Wales is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland.

During 1998 and 1999, the UK Parliament devolved certain powers [1] and responsibilities to bodies in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

In Wales, these powers and responsibilities are vested in the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. These bodies are the focus of this article. However, the UK Parliament and Government still have significant powers in relation to Wales and considerable influence over Welsh affairs. For more information, see the parallel article for England [2].

**System of Government in Wales**

Wales has a devolved government.

Under the Wales Act 2014 [3], the Welsh Government has devolved powers to make primary legislation imposing taxes to the Welsh Government. The Act also extended its borrowing powers.

Under the Wales Act 2017 [4], the Welsh Government is able to pass laws (known as Acts of the Assembly or Assembly Acts) in any policy area other than those that have been expressly reserved to the UK Parliament. The 2017 Act, which changed the devolution model to this ‘reserved matters’ model from the previous ‘conferred matters’ model, devolves extra powers to Wales over transport, energy, electoral arrangements, and teachers’ pay and conditions, and introduces an element of control over Income tax levels.

The introduction of these two pieces of legislation followed the recommendations [5] of the Commission on Devolution in Wales (the Silk Commission).

**Legislature**

The National Assembly for Wales [6] is a body of 60 elected Members.

- 40 Assembly Members (AMs) represent the constituencies of Wales – the local areas. They are elected by the first-past-the-post system [7], where the candidate with the greatest number of votes wins.
- 20 AMs represent the five regions: North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South Wales West, South Wales East, and South Wales Central. They are elected by the Additional Member System [7] using a form of proportional representation through regional lists.

**Executive**

Although the statutory name for the executive is the Welsh Assembly Government, since May 2011 it
has been known simply as the Welsh Government. [8]

The Welsh Government consists of:

- the First Minister
- Welsh Ministers
- the Counsel General (the Law Officer for the Welsh Government)
- Deputy Ministers.

The First Minister of Wales is the leader of the Welsh Government and is appointed by the sovereign following nomination by Assembly Members.

The role of the Welsh Government is to:

- make decisions for Wales on any matters that are not expressly reserved to the UK Parliament in accordance with the Wales Act 2017 [9]
- develop policies and implement them
- develop Welsh laws (Assembly Acts).

A central aspect of this role is to determine spending priorities for Wales. The majority of this spending is funded by grants from the UK Government, allocated as follows:

- The largest element is a block grant. Since the late 1970s, annual changes in the block grant have been determined by the non-statutory Barnett formula [10].
- Other UK government grants are for less predictable demand-driven spending. Changes in these grants are negotiated by the UK Government and the Welsh Government.

Under the 2014 and 2017 Acts, a new fiscal framework for Wales is being established, which gives the Welsh Government powers to raise its own taxes to fund devolved public services. In April 2018, the Welsh Government became responsible for two new taxes: the Land Transaction Tax [11] (to replace the Stamp Duty Tax) and the Landfill Disposals Tax [12]. From April 2019, the Welsh Government will have powers over other taxes, including Income Tax. The 2017 Act also includes provisions to enable the Welsh Ministers to determine the pay and conditions of service for teachers in Wales, which have previously been determined by the UK Government in Westminster.

The article on the ‘Political and Economic Situation’ [13] provides further information on budget setting in Wales.

The Minister for Education [14] has responsibility for all areas of education within the Welsh Government.

The Ministers in the Welsh Government are supported by civil servants who work across devolved areas that include key areas of public life such as health, education and the environment. Specifically, the Welsh Government civil service is the non-political administration that supports Ministers irrespective of the party that is in power. It is headed by a Permanent Secretary and organised as four groups with wide, cross-cutting remits:

- Office of the First Minister and Cabinet Office
- Health and Social Services Group
- Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group
- Education and Public Services Group.
Judiciary

England and Wales currently form a single jurisdiction – the territory or sphere of activity over which the legal authority of a court or other institution extends. Although the increased law-making powers of the National Assembly for Wales [15] mean that two primary law-making bodies now exist in the same jurisdiction, Welsh laws continue to be inextricably linked with those of England and courts share common jurisprudence, systems and procedure.

Local government

For local government purposes, Wales is divided into 22 principal areas, which each have an elected council responsible for the provision of all local government services, including education. These principal areas are variously known as 'county councils', 'county borough councils', 'city councils' or 'city and county councils'. They are collectively known as 'local authorities' or 'unitary authorities' [16].

Within each local authority, education decision-making is shared between the local authority executive (the locally elected mayor or leader, and the cabinet), scrutiny committees or panels, and the full council of elected members.

The 22 local authorities in Wales also work together as four ‘regional education consortia’, with a view to improving teaching and learning and securing the best outcomes for all learners.

In most, but not all, local authority areas, there are also elected community (or town) councils to which responsibility for specific aspects of the application of local policy may be devolved. These councils represent individual communities or towns within a local authority area. Examples of services provided by community and town councils include the maintenance of community centres / halls and indoor recreation facilities, public spaces, public seating and bus shelters, public information signs and noticeboards, playgrounds and war memorials.

Local government reform

In January 2017, the Welsh Government published the White Paper Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed for consultation. This proposed:

- wider reform of local government, including the formation of regional bodies to encourage collaboration between local authorities
- a potential change to the electoral system used in local elections from the first-past-the-post system [7], where the candidate with the greatest number of votes wins, to a single transferable vote [7] system.

Consultations on the White Paper and on the proposed electoral reforms ended in April and October 2017 respectively.

Previously, a Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery [17] was set up in April 2013 to look at how public services and local government were governed and delivered in Wales and how they might be improved. The Commission concluded that local authority performance was poor and patchy and that many local authorities were too small to address the risks and pressures they face. As a result, it recommended the merger of some local authorities. The Local Government (Wales) Act [18] became law on 25 November 2015, enabling preparations to be made for a programme of local government mergers and reform. However the plans for merging local authorities were later abandoned.