



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Intergovernmental Relations Annual Report 2023

Reporting Period 1 January - 31 December 2023

Reporting on intergovernmental working
between the UK Government,
Scottish Government, and Welsh Government
and Northern Ireland Executive.

April 2024



Intergovernmental Relations Annual Report 2023

Reporting Period 1 January - 31 December 2023

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations
The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, by Command of His Majesty

April 2024

This information is also available on the GOV.UK website: www.gov.uk/government/collections/intergovernmental-relations



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Foreword

The year 2023 was regarded as momentous for many reasons. The month of April marked the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. In the past 25 years since then, communities have achieved great things as a result of the Agreement, which has brought peace and prosperity to Northern Ireland. This anniversary also marked the creation of the infrastructure for devolved government in Northern Ireland – and the Government was pleased to see the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive in February 2024.

We also saw the 25th anniversary of the Scotland Act 1998 receiving Royal Assent, which made provision for a Scottish Government and a Scottish Parliament to which they would be accountable.

This first quarter century of devolution has seen a sea change in the way the UK is governed. It has created new political, legislative and governmental institutions that ensure that, in a whole raft of areas, decisions and choices are taken close to the people and communities they affect. It recognises the diversity across the UK, while binding us together on the basis of our shared values and history. These milestones are also a reminder that although much has changed around us, our strong and established devolution settlements require equally strong and robust intergovernmental relations to better equip the UK to face the challenges presented.

In 2023 alone, the commitment to devolution has resulted in: the historic events supporting the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla, where governments worked closely together to keep people safe and make sure everyone across the UK could come together to mark this historic event. In sports, the UK hosted the world's largest cycling event with the UCI Cycling World Championships being held in Glasgow, and the UK and Ireland were successful in the joint bid to host the UEFA European Championships in 2028. Other successes include the unlocking of two Green Freeports in Scotland and two Freeports in Wales which between them will attract £15 billion in investment and create around 95,000 new, high-skilled jobs; and our joint work to tighten the rules on owning dangerous dog breeds such as XL Bully dogs.

We have also continued to work together to respond to challenges facing the UK from inflationary pressures to the rise in energy costs underlining the importance of working together to tackle the issues we collectively face.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication and hard work of ministers and civil servants across the UK, working together in the national interest.

As we enter into the third year since the publication of the Intergovernmental Relations Review, we will build on the fantastic work which has taken place in 2023.

I look forward to continuing productive working relationships with the First Minister of Scotland, the Rt Hon Humza Yousaf MSP, and working with the new First Minister of Wales, Vaughan Gething MS to build on the respectful and effective relationship I have had with the Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS over the years. I also look forward to working with Northern Ireland's new First Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA, and deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA.

Intergovernmental relations is a continuing process which we all must commit to and deliver for the citizens of the United Kingdom. As this Annual Report sets out, much has been accomplished, but by continuing to work closely together in 2024, we can achieve even more.



The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

**Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities and Minister for
Intergovernmental Relations**

2023 in Summary

2023 continued to see the expansion and progression of the systems set out in the Intergovernmental Relations Review. Through the structures set out in the Review, new forums were set up covering justice, social security, public safety, national security and migration, further enhancing the breadth of policy areas on which the Government engages with the devolved administrations.

There were a total of 210 intergovernmental ministerial meetings in 2023.

Ministerial meetings, as well as daily meetings between civil servants made sure that the Government was working together with the devolved administrations at all levels.¹

Engagement in 2023 took place across the areas that mattered most to citizens across the UK, with the Prime Minister meeting both the First Minister of Scotland and the First Minister of Wales in the first quarter of the year. Ensuring that people were supported through cost of living pressures and rising energy costs was a priority for the Government at the beginning of the year, with engagement taking place with the devolved administrations ahead of the Spring Budget in March. Quarter 1 also saw the breaking of new ground with the inaugural meeting of the Interministerial Group for Safety, Security and Migration taking place in February.

Quarter 2 saw the 25th anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the various events which took place around this huge milestone. This quarter also saw a raft of introductory meetings between Government ministers in newly created UK Government departments with counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh governments, laying the groundwork for constructive relationships moving forward.

Quarter 3 saw further fiscal related meetings take place in advance of the Autumn Statement, as well as meetings taking place to plan for the common pressures experienced by the NHS across winter of 2023/24. This quarter also saw more

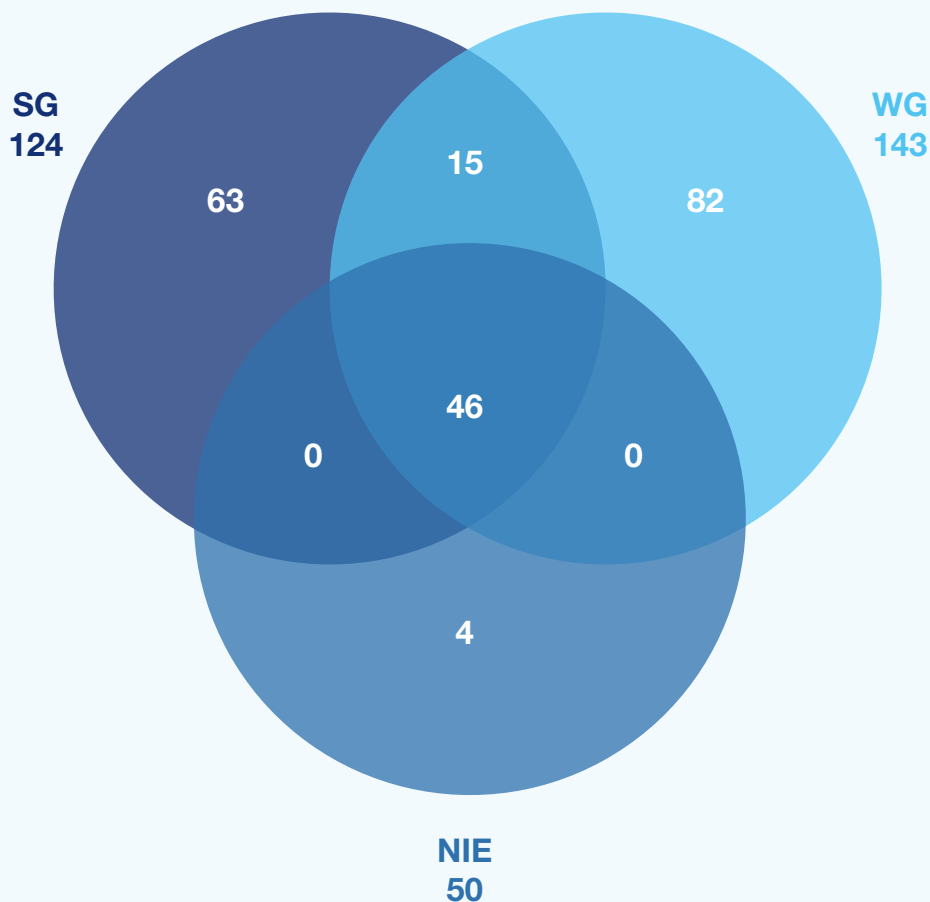
¹ To note, from 11 February 2022 until the end of quarter 4 of 2023, the Northern Ireland Executive was not in place and, as such, senior civil servants attended in the absence of ministerial representation. The data was collected through a proforma completed by departments. The analysis was quality assured by an independent analyst.

intergovernmental milestones being achieved with the inaugural meeting of the Interministerial Group for Justice taking place in September, discussing prison capacity and reducing court backlogs.

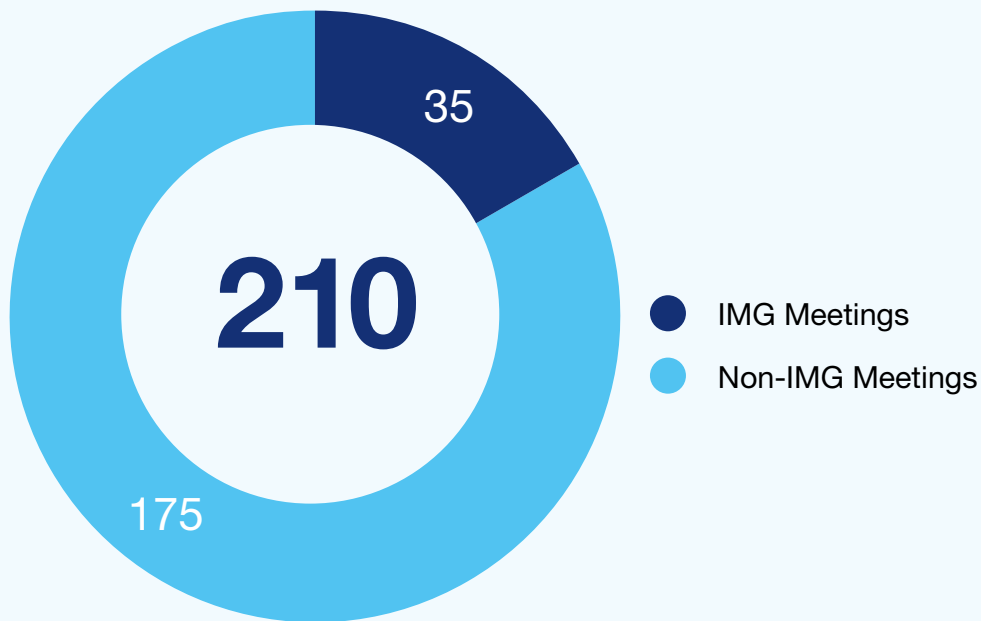
The last quarter of the year witnessed the 40th Summit of the British-Irish Council in Dublin, as well as the third Interministerial Standing Committee of the year and the second meeting in 2023 of the Islands Forum, which took place on the Isle of Lewis and looked at ways of improving connectivity between islands around the UK. Quarter 4 also saw the inaugural meeting of the Interministerial Group for Work and Pensions with Welsh Government ministers, which discussed different initiatives by the UK and Welsh governments to support people to claim their benefit entitlements.

Number of ministerial meetings between UK Government (UKG) and Welsh Government (WG), Scottish Government (SG), or Northern Ireland Executive (NIE)

A total of 46 meetings took place between UKG, WG, SG and NIE.



Number of ministerial meetings between UK Government and devolved administrations

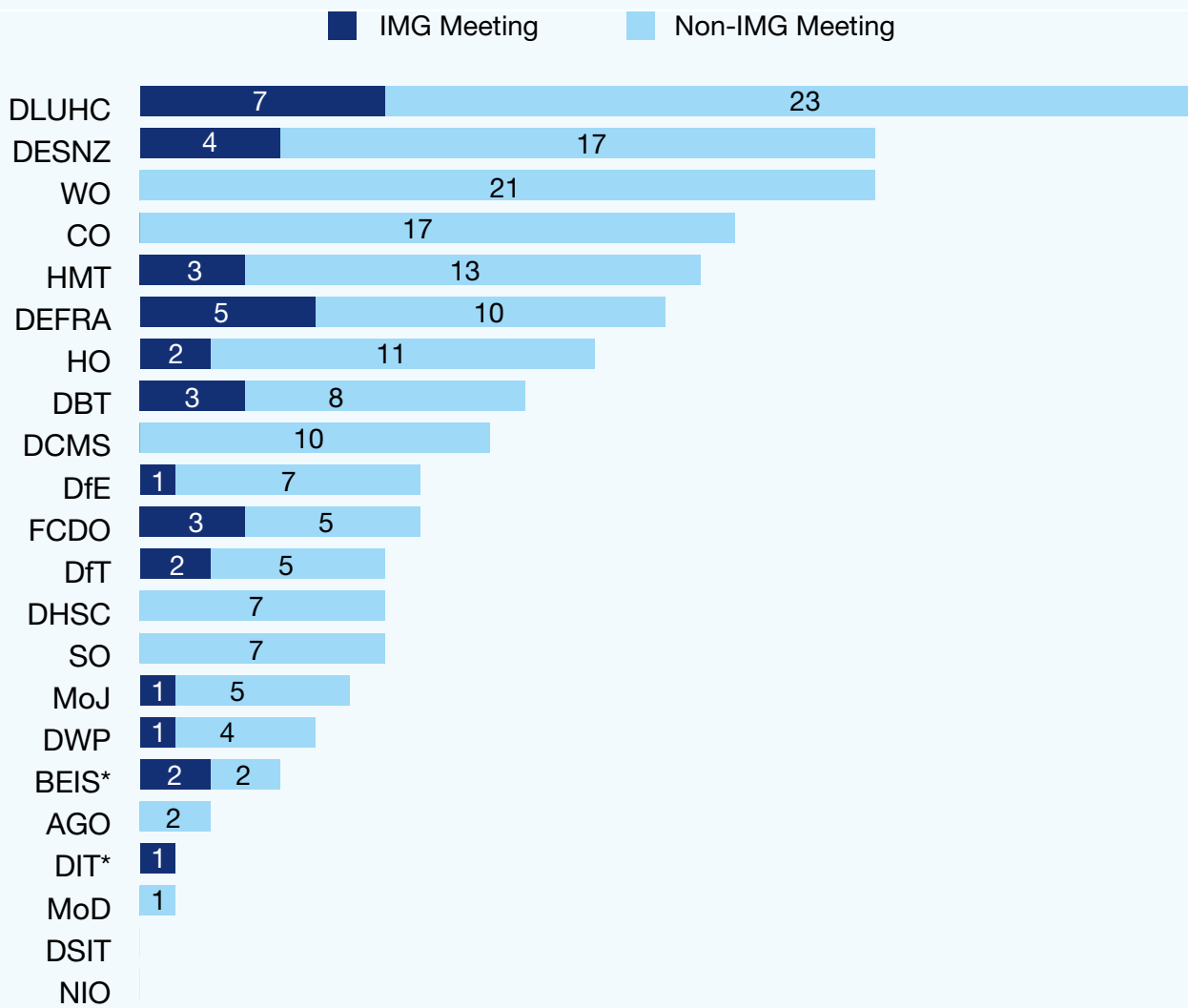


Topics of ministerial intergovernmental meetings in 2023



Note: each meeting could cover topics so the totals will not sum. In addition to these selected topics, other topics will have been covered in meetings. Not all meetings have been categorised into these topics.

Ministerial meetings between UK Government departments and devolved administrations in 2023



*BEIS was replaced by DESNZ, DSIT, and DBT as of February 7th 2023; DIT was replaced by DBT as of 7th February 2023

Highlights of 2023

Over the course of 2023, the Government has attended over 210 formal intergovernmental meetings, two British-Irish Council Summits and two Islands Forums. The Interministerial Standing Committee met three times and the Prime Minister met with Welsh Government First Minister, the Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS, to announce two new Freeports in Wales. The Prime Minister also engaged with Scottish Government First Minister, the Rt Hon Humza Yousaf MSP, when he assumed his position in March.

— Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement

One of the key milestones from 2023 was the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The anniversary year offered an opportunity to look to the future and consider how we can build on the remarkable progress Northern Ireland has made in this past quarter century. The Government marked the anniversary year through numerous events across the UK's extensive diplomatic network, including a gala dinner among those involved on the journey to the Agreement, and those that have contributed to Northern Ireland's peace and prosperity since its signing. The Government and local leaders marked this historic event alongside Ireland's Taoiseach and Tánaiste and welcomed President Biden and US Special Envoy Joe Kennedy III to Belfast, restating our shared commitment to helping Northern Ireland prosper.



Original signed Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement

■ Interministerial Standing Committee

The Interministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) brings together relevant ministers to consider matters across numerous policy areas, making sure that there is vital oversight on cross-cutting issues such as: the work on the engagement in response to cost of living pressures; and agreeing to work together to bring about proposals for a smoke free generation. More recently at the October meeting, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP noted the plans to restrict the sale and possession of XL Bully dogs, which has led to a consistent approach across UK Government and devolved administrations. The Interministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) met three times in 2023. Ministers attended from the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments, with senior officials from the Northern Ireland Civil Service attending in an observational capacity.

Ministers from various policy areas are invited to attend the IMSC to provide their insight into cross-cutting issues covered in specific meetings. At the October meeting, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories,) David Rutley MP and the Minister of State for Development and Africa, the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, provided updates on international issues such as the situation in Israel and Gaza as well as to consider next steps in the International Development White Paper, and on ways to ensure collaborative engagement between governments on areas of shared international interest.

■ British-Irish Council

The British-Irish Council continues to play a significant role in intergovernmental relations between the UK and devolved administrations and more widely across these islands (the Governments of Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey, and the Isle of Man). 2023 marked the 25th anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the creation of the British-Irish Council.

The Council held two Summit meetings in 2023, in June in Jersey and in November in Dublin. Both were attended by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP.



L-R Micheál Martin TD, Tánaiste, Government of Ireland, Deputy Peter Ferbrache, Chief Minister, Government of Guernsey, the Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister, Welsh Government, Leo Varadkar TD, Taoiseach, Government of Ireland, Deputy Kristina Moore, Chief Minister, Government of Jersey, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, UK Government, the Rt Hon Humza Yousaf MSP, First Minister Scottish Government, the Hon Alfred Cannan MHK, Chief Minister, Isle of Man Government, the Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, UK Government

In Jersey, the Summit was hosted by the Government of Jersey. Ministers discussed housing policy, with a particular focus on energy efficiency, decarbonisation, and the provision of suitable and affordable housing. Ministers visited The Limes housing development, an innovative example of energy efficient and affordable housing.

The November summit in Dublin, hosted by the Government of Ireland, marked the 25th anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement with an exhibition of the original signed Agreement.



L-R the Hon Alfred Cannan MHK, Chief Minister, Isle of Man Government, the Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister, Welsh Government, Micheál Martin TD, Tánaiste, Government of Ireland, Leo Varadkar TD, Taoiseach, Government of Ireland, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, UK Government, the Rt Hon Humza Yousaf MSP, First Minister Scottish Government, Deputy Kristina Moore, Chief Minister, Government of Jersey, the Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, UK Government

Ministers discussed the summit theme of ‘Transforming Children’s Lives: Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Wellbeing’, including a range of policy projects impacting child wellbeing. Ministers reflected on the lasting impact of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, and the importance of the British-Irish Council as one of the interlocking and interdependent institutions established under the Agreement. They also discussed a number of topics of mutual interest, including the situation in Israel and Gaza, the potential for joint activity between the governments aimed at addressing the risks to community cohesion across the UK, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Islands Forum

The Islands Forum continues to bring together participating island communities from across the UK, with the UK and devolved administrations, to tackle common challenges, including skills, infrastructure, and connectivity, and explore opportunities such as the transition to net zero. The forum also allows the Government to hear from island communities, ensuring their perspectives are reflected in central policy development and decision making.

The forum met twice in 2023, to discuss two key challenges for island communities: building and retaining a skilled workforce; and physical and digital connectivity.

Isle of Wight Forum

Held on the Isle of Wight in May 2023, the second forum meeting on skills and innovation focussed on islands' skills ambitions and was attended by council leaders and chief executives representing all eligible island communities from across the UK.

The forum was chaired by the Secretary for Levelling Up, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, supported by the then Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education Minister, the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, the then Levelling Up Minister, Dehenna Davison MP, and the then Scotland Office Minister, Lord Offord. The devolved administrations were also represented, with Scottish Government Minister Graeme Dey MSP, Welsh Government Minister Vaughan Gething MS, and Northern Ireland Civil Service Skills Initiatives Lead, Raymond Kelly, taking part. Bob Seely MP, the Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight, also attended.



The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations on a site visit to Wight Shipyard Company as part of the Isle of Wight Islands Forum

Island representatives shared perspectives on building flexible skills programmes, partnering effectively with local businesses and educational institutions, and encouraging lifelong learning. Forum members agreed to collaborate further on skills, with the Government facilitating further engagement for members with the Department for Education and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, and in the international arena.

Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Western Isles) Forum

The third Islands Forum held on Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Western Isles) in October 2023 focussed on physical and digital connectivity, recognising the importance of this issue to islands, particularly those with no fixed links to the mainland. Council leaders and chief executives representing island communities from across the UK attended. They shared their views on the importance of connectivity to island economies and communities, current connectivity challenges, and the need to work together to

address these challenges in an integrated way. The forum also agreed further work will be carried out to improve digital connectivity, supporting the ongoing work by Building Digital UK in partnership with the Scottish and Welsh governments

The forum was chaired by Secretary for Levelling Up, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, supported by the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Richard Holden MP, Levelling Up Minister, Jacob Young MP, the then Scotland Office Minister, Lord Offord, and Building Digital UK representative, Martyn Taylor. The devolved administrations were also represented, with Scottish Government Minister Fiona Hyslop MSP, Welsh Government Minister Lee Waters MS, and the Northern Ireland Civil Service Director of Regional Planning, Governance and Legislation, Kathryn McFerran, taking part. Dr Alasdair Allan MSP for Na h-Eileanan an Iar/Western Isles, also attended.



Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Jacob Young MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Scotland Office, Lord Malcolm Offord of Garvel CVO, the Scottish Government's then Minister for Transport, Fiona Hyslop MSP with representatives from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetlands Islands Council, Argyll and Bute Council, Orkney Islands Council, The Highland Council, and the Council of the Isles of Scilly at the Islands Forum held on Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Western Isles) in October 2023

Island communities are a distinct and vital part of the United Kingdom. 2023 has seen the Islands Forum become embedded as a new engagement structure across the UK, focussing on issues that matter to island communities, and ensuring island voices are heard and reflected in government policy development and decision making.

Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla

In 2023, the Government was honoured to support The Royal Household in delivering the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla.



Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla on the day of their Coronation

As part of the extensive preparation, the Government worked closely with the devolved administrations to support plans for a nationwide celebration of this historic event. This included funding big screens across the UK to watch the Coronation Service and a televised concert at Windsor Castle.

Armed Forces from across the UK, including The Royal Welsh regiment, The Welsh Guards, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, The Scots Guards, The Royal Irish Regiment and Irish Guards, took part in the Coronation procession. Gun salutes took place in every nation including at Edinburgh Castle, Cardiff Castle and Hillsborough Castle in Belfast.



Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP and his family at the Coronation Big Lunch in Downing Street

As well as the planning for the ceremonial day itself, governments worked together to help communities come together in celebration. This included initiatives such as the Big Lunch, and the Big Help Out, as well as educational materials including a short film for primary schools, with English, Welsh and Gaelic versions available to help explain the Coronation and its history to our younger children. More than 4,600 events around the UK were shared on a DCMS-led interactive map of Coronation events.



Coronation Big Lunch at Downing Street

— Economy and Trade

Maintaining good relationships with the devolved administrations has been essential in the Government's approach to a variety of key areas.

Throughout 2023, tackling the pressures on the cost of living remained essential with ministers from His Majesty's Treasury meeting with the devolved administrations sixteen times in the last year. This included three meetings of the Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee, which covered a broad range of topics, including the UK's economic and fiscal position, identifying the pressures on public spending, renewable energy and energy security, and the UK Emissions Trading Scheme and giving the devolved administration finance ministers the opportunity to discuss their key issues looking towards the Spring Budget and Autumn Statement.

The year 2023 also saw the successful conclusion and agreement of the review of the Scottish Government's Fiscal Framework which underpins the powers over tax and welfare that are devolved to Scotland through the Scotland Acts of 2012

and 2016. This allows the Scottish Government exercise its fiscal powers fully and flexibly, whilst still operating within a sustainable fiscal framework for the whole of the UK and incentivises the Scottish Government to increase economic growth while allowing Scotland to contribute to the UK as a whole.



The Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP meets the then First Minister of Wales Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS

The UK has worked closely with both the Welsh and Scottish governments on various joint economic interventions such as two new Welsh Freeports and two new Scottish Green Freeports, and the four Investment Zones with two each announced in both Scotland and Wales. These joint economic interventions provide yet more examples of a strong Union providing benefits for citizens across the United Kingdom. In every corner of Wales, they will help to create skilled jobs, drive growth and level up opportunities; from the Anglesey Freeport, the Celtic Freeport in Port Talbot & Milford Haven, the Cardiff & Newport Investment Zone, and the Wrexham & Flintshire Investment Zone. The Government has made sure that the Welsh Government has played an active role with the Secretary of State for Wales, Secretary of State for Levelling Up and Welsh Minister for Economy meeting in advance of these announcements to discuss the investments.

The Department for Business and Trade, the UK Government's department for economic growth, supports businesses to invest, grow and export, creating jobs and opportunities across the UK. DBT was formed in February 2023 bringing together the business, growth, and international trade focussed elements of other departments. Both functions bring well-established and effective Ministerial relationships with the devolved administrations which have continued throughout 2023. In 2023 DBT (and its forerunners) hosted five Interministerial Group meetings across both Business & Industry and Trade portfolios.

The devolved administrations are fully integrated into the UK programme negotiating new 'free trade agreements' (FTAs) from launch to conclusion including detailed influencing where trade intersects with devolved responsibilities and broader information sharing across the whole FTA portfolio including on reserved policy. During 2023 the UK: successfully concluded negotiations to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade grouping; progressed a programme of other FTA dialogues and non-FTA agreements including a successful programme of Memoranda of Understanding with US States; and has seen entry into force of previously agreed new FTAs with Australia and New Zealand where the Government and the devolved administrations are now moving into a new phase co-operating on implementation and leveraging the new preferential terms of trade to promote business growth in all parts of the United Kingdom. The devolved administrations have been closely engaged and active partners throughout to ensure their policy perspectives are fully taken into account.

— Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government

2023 saw regular engagement with devolved administration ministers across the levelling up, housing, communities, and local government portfolios. This has included valuable and productive bilateral and trilateral meetings on investment zones, freeports, the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act, the Homes for Ukraine programme, and Afghan Resettlement.

The Intergovernmental Relations structures have enabled helpful discussions on the key shared priorities of housing and building safety. The Interministerial Group for Housing, Communities and Local Government met twice, discussing how to tackle homelessness and then a range of housing topics, including the private rented sector,

and progress made on building safety. These discussions led to commitments for further official working in these areas.

In Partnership with Wales

The Government continued to work in partnership with the Welsh Government throughout 2023 to deliver long term investment towards sustainable economic growth via Wales's four City and Regional Growth Deals. The Secretary of State for Wales, the Rt Hon David TC Davies MP also met with Vaughan Gething MS and local leaders from southeast Wales in October to discuss plans for the Cardiff City Deal's move into the new Corporate Joint Committee structure. He also met with Vaughan Gething MS ahead of the announcement of new Investment Zones, one in Cardiff and Newport, as well as another in Wrexham and Flintshire, both of which will drive innovation and economic growth. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales, Fay Jones MP (as well as her predecessor Dr James Davies MP) regularly engaged with the Welsh Minister for Economy Vaughan Gething MS about the Deals, meeting jointly with local leaders from all four City and Region Growth Deals in Wales.

The TATA Steel Transition Board is chaired by the Secretary of State for Wales, the Rt Hon David TC Davies MP, with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP and the Welsh Minister for Economy, Vaughan Gething MS as deputy chairs. The Board was set up to support the people, businesses and communities affected by the proposed transition to low-CO₂ steelmaking and will make recommendations for where up to £100 million made available by the Government and TATA Steel UK could be invested in support measures and longer-term regeneration. Joint statements were published following the Transition Board's first meetings in October and in November 2023, which included the announcement of the investment of grant from the Government of up to £500 million to support people, businesses and communities affected by the proposed transition.

In Partnership with Scotland

Similarly, in Scotland the announcement of Green Freeports in the Inverness and Cromarty Firth and in the Firth of Forth will act as a catalyst for new green technologies, alternative fuels and renewable energy manufacturing, whilst stimulating the country's re-industrialisation and accelerating Scotland's path to a cleaner future. Investment Zones in Glasgow City Region and North East of Scotland will also help to level-up

Scotland and drive long-term innovation and stimulate economic growth and will be focused around research institutions such as universities, whilst driving growth in priority sectors. The selection of these locations and ongoing engagement with these areas throughout 2023 is the result of significant joint work between the UK and Scottish Governments.

The key areas of focus throughout 2023 were access to labour, energy costs and export opportunities.

2023 saw the signing of the full deal agreement for the Islands Growth Deal to which the Government has committed £50 million. This will include support over a ten-year period for projects in the culture, net zero and innovation space, by investing in 16 projects and programmes that capitalise on the Islands' unique assets. The Government also listened to The Highland Council who were seeking much needed improvements to the infrastructure to support the ferry service between Corran and Ardgour. The MV Corran ferry service is a lifeline for remote communities in the west coast of Scotland, and therefore, the Government agreed to re-profile £20 million from the Inverness & Highland City Region Deal to upgrade the landside ferry infrastructure.

The Scottish Seafood Industry Action Group met twice in 2023 and is a forum where stakeholders can raise any cross-cutting challenges that emerge across the sector, flagging these for resolution with all parts of the Government, the Scottish Government and the Scottish seafood industry.

■ Social Security

Ministers from the Welsh Government and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) held the inaugural meeting of the Interministerial Group on Work and Pensions, which discussed different initiatives by the UK and Welsh Governments to support people to claim their benefit entitlements.

In 2023, the beginning of the transfer of cases of Personal Independence Payment to Adult Disability Payment, the completion of case transfer for Child Disability Payment and the introduction of the Scottish Government's Carer Support Payment took place. This was in line with the devolution of certain aspects of social security to the Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act 2016 and was facilitated by the continued close engagement between the DWP and the Scottish Government. The

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare, met twice in 2023 to review progress formally, supplemented by one more informal bilateral discussion between DWP and Scottish Government ministers.

In Northern Ireland, social security, child maintenance and pensions are transferred matters, but the Department of Communities in Northern Ireland generally maintains parity with the Government. This is in line with the requirement of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for ministers in Northern Ireland Executive and the Government to consult each other with a view to maintaining, as far as possible, a single system. In the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive, officials from Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland have worked closely together to support this aim.

Health

Health remains a shared and top priority for the Government and the devolved administrations with extensive working taking place throughout 2023. The inaugural Interministerial Group for Health and Social Care met in July and discussed common pressures across the National Health Service, planning for winter 2023/2024, and future areas for discussion.

Discussions on Elective Recovery, and the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration took place at a quadrilateral meeting of health ministers in October. Ministers also said that they would like to discuss, amongst other things, agency caps and temporary staffing at the next IMG.

As part of her role as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Women Maria Caulfield MP, met with the UK Menopause Taskforce to discuss a variety of topics including, menopause training for healthcare professionals, raising awareness of menopause particularly amongst women, and the NHS Menopause Improvement Programme. Furthermore, ministers met on other key issues throughout 2023 such as the discussion on COVID-19 travel restrictions in relation to China; the Minimum Service Levels Bill; public health collaboration; and NHS dental services across the UK.

Energy and Environment

Looking after our environment is a shared endeavour for this Government and the devolved administrations. In 2023, the Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change met five times, with two of these meetings attended by key advisers to the Government. The meeting in April was attended by Nick Winsor, UK Electricity Network Commissioner and focused on grid network investment. Chris Stark, Chair of the Climate Change Committee attended the November meeting and provided an update on progress towards Net Zero, which was followed by a discussion on collaborative working between governments on climate change.

Other discussions at the Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change during 2023 included: an update on the then newly created Department for Energy Security and Net Zero; the Emissions Trading System; Heat and Buildings Decarbonisation; the Prime Minister's 20 September 2023 speech on Net Zero; as well as a forward look on priority topics for discussion in 2024. There were also discussions focusing on collaboration in the areas of Just Transition and Levelling Up; Public Engagement and Behaviour Change; and Green Skills.

Discussions on key areas such as energy affordability, including the Energy Price Guarantee, consumer protection and prepayment meters all took place between ministers from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the devolved administrations in 2023, making sure that vital support could be provided to citizens across the UK to pay their energy bills.

Significant engagement also took place with officials in Northern Ireland in the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive. This engagement resulted in the direct delivery of support to consumers in Northern Ireland with their energy bill costs. The Government made up to £15 million of reallocated funding available to Northern Ireland to respond to flooding, supporting affected business and aiding clean-up costs.

Sustained ministerial engagement was also key in helping to secure legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament for the Energy Act 2023. This engagement also led to the creation of a new ministerial forum on Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage (CCUS) – an intergovernmental forum will meet regularly to support the deployment of CCUS across the UK. The inaugural meeting of this new ministerial group took place in December 2023.

At the beginning of 2023 the Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs discussed the outcome of Convention on Biological Diversity conference (CBD COP 15), which was held in Montreal in December 2022, and was successful in achieving agreements on ambitious outcomes and targets, including to ‘halt and reverse global biodiversity loss by 2030’; to protect 30% of global lands and oceans by 2030 and for strengthened mechanisms for planning, reporting and review. In May, ministers continued the discussion on how the administrations were going to collectively implement the Global Biodiversity Framework to achieve the COP15 outcomes and agreed that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) should facilitate and coordinate a cross-UK response ahead of COP16.

— Sport

2023 was a terrific year for sport in the UK with the UCI Cycling World Cycling Championships taking place in Glasgow and across Scotland through August. Funded by the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, UK Sport and British Cycling, this was an enormous success with the event comprising of 13 different UCI Championships, taking place in no less than 14 local authority areas, with 129 nations taking part and in front of over one million spectators across Scotland during the eleven days of competition.



The UCI Cycling World Cycling Championships took place in Scotland in 2023

Also in 2023, it was confirmed that the joint UK and Ireland bid to host the UEFA European Championships in 2028 was successful. Each government agreed to support the five Football Associations to submit a joint bid in April 2023 and the UK and Ireland won the right to host the tournament in October 2023. This was the culmination of regular meetings between ministers from the Government, the Welsh and Scottish governments; senior officials from the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and ministers from the Irish Government, as well as constant dialogue and joint working between officials from all governments.

Heads of Government from the UK, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish governments were involved in a joint video expressing their support for the bid. This video was used in the presentation made to UEFA by the bid executive.



Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP with Harry Kane MBE and Gareth Southgate OBE

In addition to this success and after a short hiatus, the Sport Cabinet met on 13 November 2023. As part of this meeting it was agreed to rename the group the Interministerial Group for Sport, in line with Intergovernmental Relations Review. As

well as general updates from attendees the meeting also discussed; the potential for closer working between the Sports Ground Safety Authority and the devolved administrations; a shared commitment to women and girls' sport, and an update on the Sport Integrity call for evidence.

The next meeting of the Interministerial Group for Sport is being planned for March in Glasgow, to coincide with the World Indoor Athletics Championships.

Education

During 2023, the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, hosted the fourth UK Education Ministers Council in Liverpool, which was focussed on the theme of being digital in education. Ministers discussed current and future digital approaches to transform teacher workload and support effective teaching and learning, including the opportunities and risks presented by emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. Department for Education ministers also met their counterparts in the devolved administrations to discuss and share information relating to Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in schools and the new Advanced British Standard. This education reform will bring together A levels and T Levels into a new single qualification framework and increase the time students spend in the classroom in England.

International

International issues were discussed in various different IGR forums including a discussion at the Interministerial Standing Committee meeting in October. The Interministerial Group on UK-EU Relations, chaired by the then Minister for Europe Leo Docherty MP, and attended by devolved administration ministers, met three times in 2023. The first and second meetings were held ahead of Trade and Cooperation Agreement Partnership Council and Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee meetings, and the third was called to discuss priorities of both the Government and the devolved administrations ahead of a series of Trade and Cooperation Agreement governance meetings.

The Minister for International Development, the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, met with Scottish Government ministers Neil Gray MSP and Christina McKelvie MSP, in March and October 2023 respectively, to discuss UK overseas development activity

and the International Development White Paper which sets out the UK's strategy to meet its international development goals of ending extreme poverty as well as tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.

In June, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Americas, Caribbean and the Overseas Territories), David Rutley MP – whose portfolio includes the FCDO's devolution activity – met with Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary Angus Robertson MSP in Edinburgh, where they discussed international initiatives relating to devolved areas.

His Majesty's Ambassadors and High Commissioners include Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as an important part of their visit programmes. Visits in 2023 included those undertaken by the British Ambassador to Argentina (to Scotland), and the British Ambassadors to Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan (to Wales).

The Attorney General and Solicitor General met with the Counsel General for Wales to discuss Senedd reform, retained EU law, and the prosecution of war crimes in Ukraine.

■ Safety, Security, and Migration

The Home Office established its Interministerial Group for Safety, Security, and Migration in February 2023. The group has met twice since its establishment, both meetings being chaired by the then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP. The meetings covered three core themes of the group – safety, security and migration – with all parties agreeing the importance of closer relations and effective cooperation.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, the Rt Hon Chris Philp MP chaired two UK Ministerial Meetings with the devolved administrations (and other partners) to discuss the most pressing issues relating to drug abuse in the UK. Chris Philp MP also joined a meeting of the Policing Partnership Board for Wales in the first quarter of 2023.

The Minister for Security, the Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MBE VR MP, attended the conference to mark the 25th anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement as well as the Cyber UK Conference in Belfast in early 2023.

On migration, the then Minister for Immigration, the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, also held a number of bilateral discussions with the Scottish Government and Welsh

Government to discuss accommodation and resettlement within Scotland and Wales respectively.

Justice

The first meeting of the Interministerial Group for Justice took place in September, marking the start to a regular intergovernmental forum that facilitates engagement on important justice issues of mutual interest.

In a positive inaugural meeting, which was chaired by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice, Lord Bellamy KC, the Terms of Reference for the group was agreed, with a number of shared and high-profile issues also being discussed, such as prison capacity and court recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the year, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice, Lord Bellamy KC and the Counsel General for Wales met on numerous occasions to discuss justice issues in Wales.

In September, Lord Bellamy also spoke alongside the Counsel General and First Minister for Wales at the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association annual conference which took place in Cardiff.

Elections

Regular engagement on matters relating to elections and electoral registration in the UK remained key in 2023, as the Government continued to implement the Elections Act 2022 and the Scottish and Welsh governments both progressed plans for electoral reform for devolved elections. The Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration, which met twice, continued to provide a vital forum for ministerial discussion on these areas.

Transport

The Interministerial Group for Transport Matters was re-established in 2023 with the first meeting in May led by Welsh Government. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Minister for Climate Change Lee Waters MS, with the Minister for Roads and Local Transport Richard Holden MP also in attendance. The Scottish Government was represented by Minister for Transport Kevin Stewart MSP, and Minister for

Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights Patrick Harvie MSP, with Julie Harrison, Permanent Secretary, Department for Infrastructure representing the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The agenda focussed on the opportunities for collaboration around the use and collection of, UK wide data as well as how Active Travel projects are being implemented across the UK and learning shared between the governments.

In September, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Richard Holden MP attended the IMG, which was chaired by Scottish Government minister Fiona Hyslop MSP, and attended by Lee Waters MS and a senior official representing Northern Ireland. The topics for discussion were Rail Reform, Minimum Service Levels and the Zero Emissions Vehicles mandates.

The Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Mark Harper MP visited Cardiff in January to meet key stakeholders connected to the Cardiff Central Station redevelopment programme and announce Levelling Up Fund support for the Cardiff Crossrail scheme, and in April he also visited the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and RNLi in Aberdeen as well as Forth Ports at Grangemouth. In Glasgow, he toured City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Science Centre and Glasgow Airport.

The then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Richard Holden MP also undertook a number of visits. In Scotland, he met with the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland, saw Ravenscraig Bridge project, visited Hydrogen Vehicle Systems Ltd in Glasgow as well as Glasgow Airport and visited Lothian Buses in Edinburgh. He also travelled to Northern Ireland where Translink gave him a demonstration of hydrogen buses. He visited City of Derry Airport where he met with the then Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure, Julie Harrison to discuss a range of matters pertinent to Northern Ireland's transport system. Richard Holden MP also visited the sites of two Levelling Up Fund projects in Rhondda Cynon Taff, where he met with key contractors, local authority representatives and other stakeholders. He also visited the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea.

Numerous other visits have taken place throughout the year such as Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Mark Harper MP visit to Munro Vehicles in Glasgow as well as NATS and Spirit Aerosystems in Prestwick in August. The then Minister of State in the Department for Transport, the Rt Hon Jesse Norman MP, visited Scotland to tour Skyrora in Cumbernauld and AAC Clydespace in Glasgow who are working on the UK's space capabilities. The Minister of State (Rail and HS2), Huw

Merriman MP visited train manufacturer CAF in Newport, South Wales, as well as the Global Centre of Rail Excellence at Onllwyn, he also visited Ynys Môn in North Wales to meet key stakeholders involved in a number of local rail schemes and view rail operations at Holyhead. Finally, in September Baroness Vere visited Northern Ireland where she met with a variety of representatives from a range of transport related bodies including Artemis, Harland and Wolff Shipyard and Belfast Harbour.



Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Mark Harper MP visits Munro Vehicles in East Kilbride

All of these visits demonstrate ministers' interest in transport matters across the whole UK and provided an opportunity to see innovation in a range of areas including decarbonisation.

— Culture and creativity

In the 2021 Plan for Growth, the Creative Industries were identified as a priority sector to drive economic growth, as such DCMS was invited to develop the Government strategy called the Creative Industries Sector Vision with industry. Working with industry and across departments, DCMS set out a range of ambitions for the future

growth of the sector, including innovation, investment, exports and skills. DCMS worked with colleagues in the devolved administrations to gain their agreement in principle and used the opportunity to highlight important interventions led by them. The Sector Vision also included the agreement to establish an Interministerial Group for Culture and the Creative Industries, as well as, inviting organisations from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to be members of the industry-government forum, the Creative Industries Council – co-chaired by industry and Government ministers.

The Sector Vision was published successfully in June 2023 with the support of the devolved administrations, alongside £50m of additional funding for creative industries programmes.

Common Frameworks Update

Common Frameworks, as agreed ways of working between the Government and the devolved administrations, are increasing trust and transparency between the UK and devolved administrations. The programme continues to make progress towards full implementation with 30 out of 32 Frameworks operational, and regular meetings to ensure that the UK and devolved administrations take a joined-up and collaborative approach to managing regulatory divergence. Parliamentary scrutiny of the majority of Frameworks is complete and they are ready for the Northern Ireland Executive to agree following the restoration of the Executive.

Parliamentary Activity

During 2023, as part of its commitment to strong and transparent relations with Parliament, ministers from the Government gave evidence to various Select Committees and forums on a range of topics that required close intergovernmental working.

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

- The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, gave evidence to the committee on the workings of the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities including but not limited to the progress of intergovernmental relations since the publication of the Intergovernmental Relations Review in January 2022.

Interparliamentary Forum

- The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Housing and Homelessness), Felicity Buchan MP attended the Interparliamentary Forum in March to discuss the first year of the progress of arrangements set out in the Intergovernmental Relations Review, published in January 2022.

Scottish Affairs Committee

- The Scottish Affairs Committee launched its inquiry ‘Intergovernmental relations: 25 years since the Scotland Act 1998’ in July. The Secretary of State for Scotland and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations submitted written evidence to the inquiry in September, and an oral UK Government ministerial evidence session for this inquiry is expected in 2024.

- In May and December, Secretary of State for Scotland, the Rt Hon Alister Jack MP; Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Scotland Office, John Lamont MP; and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Scotland Office, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Business and Trade, Lord Offord of Garvel appeared before the committee as part of their regular evidence sessions on the work of the Scotland Office, including intergovernmental relations. In addition and along with David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Americas and Caribbean), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the Secretary of State for Scotland and Lord Offord of Garvel all gave evidence to the committee on Promoting Scotland Internationally in June of 2023.
- In July, Lord Offord of Garvel appeared before the committee once again and gave evidence on the examination of the action following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- John Lamont MP gave evidence to the committee during their inquiry into the impact of the cost of living on rural communities in Scotland, in September of 2023. The then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Richard Holden MP and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Energy Consumers and Affordability) at Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Amanda Solloway MP also gave evidence during this inquiry.
- The then Minister of State in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP appeared in front of the committee as part of their evidence session in relation to Hydrogen and carbon capture in Scotland.
- In her capacity as the then Minister of State for Media, Data, and Digital Infrastructure, Julia Lopez MP gave evidence on Public Broadcasting in Scotland.
- Minister of State (Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries), the Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP gave evidence to the committee in relation to Fishing grounds in Scotland.

Welsh Affairs Committee

- In June, the Rt Hon David TC Davies MP, Secretary of State for Wales and the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales Dr James Davies MP gave evidence as part of regular session on the work of the Wales Office. Secretary of State for Wales was joined at the December session of this inquiry by the current Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales Fay Jones MP. This session covered relations with the Welsh Government, regulation of sewage discharges, public transport and broadcasting in Wales.
- The Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP gave evidence in February on nuclear energy in Wales.
- As part of a session on the Welsh Fiscal Framework, the committee heard from the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Rt Hon John Glen MP in July.
- In February, the Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, in his capacity as Minister for Sport, Tourism and Civil Society at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport gave evidence on Wales as a global tourist destination.
- The Rt Hon John Whittingdale MP gave evidence in June on broadcasting in Wales as part of his role of Minister of State for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries.

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

- The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP appeared before the committee to give evidence on the work of the Northern Ireland Office in April and October.
- Secretary of State for Northern Ireland also gave evidence to the committee in March on the effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland.

European Scrutiny Committee

- In March, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP appeared before the committee and gave evidence on the Windsor Framework.
- The Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP gave evidence to the committee in June on retained EU law since the introduction of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

Glossary of abbreviations

AGO	Attorney General's Office	FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (replaced by DESNZ, DSIT and DBT as of 7th February 2023)	HMT	His Majesty's Treasury
CO	Cabinet Office	HO	Home Office
DBT	Department for Business and Trade	IMG	Interministerial Group
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	IMSC	Interministerial Standing Committee
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	MoD	Ministry of Defence
DESNZ	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero	MoJ	Ministry of Justice
DfE	Department for Education	NIE	Northern Ireland Executive
DfT	Department for Transport	NIO	Northern Ireland Office
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care	SG	Scottish Government
DIT	Department for International Trade (replaced by DBT as of 7th February 2023)	SO	Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	UKG	UK Government
DSIT	Department for Science, Innovation and Technology	WG	Welsh Government
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions	WO	Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

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