This chapter provides an overview of the political, social and economic situation in Wales, a constituent part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

During 1998 and 1999, the UK Parliament devolved certain powers and responsibilities to other elected bodies in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Subsequent legislation devolved the power to make primary legislation imposing taxes and changed the devolution model from a ‘conferred matters’ model to a ‘reserved matters’ model (see the article ‘Main Executive and Legislative Bodies’ for further information).

In Wales, these powers are vested in the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government.

For local government purposes, Wales is divided into 22 principal areas, which each have elected councils responsible for the provision of all local government services, including education. They are collectively known as local authorities or unitary authorities.

The population of the United Kingdom was estimated to be approximately 66.0 million in mid-2017, of which the population of Wales was approximately 3.1 million.

Although Wales shares a close political history with England, it has a distinct social and economic experience and cultural identity. Around one fifth of the population can speak Welsh. The Welsh language has official status in Wales and it is the Welsh Government’s goal to create a truly bilingual Wales.

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