

Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat Annual Report

April 2024 – March 2025

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1. Foreword by the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat

We are pleased to present the third Annual Report of intergovernmental activity produced by the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat (“the Secretariat”).

The production of an annual report is one of the key Secretariat functions set out in the [Review of Intergovernmental Relations](#) (“the Review”). A summary of the structures established by the Review and the role and functions of the Secretariat is included in Section 2. Further detail is provided in the Review itself and the [Policy Paper on the Function and Role of the Secretariat](#).

This annual report provides an overview of intergovernmental relations, undertaken within the structures established by the Review, between the United Kingdom (UK) Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

This reporting period covers from 1 April 2024, through to 31 March 2025.

Key political events during this reporting period included:

- One change of First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet, in May 2024
- A UK General Election, resulting in the formation of a new UK Government, in July 2024
- One change of First Minister of Wales and Cabinet, in August 2024
- The agreement by the Northern Ireland Executive of a new Programme for Government, the first since 2012, in February 2025

The Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat was fully staffed from July 2024 for the remainder of the reporting period. A new Head of the Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat was appointed in August 2024.

The information presented has been compiled from a range of published sources. It provides a summary of key information but is not intended to supersede any of the original publications. We are grateful to officials from all governments for their support in preparing this report.

Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat

2. Purpose and Structure

2.1. The Secretariat and the Review of Intergovernmental Relations

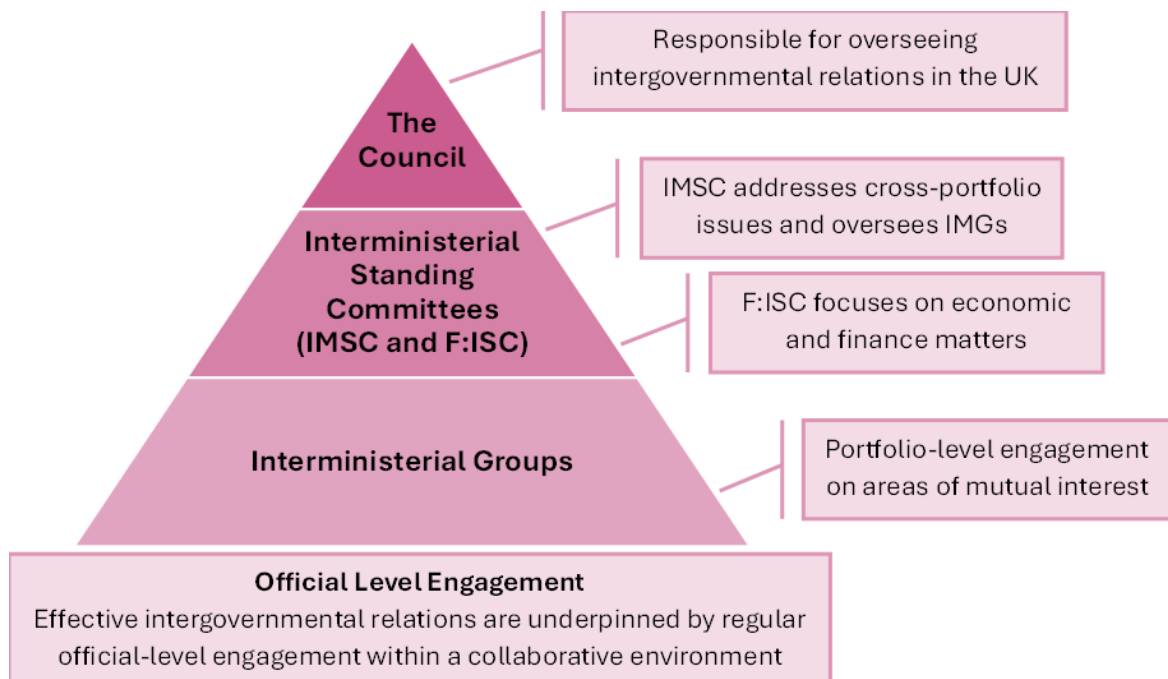
The Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Secretariat was established as part of the [Review of Intergovernmental Relations](#), published in January 2022. More detail on the function and role of the Secretariat is set out in a [UK Government policy paper](#), published in November 2023.

The Review sets out new tiered structures for IGR relations and ways of working. This includes the Secretariat. The Secretariat is impartial and is staffed by officials 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 function includes 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 over the intervening period.

2.2. 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 as required. 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 IGR 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 which cut across ministerial portfolios to ensure positive policy collaboration across all four governments. In accordance with the Review, it is intended that the IMSC meets every other month, however, it can meet more or less frequently according to need and if agreed by consensus. It meets on a rotating chair basis. The IMSC is supported by the IGR 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, known as the F:ISC 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 officials from 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 previous iterations of the 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 - facilitate agreement on issues of mutual interest across various policy areas. 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

3.1. Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council

The Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments met in person in Edinburgh on **11 October 2024**. Attendees were:



The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom



The Rt Hon John Swinney MSP
First Minister of Scotland



Rt Hon Eluned Morgan MS
Prif Weinidog Cymru



Michelle O'Neill MLA
First Minister of Northern Ireland



Emma Little-Pengelly MLA
deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, also attended from the UK Government.

The Council discussed:

- working together to grow the economy and to make the UK a clean energy superpower;
- the importance of skills and infrastructure to attract investment and create growth;
- strengthening joint working to reflect the investment opportunities that exist in all parts of the UK on the international stage; and
- the importance of good working relationships in intergovernmental relations.

A communiqué of the meeting can be found [here](#).

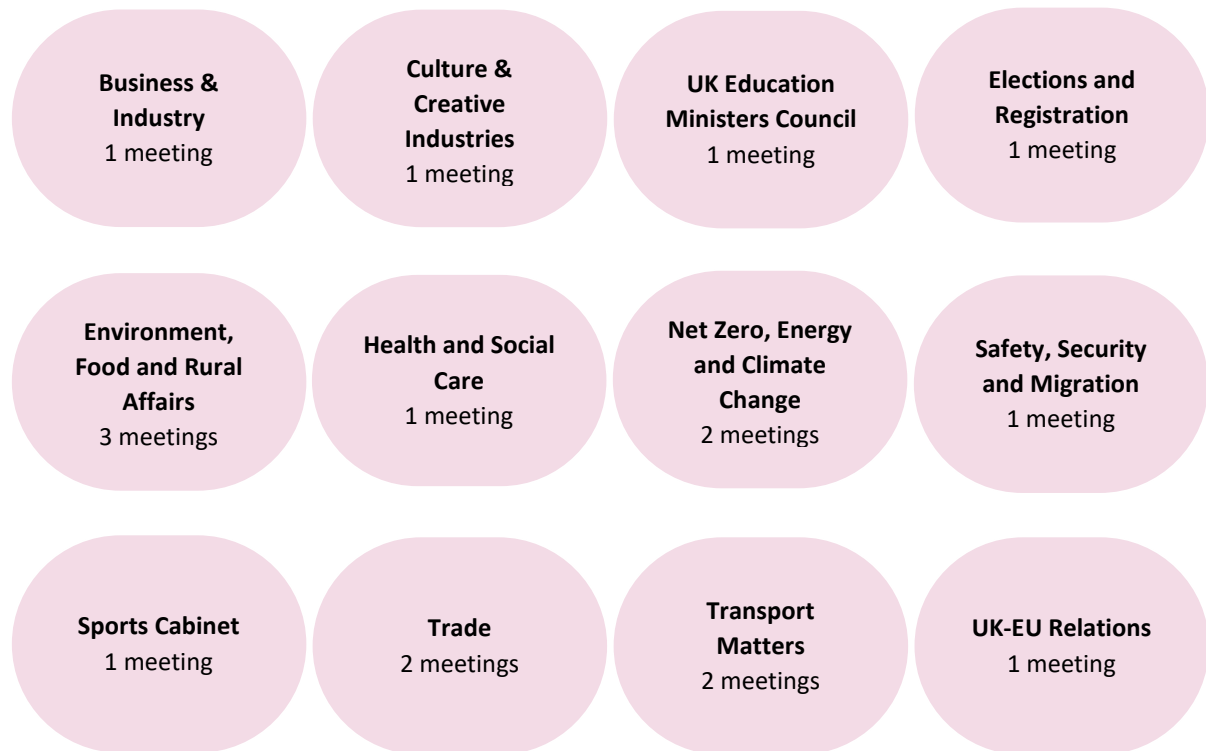
3.2. Interministerial Standing Committee and Finance Interministerial Standing Committee

There were **two** meetings of the Interministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) and **two** meetings of the Finance Interministerial Standing Committee (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	3 December 2024	• The intergovernmental relations structures. • Government responses to Module 1 of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry Report. • The Common Frameworks Programme. • The UK Internal Market Act (2020).
	27 February 2025	• The ongoing review of the UK Internal Market Act (2020). • The Sewel Convention and UK legislation. • Safeguarding assets of national importance. • The impact of global developments on the economy. • The use of technology in public sector reform. • Plans to update understanding of current activity of IMGs.
F:ISC	3 October 2024	• Resetting relationships and working collaboratively to drive economic growth and deliver public services. • The current challenging fiscal and economic context. • Fiscal plans and budgetary flexibilities. • Funding for 2024-25 and the upcoming multi-year UK Spending Review and Autumn Budget. • Collaborative working and shared priorities.
	27 February 2025	• Priorities for the second phase of the UK Spending Review and the upcoming UK Spring Statement. • The importance of continued collaboration on priorities which are key to driving economic growth and ensuring resources are maximised. • Updates on devolved governments' draft budgets for 2025-26.

3.3. Interministerial Groups

12 IMGs met formally within the reporting period. Overall, there were 17 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
Business and Industry	21 January 2025	- The importance of shared objectives on economic growth and investment. - UK Government's growth mission and modern industrial strategy. - Updated Terms of Reference for the Group.
Culture and Creative Industries	2 May 2024	- Terms of Reference for the Group. - Upcoming major cultural domestic and international events. - Funding pressures and financial challenges in the sector. - Safeguarding out-of-London and out-of-England television production targets. - Areas to celebrate.

IMG	Date	Matters Discussed
UK Education Ministers Council	20 November 2024	- Professional learning for teachers. - Teacher recruitment and retention. - UK policy for international students. [The meeting included a tour of Laurehill Community College in Lisburn].
Elections and Registration	12 February 2025	- Interest from the Youth Parliament in Northern Ireland around the extension of the voting franchise to 16-year-olds. - The Absent voting (Elections in Scotland and Wales) Private Members' Bill. - The Elections Reform and Representation Act in Scotland. - The Senedd Cymru Members and Elections Act 2024. - The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024. - UK Government electoral reform plans, including extending the franchise for reserved elections to 16- and 17-year-olds, improving registration, strengthening political finance rules, and reviewing voter identification.
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	16 September 2024	- Updated Terms of Reference for the Group. - The role of nature in society and the economy. - Future collaboration on approaches to policy and regulation that relate to natural capital. - A programme of enhanced collaboration with local government, delivery bodies, experts and stakeholders across the UK and potential areas where enhanced collaboration would be beneficial. - Working together to tackle bovine TB. - Update from the Agriculture Market Monitoring Group and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.
	18 November 2024	- The UK budget. - The removal of ring-fencing, introduction of new tax provisions and concerns within the farming community. - Areas for enhanced collaboration between the four governments. - Implementation of the Border Target Operating Model. - Potential negotiations on developing a UK-EU sanitary and phytosanitary/veterinary agreement. - The impact of labour shortages.

IMG	Date	Matters Discussed
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (continued)	27 January 2025	• The UK Government Circular Economy Taskforce • A deep dive on environmental land management. • Bovine electronic identification. • The role of devolved governments in potential negotiations on developing a UK-EU sanitary and phytosanitary agreement. • Update on the development of a UK Government Food Strategy.
Health and Social Care	11 December 2024	• Advances in scientific and technological innovations for health and care systems. • Healthcare reform - shared learning. • Plans for official-level engagement in 2025. • Topics for discussion at future IMG meetings.
Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change	17 October 2024	• Net Zero ambitions and decarbonising the power sector. • Plans to update the Terms of Reference for the Group.
	6 March 2025	• Biomethane • Local energy initiatives and benefits to communities. • The UK's Carbon Budget 7. • Topics for discussion at future IMG meetings. • Updated Terms of Reference for the Group.
Safety, Security and Migration	22 January 2025	• Plans to link migration to labour market and skills policies. • The Border Security Command. • The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill. • The Safer Streets Mission. • The Crime and Policing Bill. • The Fraud Strategy.
Sports Cabinet	24 March 2025	• A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.

IMG	Date	Matters Discussed
Trade	16 April 2024	• Ongoing negotiations and engagements with bilateral and multilateral trading partners. • Ongoing trade policy work in relation to: ○ outcomes of the recent 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) ○ the UK-India free trade agreement (FTA) ○ the UK-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) FTA
	22 January 2025	• The UK Government's current trade priorities: the UK's trade relationship with the EU; the UK's trade relationship with the USA; and the FTA programme. • Ongoing work creating a UK Trade Strategy.
Transport Matters	19 November 2024	• Bus reform, including: ○ innovation and digitisation of services ○ smart ticketing ○ accessibility and safety. • Motor insurance premiums and the motor insurance taskforce.
	5 March 2025	• Ports resilience • Motoring tax reform • E-scooters and micro-mobility
UK-EU Relations	3 December 2024	• The reset of UK-EU relations. • Implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. • Updated Terms of Reference for the Group.

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

- Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Justice
- Tourism
- Work and Pensions

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 developing and embedding the structures and processes recommended by the Review. The formation of a new UK Government in July 2024 brought a commitment to reset the relationship between the UK Government and devolved governments.



The Top Tier of the IGR Structures - the Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council - discussed economic growth and joint working to promote international investment across the UK.

Image: Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosts a meeting of the Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council in Edinburgh in October 2024.

The IMSC held two meetings and the F:ISC held two meetings, covering topics including collaborative working to drive economic growth and the use of technology in public sector reform.

IMGs engaged across various policy areas, with 17 meetings held within the reporting period.

A number of IMGs - such as Business & Industry IMG and Health & Social Care IMG - that had not met during the previous reporting period (2023/24) resumed engagement in 2024/25. Some that had met previously did not meet during this reporting period.

The IGR Secretariat extends its gratitude to all contributors.

5. Glossary of Abbreviations

EU	European Union
EV	Electric Vehicle
F:ISC	Finance Interministerial Standing Committee
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GCC	UK-Gulf Cooperation Council
IGR	Intergovernmental Relations
IMG	Interministerial Group
IMSC	Interministerial Standing Committee
MC13	13th World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MS	Member of the Senedd
MSP	Member of the Scottish Parliament
Rt Hon	Right Honourable
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

6. Image Attribution

Portrait of Prime Minister Keir Starmer

- Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer arrives at Number 10 Downing St. Taken on 5 July 2024, London. Picture by Kirsty O'Connor/ No 10 Downing Street.
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/number10gov/53836916571/in/album-72177720318503331>

Portrait of First Minister John Swinney

- First Minister of Scotland. Taken on 10 May 2024.
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/scottishgovernment/53720492021/in/album-72177720316968544>

Portrait of First Minister Eluned Morgan

- First Minister Eluned Morgan being sworn in, 6 August 24 | Prif Weinidog Cymru, Eluned Morgan, yn tyngu ei llw swyddogol, 6 Awst 24.
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/llywodraeth/54086033565/>

Portrait of First Minister Michelle O'Neill

- Provided by Northern Ireland Executive

Portrait of deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly

- Provided by Northern Ireland Executive

Group Image: Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosts a Council of Nations and Regions meetings

- Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosts a Council of Nations and Regions meetings with the First Minister of Scotland John Swinney, First Minister of Wales Eluned Morgan and First Minister of Northern Ireland Michelle O'Neill and deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and regional mayors. Taken on 11 October 2024, Edinburgh. Picture by Simon Dawson / No 10 Downing Street
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/number10gov/54059375884/in/photostream/>

Annex A – Meeting Communiqués

Interministerial Standing Committee

[Interministerial Standing Committee: 3 December 2024](#)

[Interministerial Standing Committee: 27 February 2025](#)

Finance Interministerial Standing Committee

[Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee: 3 October 2024](#)

[Finance: Interministerial Standing Committee: 27 February 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for Business and Industry

[Interministerial Group for Business and Industry: 21 January 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for Culture and Creative Industries

[Interministerial Group for Culture and Creative Industries: 2 May 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Education

[Interministerial Group for Education: 20 November 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration

[Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration: 12 February 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 16 September 2024](#)

[Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: 18 November 2024](#)

[Interministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: 27 January 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for Health and Social Care

[Interministerial Group for Health: 11 December 2024](#)

The Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 17 October 2024](#)

[Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change: 6 March 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for Safety, Security and Migration

[The Interministerial Group for Safety, Security and Migration: 22 January 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for Sports Cabinet

24 March 2025: A communiqué for this IMG has not been published.

The Interministerial Group for Trade

[Interministerial Group for Trade: 16 April 2024](#)

[Interministerial Group for Trade: 22 January 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for Transport Matters

[Interministerial Group for Transport Matters: 19 November 2024](#)

[Interministerial Group for Transport Matters: 5 March 2025](#)

The Interministerial Group for UK-EU Relations

[Interministerial Group for UK-EU Relations: 3 December 2024](#)