit.

At official level, engagement with the DAs is well-embedded and is carried out by teams across the department.

## 2.3 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Ministers and senior officials in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) take part in regular engagement with their devolved counterparts. These discussions cover important policy areas of mutual interest, including the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Festival UK 2022, UK City of Culture, as well as the effects of COVID-19 and the UK's exit from the EU on the tourism, culture and sport sectors.

Formal ministerial engagement occurs on a quadrilateral and cyclical basis with ministers from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with a view to deepening relationships, improving intergovernmental working and increasing transparency from already good levels. At official level,

the DCMS has developed strong working relationships with their counterparts in the DAs. This is reflected in positive collaboration and an appetite to continue to work closely together.

At present, the DCMS has 3 quadrilateral ministerial engagement structures that are being set up as IMGs.

Of these, Sport Cabinet meetings are held between all 4 administrations' sports ministers on an annual basis and chaired on a rotating basis. While no meeting fell in this reporting period, with the next scheduled for summer 2021, previous discussions have covered COVID-19's effect on sport and physical activity, including the National Lottery; the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham; Sport Agencies' Chair update; and the World Cup 2030 bid.

Tourism ministers' meetings, meanwhile, are more frequent, having been held approximately every 2 months during the COVID-19 pandemic between the UKG and the DAs and chaired by the DCMS Minister for Sports, Heritage and Tourism. During the last meeting, on 28 January 2021, the Group discussed COVID-19 recovery and plans for reopening the sector.

Finally, the first Four Nations Ministerial Culture Meeting was held on 16 December 2020, chaired by the UKG Minister for Digital and Culture. The meeting discussed Festival UK 2022, COVID-19 recovery and the UK's exit from the EU and was mutually recognised as a valuable forum at which to share information on UK-wide initiatives. Those present agreed that similarly constructive meetings should take place in the future, with the DCMS looking to hold a follow-up in May at which City of Culture 2025 issues would be added to the agenda.

Rotating chairs and locations are proposed for the Tourism and Culture IMGs, subject to COVID-19 restrictions. In their absence, the UKG Tourism Minister will continue to chair virtual meetings every 2 months between the 4 tourism ministers, though bilateral meetings in late March will take place instead.

## 2.4 Department for Education

While education, children's services and skills are almost entirely devolved, the Department for Education (DfE) works with the DAs in a number of important ways: liaising on domestic policies which require cross-border co-operation, consultation and coordination; exchanging policy thinking and sharing best practice; and coordinating international business, including international statistical returns and participation in international benchmarking studies.

Between them, the UKG Secretary of State for Education, the Minister of State for Universities and the Minister of State for School Standards have met their counterparts in the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government on 20 occasions between December 2020 and February 2021. These meetings were a mix of bilateral and multilateral discussions and built on the extensive ministerial and official engagement between DfE and the DAs that took place throughout 2020.

Engagement focused on addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education – for example, approaches taken by each administration to reopening education settings and arrangements for awarding qualifications in 2021. During this period, the UKG Minister of State for Universities also met her counterparts to discuss the new Turing scheme, which will support students in the UK to study and work abroad.

The DfE plans to continue the productive engagement at both official and ministerial levels with the DAs, particularly on education recovery and catch-up on lost learning. It will also explore with the DAs other areas of policy exchange and collaboration at ministerial level that can mutually benefit young people across the UK.

## 2.5 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA) is the forum for discussion between administrations on areas of mutual interest across agriculture, fisheries, environment, food and rural affairs. It meets regularly throughout the year. In 2021, the IMG EFRA met by video conferencing on Monday 25 January and is scheduled to meet again in March.

Details of the discussions at the January IMG are contained in the communique<sup>4</sup>, which is available on the GOV.UK page on IGR, alongside all other communiqués for the IMG EFRA.

## 2.6 Department of Health and Social Care

The UKG has worked collaboratively across the whole of the UK to respond to the global pandemic, supporting our UK-wide NHS and social care systems.

Since the start of the pandemic in early 2020, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been in constant communication with the DA health ministers to deliver responses that benefit people across the whole of the UK.

This has included weekly Secretary of State and health minister meetings to share information, resolve shared issues and address areas of mutual concern in response to the pandemic. Items of discussion have included the COVID-19 vaccine deployment, the National Testing Programme and ensuring sufficient testing capacity and capability across the UK. This is in addition to the supply of crucial products, including personal protective equipment (PPE), global threats and the interventions to support the UK response to new variants and health measures at the border.

Several productive bilateral meetings have been held this year by the Minister for COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment. It should be noted that the Minister's responsibilities changed on 28 November 2020, to cover both the BEIS and the DHSC and he has engaged the DAs under his DHSC remit.

There has also been multilateral and bilateral ministerial engagement on other priority areas, such as preparation for the end of the transition period and taking forward the UK's new relationship with the EU. In late 2020, in the lead up to the end of the transition period, the Minister for Health had a number of bilateral and multilateral engagements with DA counterparts. The Minister also met in early March 2021 with the Minister for Health in Northern Ireland on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Minister for Innovation also held several collaborative bilateral meetings throughout 2020 with ministers in the DAs to discuss issues within his portfolio of responsibilities, including on the UK-wide vision for the future of clinical research delivery, the UK response to long-COVID-19 and the Medicines and Medical Devices Act 2021.

In addition to this ministerial engagement, there has been daily official level engagement with DA counterparts. The 4 chief medical officers continue to meet regularly too which has supported coordinated scientific advice to the UKG and the DAs and the DHSC has solidified a number of fora across areas such as, PPE; COVID-19 vaccine deployment; therapeutics; NHS Test and Trace; shielding and protecting the vulnerable; EU and trade policy; supply of medicines and medical goods; Adult Social Care; and Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR) teams.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communique-from-the-inter-ministerial-group-for-environment-food-and-rural-affairs/inter-ministerial-group-for-environment-food-and-rural-affairs-img-efra-communique-25-january-2021>

The DHSC is considering how to build further on these working relationships and provide greater transparency. Officials are commencing discussions with DA officials on establishing an IMG, complementing the extensive ministerial engagement which is underway.

## 2.7 Department for International Trade

The Department for International Trade (DIT) has established a programme of ministerial engagement with the DAs to strengthen and support the UK's international trade programme.

The Ministerial Forum for Trade was established in 2019 and is chaired by the Minister of State for Trade Policy, with the relevant ministers from each of the DAs in attendance. The forum meets at least 3 times a year with further meetings convened by agreement. The forum provides a regular arena for strategic updates and discussions on all crucial trade matters, such as developments on the free trade agreements (FTAs) the UK is negotiating. The forum last met on 9 December 2020 and is scheduled to meet again before the pre-election period in Scotland and Wales commences. It is supported by a senior officials group, which meets every 6 weeks.

Outside of the more formal structures, DIT ministers and officials meet regularly with their counterparts in each of the DAs to engage on all aspects of the department's priorities. This includes regular updates from chief negotiators in relation to important areas of interest in FTA developments or disputes.

The DIT also holds meetings on a bilateral basis with DA ministers to discuss trade promotion and investment. The most recent bilateral meetings took place in February 2021, led by the Minister for Investment, to discuss the Office for Investment.

## 2.8 Department for Transport

The Department for Transport (DfT) is engaging with the DAs regularly at a senior official and ministerial level across modes, as well as on cross-cutting issues.

Following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a ministerial working group was set up to discuss the transport issues across the UK. It has been led by 2 Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State in the department. This is in addition to regular engagement with other ministers in relation to their respective portfolios.

The meeting now takes place approximately bi-monthly, with discussion predominantly centered on the second wave of COVID-19's effect on transport and financial support packages, and how the vaccine will affect the sector. It will continue to engage on wider portfolio matters post COVID-19.

The COVID-19 ministerial working group meeting has been adopted as the department's IMG as part of the IGR review work. The subjects for discussion will widen as the forum offers the opportunity to harness the current engagement to further consider departmental matters of mutual interest.

The joint communiqués<sup>5</sup> are published on GOV.UK after meetings, which includes the date, location, list of participants and a summary of the discussion points.

The Union Connectivity Review, independently chaired by Sir Peter Hendy, has required engagement with the DAs. Sir Peter has met all DA ministers and will continue to engage before and after publication of the interim report in March 2021.

The department is engaging with the DAs on all matters relating to the UK's exit from the EU.

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communiqués-from-the-inter-ministerial-group-for-transport-matters>

## 2.9 Department for Work and Pensions

Issues of work and welfare – and in particular making sure people around the UK continue to be supported – are at the heart of the engagement carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)’s Secretary of State and ministers. Their involvement with the DAs is centred on the relationship between reserved and devolved welfare support, and making sure information is shared in areas such as employment, which are partly reserved and partly devolved. The picture for work and welfare is a complex one across the UK. In Wales, all powers are reserved. Whereas, in Northern Ireland, social security, pensions and child support powers are transferred. In Scotland, the DWP is currently managing the transfer and implementation of powers outlined in the Scotland Act 2016 (building on the 2014 Smith Commission), which devolved considerable social security and employment support functions.

The Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare between the UK and Scottish governments is held regularly to oversee the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Scotland Act 2016. This is co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People in Scottish Government, and attended by the Minister of State for Disabled People, Work and Health, who is the UKG department’s lead minister for the union and devolution. The Joint Ministerial meetings were initially held once every 4 months but at the request of the Scottish Government are now biannual. They are supplemented by bilateral meetings between DWP ministers and their Scottish Government counterparts responsible for the social security and employment portfolios.

In addition to ministerial activity, engagement with the DAs at official and working level is frequent. Senior policy officials meet with their counterparts in the DAs at least monthly, and often weekly in the case of devolution policy, and contact at working-level is even more regular. In relation to the implementation of the powers devolved in the Scotland Act 2016, a number of meetings and joint workshops have taken place, including familiarisation visits to both the DWP processing sites and Jobcentres, in order to support the Scottish Government as it seeks to establish elements of its own welfare system. Additionally, although the department does not currently operate in Northern Ireland, the DWP engages in regular discussions with the Department for Communities (DfC) in Northern Ireland on both policy and operational matters.

Significant engagement between the DWP’s ministers and the DAs took place in December 2020. This included a trilateral meeting between the DWP’s Secretary of State and ministers from the Welsh and Scottish governments to discuss the UKG’s Plan for Jobs, as well as the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare between the UK and Scottish governments. Engagement continued at official level during January and February. Ministerial engagement with the Northern Ireland Executive is planned for March 2021.

At senior official level, there have been numerous engagements across many specialisms (policy, analytical, legal, digital, operational and others). Engagement at working level remains frequent, not least given the DWP’s significant physical presence through its Jobcentres and other operational sites in Scotland and Wales.

## 2.10 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

While the UK retains responsibility for international relations, at ministerial and official level there is regular engagement with colleagues in the DAs on a range of matters relating to UK nationals overseas, relationships with international partners and development goals and opportunities. This engagement is carried out by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), also taking up areas that used to come under the former Department for International Development (DFID).

Throughout the period, FCDO officials – in support of ministers and all parts of the UK – have remained in close contact with their colleagues in the DAs in the UK and overseas. They have

attended to issues such as consular support for UK nationals, COVID-19 and human rights; continued to identify opportunities of mutual interest through their soft power networks, and at the same time carried on with their regular contacts with the UKG's international partners.

Ministerial engagement shortly before the period covered by the quarterly report includes an introductory meeting between the Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth and the Scottish Government Minister for Europe and International Development. This took place on 1 December 2020 as part of the former's itinerary for his virtual visit to Glasgow. On the agenda were a range of topics, including the importance of the South Asian diaspora, the Scottish Government's work in international development, and the forthcoming UN COP26 conference on climate change in Glasgow in November 2021.

Over the next quarter, the FCDO will work with the DAs to agree a timetable for regular engagement between the FCDO and DA senior officials, to ensure continued delivery for all parts of the UK, including through future formalised intergovernmental structures.

## 2.11 Her Majesty's Treasury

Responsibility for UK fiscal policy, macroeconomic policy and funding allocation across the UK remains with Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT). It is important that the way in which funding to the DAs is determined is clear, transparent, unambiguous and capable of timely examination and analysis by the devolved legislatures and the UK Parliament.

The other shared interests – particularly as the country builds back from the COVID-19 crisis – include the need to encourage sustainable economic growth in all parts of the UK; maintaining and improving the management of public finances; providing high quality public services at the best possible value; and ensuring that the UK remains internationally competitive for the good of people all across the country.

While at ministerial level this relationship is led by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the rest of the ministerial team, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, also engage with ministers from the Scottish and Welsh governments, and the Northern Ireland Executive.

In the period covered by the quarterly report, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury met two Welsh Government ministers and one Scottish Government minister in January 2021 regarding the delivery of freeports. In February 2021, the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury met two Scottish Government ministers, one Welsh Government minister and one minister from the Northern Ireland Executive to discuss Net Zero, energy and climate change.

## 2.12 Home Office

Home Office (HO) engagement with the DAs at official level is extensive across all business areas. The engagement varies depending on whether the matter is reserved or devolved, and the resulting nature of the partnership working. The department leads on some important quadrilateral fora, such as those for managing the UK-wide approach to modern slavery, serious organised crime, internal security and fire and rescue services.

Over the past quarter, the HO has engaged with the DAs on health measures at the border, the future border and immigration system and on contingency asylum accommodation at ministerial and/or official level.

The HO is also actively engaged with the DAs on issues relating to drug misuse, including participation in regular monthly meetings between the UKG and the DAs. The Crime and Policing Minister met the Scottish Government Drugs Minister in February 2021 to discuss, amongst other things, holding a further UK Drugs ministerial meeting in the future.

Home Office ministers have also engaged with ministerial counterparts on prospective bills, including the Domestic Abuse Bill 2020 and Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021. The Minister for the Lords met the Lord Advocate to discuss the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill 2021 in which the HO committed to working with the Lord Advocate's office and operational partners to enable the implementation of guidelines in the absence of a Legislative Consent Memorandum.

The department will continue to engage the DAs on all areas of the business and is currently developing plans for an IMG on safety and security matters. The Home Secretary is committed to working collaboratively and sharing core activity and learning for all the people of the UK.

## 2.13 Ministry of Defence

Successful working and engagement with the DAs is important to defence to increase mutual understanding and improve policy making and outcomes. The armed forces and their families based in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales rely on devolved services. The complementary efforts across the UKG and the DAs to support our personnel and veterans provide positive examples of how the UKG and the DAs can work together to achieve common interests.

Defence ministers do not have devolved counterparts as such, but ministerial engagement is focused on portfolios covering industry, economy, military basing and support for the armed forces covenant and veterans. Throughout 2020 military assistance on the COVID-19 pandemic also presented opportunities for ministers and others to engage. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) ministers value regular bilateral ministerial engagement and will look for opportunities to increase and deepen those relations throughout 2021. The publication of the MoD Integrated Review Command Paper and the review of the Defence Security and Industrial Strategy in March 2021 will mark a renewed programme of engagement. Ministers will want to discuss implementation of conclusions from these reviews and opportunities created for the UKG and the DAs. Together with the Scottish Government, the MoD is exploring further collaboration on Defence Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and youth programmes and will look to roll these out further across the UK.

Senior military officers based in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and elsewhere also engage the DA ministers on issues relevant to the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. This will continue throughout 2021.

The Office for Veterans Affairs, based in the Cabinet Office, also co-chairs with the MoD the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board (MCVB). Details on this are covered in section 2.1.

## 2.14 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

As the UKG's department for 'place', the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is committed to building positive, constructive relationships with the DAs at all levels across its portfolio. These relationships are vital as MHCLG sets the pace on developing UK-wide programmes focused on left behind places and which will level up investment, prosperity and opportunity for all people, communities and businesses across the UK.

The MHCLG built these relationships through formal and informal engagement with the DAs. Senior officials lead discussions across the MHCLG portfolio, including on matters relating to local growth, housing market analysis, planning reform, building safety, local government and the ongoing response to COVID-19.

The department recognises the importance of constructive discussions at ministerial level. On 12 January 2021, the then UKG Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing met with Scottish Government's Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning to discuss amendments to the Building Safety Bill 2020.

To formalise the arrangements for ministerial discussions, officials are currently working with their counterparts in the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to establish a new IMG on housing, communities and local government. This IMG will provide the UKG and the DAs with a forum for discussions on devolved and reserved policy matters within the MHCLG's portfolio. Details of the meetings of this group will be published according to agreed transparency arrangements. It is intended that this IMG meets regularly, providing ministers from the UKG and the DAs the opportunity to discuss important areas of mutual interest.

In the coming months, the MHCLG's ministerial engagement will include several bilateral and multilateral discussions on the UKG's UK-wide investment programmes announced at the Budget on 3 March 2021, including the UK Community Renewal Fund, the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Community Ownership Fund. This engagement will also extend to local governments from all 4 nations who are being invited to a ministerial webinar hosted by the UKG. In the longer term, the aim is also to have broader discussions in areas of shared interest, including on the future role of communities and local government across the UK on crucial issues such as tackling climate change and the recovery from the pandemic.

This engagement will bring a better understanding of communities and places across the UK to the UKG and strengthen relationships between the UKG and the DAs. The aim is to include details of the first IMG meeting and the engagement following announcements made at the 2021 Budget in the next quarterly report.

## 2.15 Ministry of Justice

Because justice is devolved in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but a reserved matter in Wales, the major focus of the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) engagement with the DAs is with the Welsh Government. A concordat published in 2018, setting out good practice for working relationships between the MoJ and the Welsh Government, was an important step forward for improved IGR and justice outcomes for both administrations. It encourages MoJ ministers and officials to ensure the Welsh Government's interests when designing and implementing UK justice policy and activities likely to have an effect in Wales; and the Welsh Government, in turn, to consider the interests and responsibilities of the MoJ when exercising devolved functions. This clarity and accountability has fostered productive working relationships and the sharing of best practice.

However, there is also scope for closer work between the MoJ and the Scottish Government, Northern Ireland Executive, and their justice partners, on areas of shared mutual interest, such as prison policy. The MoJ is planning to increase this engagement.

Under the Concordat with the Welsh Government there is no fixed timetable for meetings. The primary relationship has been between the Minister for Prisons and Probation at the MoJ and the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip in the Welsh Government. They have met on an ad hoc basis around particular topics or decisions, supplemented by correspondence. The last meeting took place in January 2021. The Lord Chancellor has also met the Welsh Government's First Minister, Counsel General and Deputy Minister and Chief Whip and is committed to continuing to engage with them on justice matters.

MoJ agencies in Wales engage closely with the Welsh Government on a range of devolved responsibilities that are essential to delivering services to offenders, and within the civil and family justice system.

In terms of wider DA engagement, MoJ hosts a regular criminal justice discussion. This provides an opportunity for senior officials from the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive and MoJ operational officials from Wales, to meet to consider the latest criminal justice policy and operational issues, including COVID-19 management.

Ad hoc meetings take place regularly on cross-cutting policy issues, such as criminal compensation, legal services and judicial policy.

## 2.16 Northern Ireland Office

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SoSNI) and Minister of State for Northern Ireland (MoSNI) undertake regular bilateral engagements with ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive focused on a wide range of topics.

This year a core focus of such engagements has been in relation to the Northern Ireland Protocol and its implementation following the trade agreement with the EU. There has also been regular engagement on COVID-19 related matters, including the ongoing vaccination programme, economic recovery and easing of restrictions. Ministers also held a number of positive engagements in the lead up to the recent City Deals announcement for Derry/Londonderry, which reflects a real world example of how the successful collaboration of IGR can achieve significant milestones. The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) ministers and the Northern Ireland Executive ministers will continue to meet frequently, to discuss the major issues affecting Northern Ireland and encourage collaborative working between the UKG and the DAs.

This will include the ongoing quarterly Joint Board meetings, established as a part of the New Decade, New Approach deal, and which will be attended by the SoSNI, Northern Ireland's First and deputy First Minister and other Northern Ireland Executive ministers as required. The Joint Board provides oversight of the funding arrangements for the transformation in health, education and justice measures. This engagement will ensure that the UKG can support the Northern Ireland Executive to take steps to improve public services and increase the sustainability of Northern Ireland's finances. The last meeting of the Board took place on 3 March 2021.

## 2.17 Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland

The Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland (OSSS) ensures Scottish interests are fully and effectively represented at the heart of the UKG, and the UKG's responsibilities are fully and effectively represented in Scotland. The OSSS plays a central role in leading, facilitating and supporting engagement between the UKG and the Scottish Government.

The OSSS leads certain engagements with the Scottish Government and also supports respective lead policy departments in the UKG in their engagement with the Scottish Government. This broad spectrum of engagement with the Scottish Government, includes (but is not limited to) policy-based IMGs, regular COVID-19 meetings led by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce, and ad hoc engagement as and when required.

In January and February 2021, OSSS ministers met with counterparts in the Scottish Government 18 times. The OSSS led or chaired 4 engagements with the Scottish Government, while 14 engagements were led by another UKG department, with the OSSS supporting. In these meetings, OSSS ministers discussed a broad range of issues with Scottish Government counterparts, including the transition to new arrangements under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the Scottish seafood industry, and seed potato exports.

A strong example of engagement involving the Scottish Government in the early months of 2021 is the Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce, a time-limited group which is chaired by the OSSS and will run until May 2021. The taskforce meets fortnightly to identify issues with export, develop and recommend practical solutions, and ensure there is effective communication with the industry. It brings together the UKG departments, the Scottish Government, and stakeholders in the Scottish seafood export industry. Other examples of engagement include the announcement of a new £70 million Rural Growth Deal for Argyll and Bute in February 2021 by the UKG Minister for Scotland alongside the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity and the Argyll and Bute Council Leader. The Minister also jointly announced a

£4.5million investment in broadband for Central Scotland together with the Scottish Government's Minister for Connectivity.

Looking ahead to the next quarter, the OSSS will continue with the regular rhythm of engagement through IMGs covering areas of mutual interest to the UKG and the Scottish Government. The OSSS will continue to chair the fortnightly Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce until its conclusion in May 2021. In June, the next meeting of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare is set to take place. This group is co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People in Scottish Government. It meets every 6 months to ensure the implementation of welfare and employment-related aspects of the Scotland Act 2016.

## **2.18 Office of the Secretary of State for Wales**

Throughout January and February 2021, the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (OSSW) ministers met with the Welsh Government on 20 occasions, 12 of these engagements were led by other UKG departments with OSSW in a supporting role. This highlights the significant role of the OSSW in supporting and facilitating engagement between the UK and Welsh governments.

Discussions have taken place on a wide range of issues, including regional growth, border infrastructure and freeports. OSSW ministers also attend regular meetings chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on the UK-wide response to COVID-19 and various IMGs. OSSW ministers have also met Welsh Government ministers to discuss topics such as the upcoming Senedd elections and coal tips safety in Wales.

There has been an unprecedented level of engagement between the UKG and the DAs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 is the biggest challenge the UK and Welsh governments have faced in generations. Throughout it, the 2 governments have worked more closely than ever before and OSSW ministers remain committed to a UK-wide approach to tackling the virus.

In the coming months, the OSSW will continue to engage with the Welsh Government bilaterally and in various ministerial fora. The OSSW will continue to work with other UKG departments to support engagement with the Welsh Government.



