

Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat Annual Report

April 2023 – March 2024

Contents

1. Foreword by the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat	2
2. Purpose and Structure	3
The Secretariat and the Review of Intergovernmental Relations	3
Tiers of Engagement	3
3. Engagements	5
Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council	5
Interministerial Standing Committee / Finance Interministerial Standing Committee	5
Interministerial Groups	7
4. Conclusion	12
Glossary of Abbreviations	13
Annex A – Meeting Communiqués	14

1. Foreword by the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat

We are pleased to present the second Annual Report of intergovernmental activity produced by the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat (“the Secretariat”). The functions of the Secretariat are set out in the [Review of Intergovernmental Relations](#) (“the Review”) with further detail in the [Policy Paper on its Function and Role](#). These functions include a requirement to produce an annual report.

This annual report provides an overview of formally recorded intergovernmental relations between the United Kingdom (UK) Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. Further background on the Review and the role of the Secretariat is included in Section 2. Please note that this report provides a summary of activity and does not supersede the Review itself.

This reporting period covers from 1 April 2023, through to 31 March 2024. Following on from much of the formative work outlined in our previous annual report, this reporting period saw the new structures, particularly those at portfolio level, continue to be embedded.

Key political events during this reporting period included:

- One change of Deputy Prime Minister in the UK Government, in April 2023
- The 25th Anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, in April 2023
- The Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, in May 2023
- The restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, in February 2024
- One change of First Minister of Wales, in March 2024

The first Head of the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat was appointed in May 2023, however the Secretariat was still gearing up and was not fully staffed over the course of this reporting period.

The information presented has been compiled retrospectively from a range of published sources. We are grateful to officials from the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive for their support in preparing this report.

Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat

2. Purpose and Structure

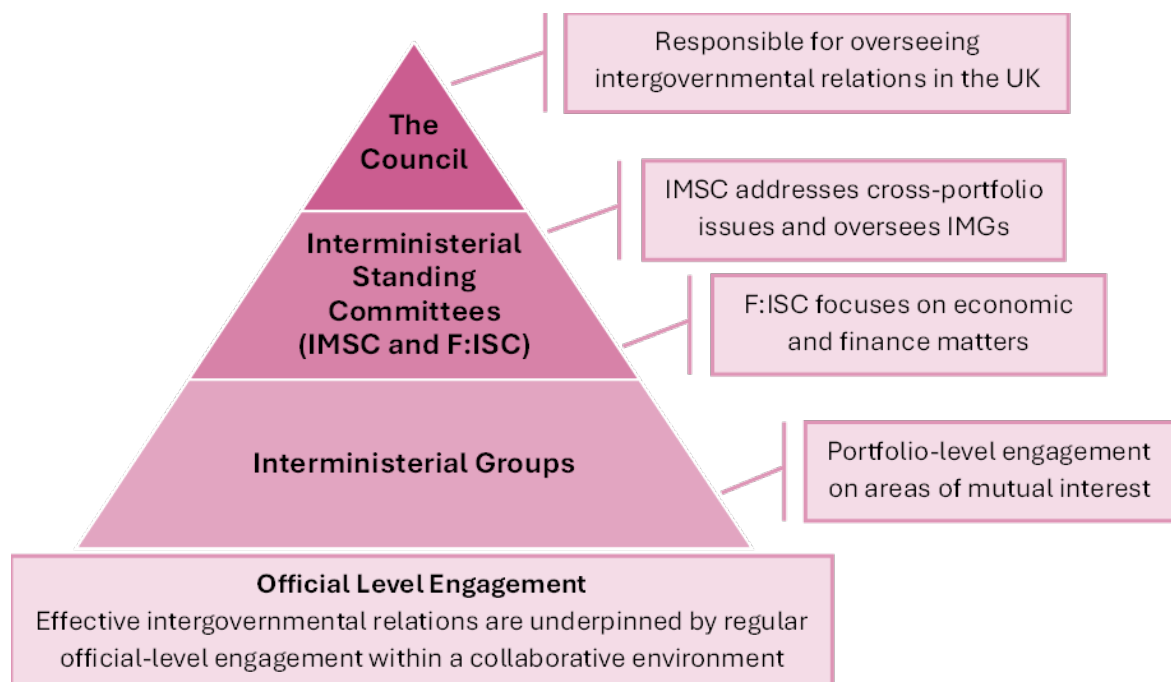
The Secretariat and the Review of Intergovernmental Relations

The Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Secretariat was established as part of the [Review of Intergovernmental Relations](#), published in January 2022. More detail on the function and role of the Secretariat is set out in a [UK Government policy paper](#), published in November 2023.

The Review sets out new tiered structures for IGR and ways of working. This includes the Secretariat. The Secretariat is impartial and is staffed by officials on placement from across governments. The Secretariat promotes the efficient and effective maintenance of intergovernmental relations across tiers, facilitates prompt handling and resolution of disputes, and provides administrative support across the structures. Its functions include publishing an annual report on intergovernmental activity.

The information presented in this section of the report summarises the structures of IGR as they are set out in the Review. These structures have developed and evolved in practice over the intervening period.

Tiers of Engagement



The Review sets out three tiers of engagement for intergovernmental relations.

The top tier of engagement is the Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council ("the Council"). All middle tier and portfolio tier engagements, as well as the IGR Secretariat, are ultimately accountable to the Council. The review sets out that the Council will meet annually, with the ability to meet extraordinarily. The Council is chaired by the Prime Minister and is attended by the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. The Council is supported by the Secretariat.

The middle tier of engagement is the Interministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) and the Finance Interministerial Standing Committee (F:ISC). The IMSC usually consists of ministers with responsibility for intergovernmental relations from each government. The IMSC considers issues cutting across several ministerial portfolios and ensures positive policy collaboration across all four governments. In accordance with the Review, the IMSC is intended to meet every other month, but it can meet more or less frequently according to need and if agreed by consensus. Meetings of the IMSC are chaired by its members on a rotating basis. The IMSC is supported by the Secretariat, which is responsible for coordinating meetings, capturing minutes and actions, and preparing and publishing communiqués.

The F:ISC consists of ministers with responsibility for finance and budgeting from each government and considers the impact of economic and finance matters affecting the UK. In accordance with the Review, the F:ISC should meet quarterly, but meetings may occur less or more frequently if agreed unanimously, and meetings should take place around key events. The F:ISC will be chaired by the UK Government or a Devolved Government finance minister on a rotating basis. The F:ISC is supported by its own Secretariat, led collectively by officials from all four governments.

Tier one is portfolio level engagement, consisting of the Interministerial Groups (IMGs). The IMGs cover a range of policy areas and consist of relevant portfolio ministers from each government. IMGs are organised, and secretariat support provided, by the participating teams in each government. The IMGs meet in accordance with their jointly agreed Terms of Reference and publish their own communiqués. When the Review was published, it set out a number of preliminary IMGs to be established. This list was not intended to be exhaustive or definitive and, as seen in this report and the 2022-23 IGR Secretariat's Annual Report, IMGs have been adapted according to evolving needs. The IMGs envisaged in the review were:

 Business and Industry	 Tourism	 Science and Research
 Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change	 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	 Health and Social Care
 Elections and Registration	 Education	 Work and Pensions
 UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement	 Higher Education	 Safety, Security and Migration
 Culture	 Transport	 Housing, Communities and Local Government
 Sports Cabinet	 Trade	 Justice

These three tiers of ministerial forums are in place to consider and, where appropriate, reach agreement on issues of mutual interest across various policy areas. This ministerial oversight is essential for promoting effective collaboration and ensuring political accountability. However, effective IGR is underpinned by ongoing regular engagement between officials.

3. Engagements

Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council

This forum did not meet during the reporting period.

Interministerial Standing Committee / Finance Interministerial Standing Committee

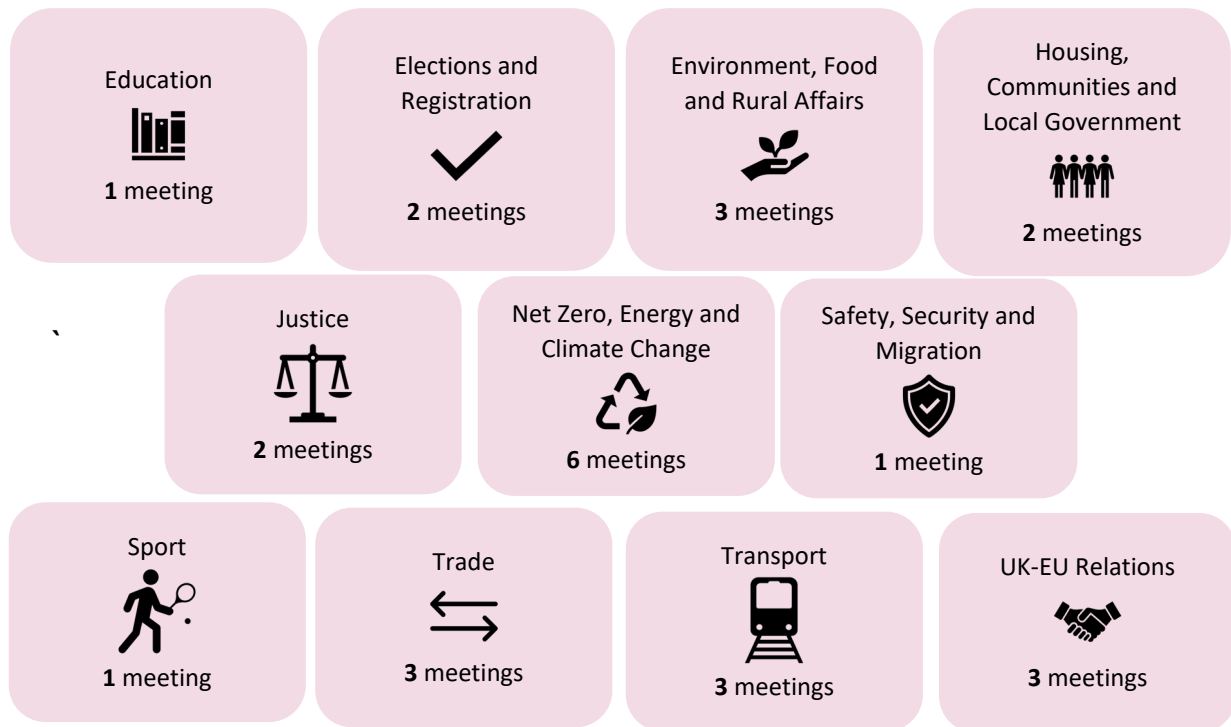
There were **three** meetings of the IMSC and **four** meetings of the F:ISC within the reporting period. A link to the published communiqué from each meeting can be found at [Annex A](#).

Meeting	Date	Matters Discussed
IMSC	17 May 2023	• Economic benefits of Investment Zones. • Upcoming UK legislation and the principles of the legislative process. • The status of Common Frameworks. • International engagement.
	19 October 2023	• Cost-of-living workstreams across governments. • Joint working in IMGs. • The situation in Israel and Gaza. • The International Development White Paper. • The upcoming fourth parliamentary session. • Proposals for a smokefree generation. • Proposals for banning the possession and sale of XL Bully dogs across England and Wales and related proposals in Scotland.
	12 March 2024	• Key priority areas for the Northern Ireland Executive. • Supporting multi-faith communities across the UK following tensions arising in the Middle East. • Upcoming UK Parliament legislation, including: ○ Efforts to create a smokefree generation ○ Ensuring sub-Post Masters are exonerated from Horizon related convictions • The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales.

F:ISC	22 June 2023	• Public spending pressures and the economic outlook. • Energy security and net zero. • EU replacement funding. • Review of the F:ISC Terms of Reference and Operating Procedures.
	20 September 2023	• Economic and fiscal priorities in advance of the UK Government's Autumn Statement. • Challenges on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). • Scottish Government's Fiscal Framework Review. • Energy security. • Revised F:ISC Terms of Reference and Operating Protocol.
	25 January 2024	• Economic and fiscal priorities following the UK Autumn Statement and in advance of the upcoming UK Spring Budget. • Updates on 2024-25 budgets from Scottish Government and Welsh Government. • Action to tackle poverty in an economic and fiscal context.
	14 March 2024	• UK Spring Budget and implications on devolved government budgets. • Outlook for public spending.

Interministerial Groups

Eleven IMGs met formally within the reporting period. Overall, there were **27** IMG meetings, which can be broken down as follows:



A link to the published communiqué from each meeting can be found at [Annex A](#).

IMG	Date	Matters Discussed
Education	8 June 2023	- Digital approaches to transform teacher workload and support effective teaching and learning. - Opportunities and risks presented by emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI). - The use of technology to empower learners and teachers. - Plans for examinations in 2023.
Elections and Registration	14 June 2023	- May local government election in England. - Introduction of voter identification requirements. - The running and outcome of the Northern Ireland elections. - Next steps for implementation of the Elections Act 2022. - Making elections more accessible to all members of society.

Elections and Registration (continued)	23 January 2024	• The Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill. • Scottish Government's work on improving the accessibility of elections. • Public attitudes to elections. • The Elections Act 2022. • Online absent vote applications for elections in Scotland and Wales. • The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill and the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill. • The completeness and accuracy of the electoral register.
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	17 April 2023	• Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). • The Retained EU Law (REUL) Bill. • Food supply issues. • The Windsor Framework.
	22 May 2023	• Implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework to achieve COP15 outcomes. • Scotland's DRS. • Defra's plans to ban sale of wet wipes containing plastic in England. • The REUL Bill. • Scottish Government's vision and ambition for the Blue Economy. • The importance of food security.
	13 September 2023	• The Windsor Framework. • Plans for COP28. • Scottish Government's plans to ban the sale and possession of glue traps. • The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Housing, Communities and Local Government	10 May 2023	• Tackling homelessness. • Progress on building safety matters.
	13 December 2023	• Presentation on research on the impacts of regulation on the Private Rented Sector. • Challenges faced around affordable homes and housing supply. • Progress on building safety, cladding remediation, insurance, mortgage and lending markets and RAAC.
Health	10 July 2023	A meeting took place but is not recognised as having been a formal IMG. As a result, a communiqué has not been published. The meeting is noted in this report as it was a precursor to the Health and Social Care IMG.
	25 October 2023	Representatives met but due to a number of interruptions to the meeting owing to (Westminster) Parliamentary business, this is not recognised as having been a formal IMG. As a result, a communiqué has not been published. The meeting is included in this report as it was a precursor to the Health and Social Care IMG.
Justice	12 September 2023	• Agreement of Terms of Reference for the Group. • Prison capacity. • Court recovery following COVID-19. • The Ministry of Justice's review of civil legal aid. • The Victims and Prisoners Bill.
	25 January 2024	• Exoneration of the wrongly convicted victims of the Post Office Horizon Scandal. • Measures to improve prison capacity. • Court recovery. • Modernising the legal aid system.
Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change	27 April 2023	• Recent progress and issues. • Grid network investment.
	28 June 2023	• Just Transition and Levelling Up. • Public Engagement and Behaviour Change.

Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change (continued)	14 September 2023	• Update on Net Zero. • Heat and Buildings Decarbonisation.
	15 November 2023	• Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's speech on Net Zero. • Green skills.
	21 February 2024	• UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) Authority's plans for expansion of the scope of the scheme to additional sectors.
	13 March 2024	• The Carbon Budget 7 work programme. • Industrial Decarbonisation and Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS).
Safety, Security and Migration	11 July 2023	• Dialogue across the three core themes of safety, security and migration.
Sport	1 March 2024	A communique for this IMG has not been published.
Trade	25 May 2023	• The opportunities arising from the establishment of the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), and from the agreement of the Windsor Framework. • The UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA). • The UK-Canada FTA. • The UK's programme of Memoranda of Understanding with US states.
	7 September 2023	• The UK-India FTA. • The UK-Canada FTA. • The accession of the UK to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).
	29 November 2023	• The UK's preparations for the 13th World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC13). • The UK-India FTA. • The UK's programme of Memoranda of Understanding with US states. • The UK's delivery of trade initiatives outlined in the Atlantic Declaration.

Transport	24 May 2023	• The collection and sharing of UK-wide data. • The active travel agenda.
	13 September 2023	• The zero emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate. • Rail reform. • Minimum service levels for rail.
	5 February 2024	• Freight in the UK.
UK-EU Relations	26 June 2023	A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.
	11 September 2023	A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.
	6 March 2024	• Upcoming meetings of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement Partnership Council and Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee. • The restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive. • Terms of Reference for the Group.

The bilateral **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Welsh Government Interministerial Group on Work and Pensions** also met during the reporting period. This is a forum for the UK Government and Welsh Government and is designed to complement intergovernmental structures, adhering to the Review. The group met on 6 November 2023 and discussed initiatives to support people to claim their benefit entitlements, including Pension Credit take-up campaign, Help for Households initiative and Welsh Government's Claim What's Yours campaign.

A list of the IMGs that did not meet in this reporting period is provided below:

- Business & Industry.
- Culture and Creative Industries.
- Tourism.

4. Conclusion

The publication of this report supports the commitment to transparency in intergovernmental relations activity, as set out in the Review.

Over the reporting period, progress was made in further embedding and developing the structures and processes recommended by the Review.

The IMSC held three meetings and the F:ISC held four meetings, covering topics from international matters to economic and fiscal plans, addressing both immediate and long-term challenges. The Top Tier of the IGR Structures - the Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council - did not meet during this reporting period.

IMGs engaged across various policy areas, with 27 meetings held within the reporting period. All IMGs that had been established in the previous reporting period continued to meet. The IMG structures continued to develop with the formalisation of the Sports Cabinet as an IMG, and the first meetings of Justice and Transport IMGs taking place during this reporting period.

The Secretariat extends its gratitude to all contributors.

Glossary of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
COP 15 / CBD COP 15	15 th meeting of the parties to The Convention on Biological Diversity
COP 28	28 th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties
CCUS	Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
DEFRA	The UK Government Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DRS	Deposit Return Scheme
DWP	The UK Government Department for Work and Pensions
EU	European Union
F:ISC	Finance Interministerial Standing Committee
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
IGR	Intergovernmental Relations
IMG	Interministerial Group
IMSC	Interministerial Standing Committee
MC13	13 th World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference
RAAC	Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete
REUL	Retained EU Law
UK	United Kingdom
UK ETS	UK Emissions Trading Scheme
WTO	World Trade Organisation
ZEV	Zero emission vehicle

Annex A – Meeting Communiqués

Interministerial Standing Committee

[Interministerial Standing Committee: 17 May 2023](#)

[Interministerial Standing Committee: 19 October 2023](#)

[Interministerial Standing Committee: 12 March 2024](#)

Finance Interministerial Standing Committee

[Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee: 22 June 2023](#)

[Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee: 20 September 2023](#)

[Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee: 25 January 2024](#)

[Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee: 14 March 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Education

[UK Education Ministers Council: 8 June 2023](#)

The Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration

[Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration: 14 June 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration: 23 January 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: 17 April 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: 22 May 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: 13 September 2023](#)

The Interministerial Group for Housing, Communities and Local Government

[Interministerial Group for Housing, Communities and Local Government: 10 May 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Housing, Communities and Local Government: 13 December 2023](#)

The Interministerial Group for Health

10 July 2023: A communiqué for this meeting has not been published.

25 October 2023: A communiqué for this meeting has not been published.

The Interministerial Group for Justice

[Interministerial Group for Justice: 12 September 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Justice: 25 January 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 27 April 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 28 June 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 14 September 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 15 November 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 21 February 2024](#)

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 13 March 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Safety, Security and Migration

[Interministerial Group for Safety, Security and Migration: 11 July 2023](#)

The Interministerial Group for Sport

1 March 2024: A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.

The Interministerial Group for Trade

[Interministerial Group for Trade: 25 May 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Trade: 7 September 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Trade: 29 November 2023](#)

The Interministerial Group for Transport

[Interministerial Group for Transport: 24 May 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Transport: 13 September 2023](#)

[Interministerial Group for Transport: 5 February 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for UK-EU Relations

26 June 2023: A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.

11 September 2023: A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.

[Interministerial Group for UK-EU Relations: 6 March 2024](#)

DWP and Welsh Government Interministerial Group on Work and Pensions

[DWP and Welsh Government Interministerial Group on Work and Pension: 6 November 2023](#)