

# Strength in Union

The Case for the United Kingdom

**EDITED BY ANDREW BOWIE MP**





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## About the Centre for Policy Studies

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Founded in 1974 by Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher, the CPS has a proud record of turning ideas into practical policy. As well as developing the bulk of the Thatcher reform agenda, it has been responsible for proposing the raising of the personal allowance, the Enterprise Allowance and the ISA, as well as many other more recent successful policy innovations, such as free ports, fixed-rate mortgages, full expensing, the public sector pay freeze, the stamp duty holiday, and putting the spotlight on how to use market-based solutions to reach Net Zero targets.

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## Foreword by the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

What does The Union mean to you? It's an apparently simple question that my friend Andrew Bowie put to 15 political colleagues who share our passion for strengthening the bonds of the United Kingdom. But as this fascinating collection of essays reveals, their answers are anything but straightforward.

And that's because this partnership is so much more than a dry historical artefact or a bureaucratic collection of constitutional arrangements. There is no one definition of the Union – a living, breathing, evolving collaboration of diverse peoples, institutions and values; the very model of a multinational, multiethnic and multicultural state, and the most successful of its kind in the world.

For more than 300 years the three pillars on which the United Kingdom is founded – shared prosperity, security and solidarity – have offered comfort and succour to the citizens it serves.

**‘Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from Andrew’s book is that the Union is a family of nations, and a nation of families. The relationships that have stood us in good stead for generations have also equipped us very well for the future’**

And in the gruelling fight against Covid-19 we have drawn on the combined strengths of the United Kingdom time and again, sharing resources when we needed them most.

The vaccination programme began with brilliant Oxford research scientists supported by UK government investment. The benefits of that funding would be felt by citizens everywhere, in every job in every arm. The vaccine was bottled in the Wockhardt factory in Wales; the amazing Lighthouse Lab in Glasgow was testing positive samples for genomic sequencing and variants of concern; and the first



person in the UK to receive a vaccine had been born in Northern Ireland. Every element is part of our island success story.

The UK Armed Forces helped deliver vaccines wherever in the country they were needed most; they flew patients from outlying Scottish islands to the mainland for treatment and drove tanker-loads of oxygen to hospitals where supplies were low. Our emergency services spread their workload to help each other out: at times when the ambulance service in Scotland was under particular strain, call handlers in England stepped into the breach, knowing their Scottish counterparts would do likewise if the situations were reversed.

**‘We should celebrate our vision of a prosperous, progressive and dynamic country that has adapted over time and will continue to do so. A country that champions the robust institutions like our great universities in which we take such pride, and which reflect the distinctive traditions from around the UK – but that also embraces diversity and change’**

Through the pooling of our wealth and resources, the broad shoulders of the Treasury have been able to support tens of millions of people through furlough schemes and the expansion of universal credit. And now, as we look to rebuild and renew our public services, the Union will be the lever that supports the Levelling Up agenda, spreading opportunity more equally around the country. The recent increase in National Insurance contributions – paid by people in the same way around the country, wherever they happen to live – will help the NHS recover from the pandemic and fund extra operations, shorter waiting lists and more dignity in old age.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from Andrew’s book is that the Union is a family of nations, and a nation of families. The relationships that have stood us in good stead for generations have also equipped us very well for the future.



We should celebrate our vision of a prosperous, progressive and dynamic country that has adapted over time and will continue to do so. A country that champions the robust institutions like our great universities in which we take such pride, and which reflect the distinctive traditions from around the UK – but that also embraces diversity and change.

**‘Looking ahead, I believe the case for a United Kingdom grows stronger with every day that passes’**

Looking ahead, I believe the case for a United Kingdom grows stronger with every day that passes. And just as we tackled Covid-19 with a UK-wide approach, so we should work together to build back better – banking the progress we have made so far and building a sustainable, long-term economic recovery for the whole country over the next five years and beyond.





## Introduction *by the Rt Hon Theresa May MP*

Many people – distinguished academics, politicians, businesspeople and others – have spoken and written about the relationship between the historic nations of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland, which form the country we know as the United Kingdom. That relationship has evolved over many centuries and has proved durable and flexible, changing to meet the needs and aspirations of the peoples of these islands. It means different things to different people, but at its heart it is a family of nations and a union of people.

In the chapters that follow, Conservatives from different backgrounds write about what the UK means to them and why they believe its continuation as a Union of four nations is of benefit to all its people.

**‘We should never forget that the people who benefit the most from that solidarity across the UK are not the strong and the successful, but the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society’**

But the benefit of us being one United Kingdom goes beyond the interests of people living in the four nations. The strength of the UK has had an impact beyond our shores. Indeed, I believe it has benefited the world, and each nation of the UK has contributed.

The steam engine was perfected in the 1790s by a partnership between an engineer from Greenock, James Watt, and a manufacturer from Birmingham, Matthew Boulton.

Penicillin was discovered in 1928 by a Scottish doctor, Alexander Fleming, working in a London hospital, St Mary’s.

William Thomson, 1st Baron Kelvin, born in Belfast and a professor at the University of Glasgow, worked on the mathematical analysis of electricity and the formulation of the first and second laws of thermodynamics, and absolute temperatures are stated in units of kelvin – named after him.



And, of course, the National Health Service, important to all four nations and to all people across the UK, was founded by a Welshman – Aneurin Bevan – sitting as a UK government minister in Westminster.

There are many ways to think of the UK. We can, of course, look at it through the prism of historical milestones or economic advantages. The UK's Customs Union created the first modern industrial marketplace. The pound sterling has served the four nations of the UK for centuries. But important though those milestones and advantages are in shaping the country, to look at it simply through these lenses is to mistake the true nature of the UK. Because it is not just a constitutional artefact, nor just a marketplace for goods. It is a social union of people.

## **‘Our Union seeks to work for everyone and unites people who share certain fundamental values’**

As such, of course, it continues to exist through the support of its people. That support was most recently tested in the Scottish independence referendum of 2014, when the result was clearly in favour of maintaining the relationship between nations and against separation. Today we see the Scottish National Party singularly focused on rending the relationship asunder and separating Scotland from its historic and social hinterland. Independence may sound like a positive word, but it can only be achieved by breaking existing links and destroying the relationship that has served all parts of the UK well for centuries.

Independence means separation. It means irrevocable change and a step into an uncertain future. That would be a questionable step at any time. But right now, with countries recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the fallout from Brexit, and with the need to address the global challenge of climate change – all of which require new approaches to the economy and people's future prospects – it would be even riskier.

The future of the UK does not just lie with the views of people in Scotland, but it is in Scotland that we see a party in devolved government whose single policy aim is independence. As I look to the reasons why polls in Scotland recently showed



a majority in favour of independence, I sense that they do not lie in debates about economic strength. That is not to say that those arguments do not have to be fully debated or that vital questions like what currency a separate Scotland would use – to which the ‘Yes’ side in 2014 had no coherent response – need not be answered unequivocally. Rather, I think the reasons lie more in intangible issues like identity and a desire for greater respect and recognition.

This concerns me because one of the core strengths of the UK is the respect we give to different identities. Being together in a Union does not mean we lose our local and national identities. Nationality is just one of the many factors that form part of the complex tapestry of each individual, alongside factors like sexuality and racial heritage. You do not have to choose between being British and being Scottish or Welsh or Northern Irish or English. You can be British *and* Scottish and so on. Someone might consider themselves to be a Yorkshireman, but that does not mean they cannot be British – they can be a Yorkshireman and English and British.

**‘Our strength lies in diversity, but it also lies in how we come together and interact as a United Kingdom of people, in the shared bonds and interests that unite us’**

The Union of nations that forms the UK has never been about uniformity. Diversity is part of the deal. Our Union seeks to work for everyone and unites people who share certain fundamental values. It is a place where everyone committed to democracy and the rule of law can feel at home and part of the whole. This accommodation of multiple layered identities against a background of common values is one of the UK’s greatest assets. It is a defining strength of our Union.

No one has to choose a single identity. But as part of that strength it is important that we respect that diversity of identity. We should recognise the pride that each nation feels in its identity and in its history. It is not enough to tell people that they should not want independence; we should be showing them the benefits of being part of the Union. We in England certainly should not wag our fingers at Scotland and tell people there that they could not exist without us. We should recognise that



while Scotland's economy is stronger for being part of the UK, so England needs the other parts of the UK. We may talk about Global Britain, but where would England be on the world stage without the rest of the UK?

**‘We should never forget that the people who benefit the most from that solidarity across the UK are not the strong and the successful, but the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society’**

Our strength lies in diversity, but it also lies in how we come together and interact as a United Kingdom of people, in the shared bonds and interests that unite us. That strength is seen day to day in so many different ways. We see it in the work of our Armed Forces where people from all four nations come to work together with one common loyalty. We see it in the wider public service like our foreign service and UK Aid, where more is achieved by our working as one Team UK than could be achieved by working separately.

When we face challenges, we pool our resources to overcome them. This is another great benefit of our Union. It means devolved legislatures can provide more responsive and representative government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland without giving up the strength and security that pooling and sharing risks and rewards provides.

We should never forget that the people who benefit the most from that solidarity across the UK are not the strong and the successful, but the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society.

## Devolved where it makes sense, together where it makes sense

That has been clearly seen over the past year or so in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Each nation of the UK was able to take its own decisions about the application of lockdown, the nature of individual restrictions and the geographical coverage of certain measures, but this was against the background of knowing that



the strength of the whole UK was being brought to bear in ensuring a programme of vaccination that will protect people in every one of our four nations. The exercise of that collective strength alongside devolved decisions about the application of responses to the pandemic in each nation is a good example of the best of the UK – respecting individual national identity while using the strength of the whole to benefit all. Indeed, the NHS is perhaps the best example of the social solidarity of our union of people; an institution that exemplifies both the diversity and the harmony of our Union.

As I write, however, that solidarity is under scrutiny, not only in Scotland but also in Northern Ireland, as a result of Brexit. The application of the Withdrawal Agreement and the treaty on our future relationship with the European Union challenges us to show our commitment to a single internal market in the UK and to ensuring all parts of the UK have access to the economic advantages of being part of the whole. The exit of the UK from the EU does require us to look again at the relationship between the four nations to ensure that it is working for all parts of the UK. We joined as one entity, we left as one entity. The challenge now is to ensure we can forge a new future as one entity.

**‘This great United Kingdom, this bringing together of nations and people, has a great history. Let’s make sure it has a great future – for the sake of all its people’**

If we are to do that, we must acknowledge that there are those who feel that the institutions and structures of that entity are not working for them. The UK is built on firm foundations but safeguarding it for the future requires us not just to maintain the ties that bind us but also to strengthen them for the challenges that lie ahead. We need to be creative – looking to the future, not clinging to the ways of the past.

It is tempting to place the argument for the UK in the context of our past successes. But that cannot be the end of the story. The real challenge is to show a vision of a bright future for the whole UK, built on our collective strengths, with each nation playing its part. At a time when the values we share have come under increasing



strain internationally, when it is argued that the West has failed to protect those values and when the world seems more and more to be one of absolutism, with power blocs facing up to each other, there is an important role for the independent state that can bridge the gaps between them, is respected for the way it acts to promote its values and which is not afraid to call out injustice.

That is a vision for the role of Global Britain that would show us reforging a key position among the states of the world. A UK playing its part in that way would be of benefit to the world, not just the people of the UK. But it can only be fully achieved by a United Kingdom. Individual UK nations could not play that role and would not attract the same degree of respect.

**‘A UK playing its part in that way would be of benefit to the world, not just the people of the UK. But it can only be fully achieved by a United Kingdom’**

We perhaps do not sufficiently appreciate the extent to which the UK is respected and admired around the world precisely because we have built a peaceful, stable and prosperous union of four nations – each of which retains its own identity and traditions, and each of which contributes to a greater whole. We are a model that others seek to emulate.

But to maintain that benefit means understanding the needs, respecting the interests and recognising the value of each of the four nations. As I have said before, we need to work more cleverly, more creatively and more coherently as a UK Government fully committed to a modern, 21st-century Union in the context of a stable and permanent devolution settlement to strengthen the glue that holds the UK together. That means making devolution work better: finding new ways of collaborating to improve the lives of our citizens, improving working relationships at all levels and showing respect for the devolved administrations as an integral part of the system of governance of the UK. Crucially, it also means making the Union work better too: ensuring that every policy and initiative coming out of Whitehall works for



the whole of the UK, making sure every department makes strengthening the bonds that unite us a priority for its work, and finding new and creative ways to reap the benefits of the Union for all of its people.

**‘By facing the future and overcoming obstacles together, we can achieve far more than we ever could apart’**

By facing the future and overcoming obstacles together, we can achieve far more than we ever could apart. This great United Kingdom, this bringing together of nations and people, has a great history. Let's make sure it has a great future – for the sake of all its people.



## We are stronger together on the world stage *by the Rt Hon Lord Hague of Richmond*

With the lengthy cycle of lockdowns confining millions across the globe to their homes for weeks and months at a time, many will look back on 2020-21 as a Groundhog Year, each of us reliving almost indistinguishable days over and over again.

And yet the last year or so has also been a time of extraordinary global change. Notwithstanding the election of Joe Biden, a fierce defender of the international rules-based order, these changes have largely been for the worse. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the strains under which our international rules-based system is creaking, with the global response to the pandemic far less co-ordinated than to the global financial crisis of 2008.

**‘Given that Western democracy is being challenged in a way it has not been since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is more important than ever that Global Britain plays her role in defending democracy and liberal values on the world stage’**

Given that Western democracy is being challenged in a way it has not been since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is more important than ever that Global Britain plays her role in defending democracy and liberal values on the world stage. And yet a surge of nationalism in Scotland puts the future of the United Kingdom and our country’s ability to be a force for good in the world at risk.

Despite the SNP losing its ‘once in a lifetime’ vote just seven years ago, the party again went into this year’s Holyrood elections seeking a mandate to subject Scotland to another bitter and divisive referendum. Although the Scottish people denied the SNP a majority and this mandate, Nicola Sturgeon ploughs ahead regardless. While quick to condemn Donald Trump’s refusal to respect the result of the 2020 US election, the First Minister and her party have never sought to honour the verdict of the 2014 vote. Each and every day, the SNP seeks to distract from its





poor record by blaming the UK Government for all of Scotland's ills while calling for another vote. In Holyrood, it is always Groundhog Day.

While I was serving as Foreign Secretary, our allies repeatedly raised their concerns with me about the Scottish referendum and the impact that separation would have on our ability to do good on the world stage. Whether regarding the impact on our powerful voice on the world stage, our strength in the United Nations, or our ability to defend democracy, our friends and allies always made the same point: together, the UK's family of nations can do so much more good globally than we ever could apart.

## Our voice on the world stage

Despite the post-war decline in the importance of Europe and the growth of Asia, a trend accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK remains one of the very few countries on the world stage that can move the dial on global issues. Anyone who doubts the big punches that our small islands can still throw should count the number of countries who supported us in expelling Russian diplomats after their chemical weapons attack at Salisbury, or the number of our friends and allies who backed our efforts to support the people of Hong Kong in the face of Chinese repression.

**‘ It is British soft power that helped bring the Commonwealth Games to Glasgow in 2014 – and with it £740 million for the Scottish economy ’**

The English language, our links with the United States and the Commonwealth, and our powerful economy, give us a great deal of clout internationally. Our country is consistently ranked as one of the most influential countries across the world. For example, the Soft Power 30 index compiled by Portland Communications has placed the UK as the second most influential country in the world for four years in a row. Whether it is speaking up on human rights abuses, calling for greater action on climate change or helping to broker peace in conflict zones, what Britain says still matters.



As a member of our family of nations, Scotland benefits from the UK's strong international influence. It is British soft power that helped bring the Commonwealth Games to Glasgow in 2014 – and with it £740 million for the Scottish economy. Likewise, this same soft power will bring COP26 to Glasgow in November and put Scotland at the centre of the most important climate change conference since the Paris Agreement.

While Scotland enjoys a formidable reputation around the world, it is far from certain that an independent Scotland, with a dramatically smaller diplomatic service and Foreign Office, would be able to achieve such effective diplomatic wins for the Scottish people. Indeed, in 2013, the Foreign Affairs Committee warned that 'Scottish voters should be under no illusion about the significant resources that would be required to fulfil the Scottish Government's aim of replicating the quality of the business and consular support currently provided by the FCO'.<sup>1</sup>

**‘The whole UK benefits from Scotland’s links with the millions of people across the world descended from Scots, from the US to Australia, who pride themselves on their Scottish heritage’**

But just as Scotland's soft power is enhanced through the UK, so too is the UK's soft power boosted by Scotland. The whole UK benefits from Scotland's links with the millions of people across the world descended from Scots, from the US to Australia, who pride themselves on their Scottish heritage. Moreover, Scottish independence would be perceived across the world as a sign of the UK's decline. The loss of territory and population, and the impact on our economy, would be met with delight by autocratic regimes who would relish the diminished power of our country to do good globally.

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1 House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Foreign Policy Considerations for the UK and Scotland in the Event of Scotland Becoming an Independent Country: Sixth Report of Session 2012–13' (The Stationery Office, 2013), paragraph 98



## Our strength in the United Nations

One of the reasons that the UK continues to punch well above her weight internationally is that our country enjoys influential positions within global forums. Through our permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the UK has a strong platform for upholding peace and security and promoting human rights. As Foreign Secretary, I saw first-hand the good that the UK can achieve through the UN Security Council, with 156 states agreeing to co-operate with our work to end sexual violence in conflict.

**‘ Through our permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the UK has a strong platform for upholding peace and security and promoting human rights ’**

Of course, an independent Scotland would set about joining the UN, through which it could seek to support peace, security and human rights in its own right. But an independent Scotland could never become a permanent member of the UN Security Council; the country would have to compete in elections in order to temporarily serve on that august body. Given that Ireland has been a member of the UN Security Council for just six years since the UN began, in contrast to the UK’s 76 years, Scotland’s ability to do good internationally through the UN would be much diminished by independence.

So too would the rest of the UK’s influence at the UN wane in the event of Scottish independence. Reform of the UN Security Council is both necessary to improve the effectiveness of the organisation and long overdue. However, any action that weakens our country will be leapt upon by Russia and China as an excuse for revisiting the UK’s P5 membership, in the event that reform does come. As the United Nations Association – UK has warned, ‘any reduction in the UK’s status ... such as would result from Scottish independence, would be likely to increase the already growing demands for reform of the Security Council’.<sup>2</sup>

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2 United Nations Association – UK, ‘What would happen to the UK’s seat at the UN Security Council if Scotland were to become independent?’ (UNA–UK, August 30, 2017)



## Our ability to defend democracy

Another international organisation through which our country is an important force for good globally is Nato, the alliance that has done more to uphold peace in Europe since the Second World War than any individual country ever could. The UK is just one of three nuclear nations within Nato, helping to deter nuclear attacks on 30 countries, which together account for around one in seven of the world's population.

**‘The economic impact of Scotland’s departure would make it harder for the UK to provide sufficient funding for our Armed Forces, our world-leading intelligence and security services, and the maintenance of our independent nuclear deterrent’**

Through the UK’s membership of Nato and the alliance’s principle of collective defence, which deters foreign attacks, Scotland’s peace and security are well safeguarded. While, again, an independent Scotland could of course join Nato in its own right, it is far from certain that a nationalist government would allow the country to do so. The SNP has historically been opposed to Nato membership, only adopting a pro-Nato stance in 2012. Moreover, in their white paper on independence, the nationalists proposed spending less on defence than the required 2% of GDP,<sup>3</sup> casting further uncertainty over their commitment to the organisation.

Regardless as to whether an independent Scotland would be allowed to join Nato, the break-up of the UK will be a godsend to our enemies. As much as the architects of independence seek to distance themselves from Russia – with Alex Salmond trying in vain to do so from his television show on the Kremlin-funded channel RT – there are few results that would delight Vladimir Putin more than Scottish independence. Putin’s Russia thrives on spreading discord between and within Western democracies.

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3 Scottish Government, ‘Scotland’s Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland’ (Scottish Government, 2013)



We know from the Russia report released last year that there have been credible claims that Russia interfered in the 2014 referendum.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Atlantic Council has produced evidence that Russia has been running a disinformation campaign to discredit the result of the Scottish independence referendum result, including claims that 'Yes' ballot papers were added to 'No' piles.<sup>5</sup> Russia's motive is clear: breaking up one of the most successful unions of nations in history would both leave the people of Scotland and the rest of the UK more vulnerable to the malign influence of the Kremlin and weaken Britain's ability to counter Russia on the world stage.

**‘ The Atlantic Council has produced evidence that Russia has been running a disinformation campaign to discredit the result of the Scottish independence referendum result, including claims that ‘Yes’ ballot papers were added to ‘No’ piles ’**

Leaving aside the SNP's ambivalent position over Nato and Russia and the risks of independence for the security of Scotland, a vote for independence would also leave the rest of the UK less safe and secure. The economic impact of Scotland's departure would make it harder for the UK to provide sufficient funding for our Armed Forces, our world-leading intelligence and security services, and the maintenance of our independent nuclear deterrent. As the Defence Committee concluded in 2013, 'the level of security and defence presently afforded to the people of the United Kingdom is higher than that which could be provided by the Governments of a separate Scotland and the remainder of the UK'.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 'Russia' (UK Parliament, 2020)

5 The Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), '#ElectionWatch: Scottish Vote, Pro-Kremlin Trolls' (December 13, 2017)

6 House of Commons Defence Committee, 'The Defence Implications of Possible Scottish Independence' (The Stationery Office, 2013), paragraph 156



## The false promise of EU membership

Ignoring the realities of independence for Scotland's influence and ability to do good globally, the nationalists have a familiar silver bullet: the European Union. The SNP claims that joining the EU will grant Scotland strong influence in Europe and the ability to do more to address important global issues. The real picture, however, is far less clear.

**‘ The EU’s Excessive Deficit Procedure rules state that EU countries must not allow their budget deficit to exceed 3% of GDP, less than half of the 7% of GDP seen in Scotland before the Covid-19 crash ’**

First, it is far from certain that an independent Scotland would be able to join the EU in the short to medium term. As highlighted consistently since the referendum was granted, joining the EU means joining the euro and abandoning the pound, a proposition less than one in five Scots supports. Moreover, the EU's Excessive Deficit Procedure rules state that EU countries must not allow their budget deficit to exceed 3% of GDP, less than half of the 7% of GDP seen in Scotland before the Covid-19 crash.

Second, even if an independent Scotland were able to join the EU, it is unlikely that it would have a strong voice within Europe, never mind on the world stage. Influence within the EU – from the number of MEPs to the allocation of votes under the Qualified Majority Voting system – is based on countries' population sizes. This would leave Scotland with less influence in the EU than countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The nationalists often peddle the politics of grievance, claiming that Scotland is ignored by Westminster, despite accounting for 8% of the UK's population. It is difficult to see how Brussels could give Scotland a greater voice, accounting as it would for just 1% of the EU's population.



## Together, we can do more good globally

Working together, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland are a formidable force for good on the world stage. If the people of Scotland want to continue to enjoy strong soft power, hold privileged positions in international forums and play their part in defending democracy, they must reject the siren calls from Sturgeon and her party. A leap into the dark would damage not only Scotland's ability to do good on the world stage, but also the rest of the UK's.

Similarly, if Britain wants to continue to work to make the world safer, fairer and more prosperous, we must do everything we can to protect the precious bond between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

**‘ Together, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland can continue to be a force for good on the world stage and enjoy the peace, security and prosperity this brings ’**

Both at home and abroad, our family of nations is truly more than the sum of its parts. Together, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland can continue to be a force for good on the world stage and enjoy the peace, security and prosperity this brings.



## The SNP has no idea how to defend Scotland *by the Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon*

In my home city of Perth stands the Black Watch Museum. It proudly commemorates the history of that great regiment: ‘from Fontenoy to Fallujah with Ticonderoga, Waterloo, Alamein and two World Wars in between, the Black Watch has been there when the world’s history has been shaped’.<sup>7</sup>

It’s a reminder that for over 300 years Scotland and England have defended freedom side by side: together, we’ve fought fascism and aggression in Europe and terrorism across the globe. Scottish soldiers, Scottish airmen and women and Scottish sailors have helped keep these islands safe. But they have done so much more: together they’ve helped to advance our values – of freedom under the law and respect for international order – across the world.

**‘ Britain has the strongest defence forces in Europe  
and is the fifth biggest defence power in the world ’**

Today our aircraft carriers, launched from Rosyth, are sailing the globe to help keep the peace alongside our allies. Scottish pilots are flying RAF Typhoons to police Baltic airspace against Russian incursion. Scottish troops serve in Africa, Asia and the Middle East to help underpin fragile democracies and protect our European security. These operations, always in support of international law and multilateral treaties, put the liberal values of the Scottish Enlightenment into practical and humanitarian effect.

Britain has the strongest defence forces in Europe and is the fifth biggest defence power in the world. That strength and power, second only to the United States among the democracies, is for the common good. And it’s only possible because Scotland and England together, with Wales and Northern Ireland, are so much more than the sum of their parts.

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<sup>7</sup> The Black Watch Museum, accessed here: [link](#)





Scotland plays a central part in the defence of the British Isles. The Royal Navy's base on the Clyde hosts all its submarines – not just the Trident boats – and employs 8,500 people. Orders for nine new frigates are being placed with shipyards on the Clyde and the Forth, employing thousands more. RAF Lossiemouth, employing another 2,200, hosts half the RAF's Typhoon squadrons and will house the UK's nine P-8 maritime patrol aircraft. Thousands of troops, including the 51st Infantry Brigade and five battalions of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, are stationed across Scotland, always ready to help out, whether it's to battle flooding or assist with the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

**‘ Adversaries such as Russia, China, Iran and North Korea breach international treaties and directly threaten our way of life ’**

British defence combines the best of each nation. Those aircraft carriers were built block by block in both Scottish and English shipyards. Our RAF Typhoons are assembled in Lancashire, with sophisticated avionics from Edinburgh. Every regiment in the British Army would be poorer without its Scottish men and women. Scots have always served at the very highest ranks in the British military. Most of Wellington's generals were Scots. Admiral Duncan from Dundee saved us from the Dutch at Camperdown. Admiral Cochrane from Hamilton helped lead Brazil, Chile and Peru to independence, and Admiral John Paul from Kirkcudbright is recognised as 'the Father of the American Navy'.

Our defence of these islands is successful because it is interwoven. The RAF holds fighter jets at instant readiness at both Lossiemouth in Moray and Coningsby in Lincolnshire to intercept Russian aircraft entering our air defence zone and to prevent a 9/11-style attack on any of our cities, in Scotland or England. Those jets, with tanker support, must cover the whole of our flight information region in minutes. Terrorist hijackers won't ask permission to overfly any Scottish border.

The Royal Navy protects fisheries around Scottish coasts but also the key transatlantic cables, so vital for the commercial centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow.



Our Vanguard submarines are on constant patrol from Faslane to deter any potential nuclear attacker from targeting Scottish as well as English cities. The P-8 maritime patrol aircraft at Lossiemouth and the new anti-submarine frigates being built on the Clyde in turn protect the deterrent.

A separate Scotland would undermine all this. Small-scale Scottish-only forces would have to be constructed from among those who were willing to transfer from each of the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, Army and UK Strategic Command. The nationalists propose a Scottish military comprising just four warships, a couple of RAF squadrons and an army brigade. To keep Scotland safe such a small force would necessarily have to contract out key defence functions such as air policing, cyber-security, and the use of enablers such as helicopters, just as the Irish Republic relies on the RAF to police its own airspace.

### **‘The only defence policy the SNP put forward shows the poverty and insularity of separatist thinking’**

But size isn’t the only issue. An independent Scotland would have to develop a separate defence policy. And here the difficulties begin: the separatists haven’t yet started to think this through. The SNP submission to the UK Government’s Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy contained just seven pages on defence;<sup>8</sup> there was not a single costing for the hundreds of millions of pounds involved in the dismembering of our Armed Forces and the loss of so many defence jobs across Scotland.

The only defence policy they do put forward shows the poverty and insularity of separatist thinking. The SNP wants us to forget about ‘out of area operations of dubious benefit’ and focus instead just on the Arctic Circle and the ‘High North’.<sup>9</sup> This ignores the real-world threats from international terrorism, from a nuclear-armed Iran, from Russian and Chinese aggression and from growing instability in Africa. To counter the increasing danger of cyber attacks – of the kind we’ve already seen on

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8 SNP submission to the Integrated Review, pp.6-12 (November 17, 2020)

9 Ibid, p.6



Scottish companies, on our NHS, on Parliament – the nationalists’ only answer is to propose an ‘ambassador for hybrid affairs’. To stop President Putin interfering in our country – remember the Salisbury poisonings – they suggest that we only need to reform the funding of political parties to curb foreign donations (which are already illegal).<sup>10</sup>

These aren’t real world answers. In fact, they would weaken our security and leave us less safe. An independent Scotland would mean a weaker Nato; a fractured Britain would be more vulnerable to Russian aggression, more exposed to Islamist terrorism and less able to counter Chinese interference. In the real world, our adversaries would welcome a weaker Britain. Look how Russia has preyed on the instability of the Balkans and how China takes full advantage of over-indebted countries; cyber-warriors won’t be deterred by an ‘ambassador for hybrid affairs’.

**‘An independent Scotland would mean a weaker Nato; a fractured Britain would be more vulnerable to Russian aggression, more exposed to Islamist terrorism and less able to counter Chinese interference’**

Let’s look at the rest of that defence policy in detail. First, the nationalists propose that Scotland joins Nato in its own right: Scotland would take its place around the Nato table next to Slovakia and Slovenia. But Nato is a nuclear alliance: its members accept that they come under the nuclear umbrella, the protection provided by the US and UK nuclear deterrents. To quote Nato: ‘The supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance.’<sup>11</sup> Each new member of Nato (and an independent Scotland would be a new member) has to accept this on joining.

Even when they don’t have nuclear weapons of their own, Nato members support Nato’s nuclear-sharing arrangement, under which many members provide dual-capability aircraft and the bases from which they can fly. All Nato members (except

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>11</sup> The Alliance’s Strategic Concept, Rome, paragraph 55 (November 7-8, 1991)



France, which has its own nuclear forces) take part in Nato nuclear planning, including Canada and Norway. Even if a separate Scottish Government rejected our Vanguard submarines and closed their base at Faslane, Scotland in Nato would still be unable to opt out of nuclear protection.

Second, the SNP proposes that Scotland (and indeed the UK) should no longer commit to 'out of area operations'. Instead, a separate Scotland would restrict its Nato contribution to its north-western boundary: the Arctic Circle and the High North.

### **‘ The Skripal poisoning could have occurred in Stirling as easily as in Salisbury. Sputnik broadcasts Russian propaganda from an office in Edinburgh ’**

There are indeed growing tensions in Nato's north, as the climate warms and the northern trade passage opens up. But those countries most concerned – Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states – are looking to strengthen, not break up, their partnerships with larger neighbours. Norway is working with the US and the UK on Atlantic patrolling, and the Nordic and Baltic states have joined the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force.

But the threats to the security of our islands are not just European. Since the beginning of this century they have been increasingly international. Adversaries such as Russia, China, Iran and North Korea breach international treaties and directly threaten our way of life. The Skripal poisoning could have occurred in Stirling as easily as in Salisbury. Sputnik broadcasts Russian propaganda from an office in Edinburgh. Chinese hackers steal intellectual property from companies north and south of Hadrian's Wall.

And then there is terrorism, the biggest international threat of all. Daesh, Al Qaeda and their offshoots remain very dangerous to any of us in the West. The Nato mission in Afghanistan and our coalition protecting Iraq weren't just about defending their democracies: we were there to defend ours. Scotland, like England, like France, like Spain, is in the firing line. Islamist extremists attacked Glasgow Airport the day



after they planted car bombs in London in 2007. Four of the Britons slaughtered by Islamist terrorists on the beach in Tunisia in 2015 were Scots.

Dealing effectively with terrorism means dealing with it at source, and certainly 'out of area'. British troops, Scots battalions among them, served tour after tour in Afghanistan to restrict safe havens from which attacks in British and European cities could be directed or inspired. Scottish RAF pilots and army trainers, including 3 Rifles from Edinburgh, are part of the 75-nation-strong coalition driving Daesh out of Iraq. Those airstrikes and that training have helped to reduce attacks on British and European cities. To their shame, the Scottish nationalists in Parliament voted each time against joining our allies in those UN-backed operations.

**‘If it were outside the protection of GCHQ (including our world-leading National Cyber Security Centre) and no longer part of the new UK National Cyber Force, Scotland would be less able to forestall cyber-attacks on its citizens and its companies’**

Protecting us from terrorist attacks and 'grey zone' interference also depends upon intense intelligence and co-operation with our closest allies. Britain in particular relies on its membership of the 'Five Eyes' intelligence-sharing partnership between the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. If it were outside the protection of GCHQ (including our world-leading National Cyber Security Centre) and no longer part of the new UK National Cyber Force, Scotland would be less able to forestall cyber-attacks on its citizens and its companies.

A separate Scotland would also be retreating from the world. Through the UK, Scotland shares one of the five permanent seats on the UN Security Council and one of the seven seats at the annual G7 economic summit. These leadership positions matter when it comes to upholding the rules-based international order on which Scotland's security and prosperity ultimately depend. If you believe that international borders should not be changed by force, then you must respond to Ukraine's call for equipment and training to resist Russian aggression. If you believe in upholding the treaty safeguarding Hong Kong (much of whose success is owed



to Scottish finance and expertise), then you have to stand up to Chinese bullying. Effective deterrence and defence involve deploying our military power – ships, troops and aircraft – across the globe alongside our allies.

In fact, Scotland has always looked outwards. The prosperity of our islands was largely built on Scottish merchants and entrepreneurs, trading across the globe. Inside or outside the UK, the Scottish economy depends on trade with the rest of the world: it's always been in Scotland's interest to keep those trade routes open, whether it's the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf, the Bab-el-Mandeb in the Red Sea or the Strait of Malacca in the Pacific. Leaving the UK would not enable Scotland to opt out of the global economy; nor could Scotland morally leave international policing of its trade routes to everybody else. That's why there's an Australian frigate operating in the Gulf, far from home.

**‘Defence is a major industry with over 10,000 high-value jobs across Scotland, depending on £1.75 billion of UK defence spending annually’**

Finally, those armed forces that a separate Scotland would try to retain would be further weakened by two extraordinary reforms that the SNP proposes. First, that servicemen and women should be allowed a trade union, described as a ‘representative body’. That trade union would have pay-bargaining rights and the ability to take up disciplinary concerns; this would completely undermine the chain of command. Second, 17-year-olds, though adult enough to be given the vote in a Scottish referendum, would be barred from joining up until they were 18, thus making recruitment more difficult.

Reducing Scotland's role in the world and dismembering our Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force would leave us all less safe. It would weaken Nato and would play into the hands of our adversaries, especially those in Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang and Tehran who wish us harm. But it would also come at a huge economic cost. There's no pricing in the SNP's policy for the millions to be spent on re-organising and re-basing each of our Armed Forces.



Nor have they considered the impact on employment and Scottish industry. It isn't just the jobs at military bases in Edinburgh, Leuchars, Arbroath, Lossiemouth and Faslane that would be under threat. Defence is a major industry with over 10,000 high-value jobs across Scotland, depending on £1.75 billion of UK defence spending annually. And it's a significant exporter: over 20 major defence companies have manufacturing, research and other facilities in Scotland.

There would be immediate employment consequences from partition: Royal Navy warships are only built in UK yards, so could no longer be ordered from the Clyde. Babcock's construction of the common missile compartment for the UK Dreadnought and US Columbia submarine programmes would have to be moved from Rosyth. RAF Typhoons and maritime patrol aircraft would leave Lossiemouth.

**Major contractors such as Thales in Glasgow, Leonardo in Edinburgh and Raytheon in Fife would have to reassess their locations. These are high-value white-collar jobs closely linked to Scottish universities. Scotland would also lose its share of the UK's £2.5bn space programme, including the spaceport planned for Sutherland**

But there would be longer-term consequences too. Major contractors such as Thales in Glasgow, Leonardo in Edinburgh and Raytheon in Fife would have to reassess their locations. These are high-value white-collar jobs closely linked to Scottish universities. Scotland would also lose its share of the UK's £2.5bn space programme, including the spaceport planned for Sutherland.

We need to consider all this with our eyes wide open. Scotland could pull out of the UK's defence and minimise its role and influence in the world. Scotland could reduce itself to the likes of Slovakia and Slovenia: small countries can join Nato. Dismembering our long-standing Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force would be complicated, painful and extremely costly. That is the question that the separatists



must answer: would all this be really worth it if the result is a much less safe Scotland than today?

**‘ Nemo me impune lacessit – nobody attacks me with impunity – is the Black Watch regimental motto. Scotland has never left its defence to others. It shouldn’t do so now.’**

And morally this is very different from any economic argument. Some Scottish voters could indeed choose to risk becoming poorer, at least in the short term, in return for the perceived gains of independence. But to decide wilfully to make Scotland less safe – at a time when the threats to our security are agreed to have significantly increased – would be perverse.

And there’s something else. Scots have never opted out of their own defence. *Nemo me impune lacessit* – nobody attacks me with impunity – is the Black Watch regimental motto. Scotland has never left its defence to others. It shouldn’t do so now.





## The Union and the tale of the two dragons *by Robin Millar MP*

Vortigern, High King of the Britons, had rotten luck.

Even by the chaotic standards of the fifth century, nothing seemed to go his way. To the north, fierce blue-skinned men – the Picts – had hopped over the old Roman wall and were carrying off or burning whatever they could lay their hands on. Spurred by tales of plunder, ships brimming with pirates and settlers – including the dreaded Scots – had crossed the Irish Sea and swept over the beleaguered Britons. When Vortigern, in his desperation, invited in the Saxon brothers Hengist and Horsa to defend his lands, the pair duly betrayed him, killed his son and set about conquering swathes of Britain.

**‘ Successive British administrations have failed to grasp that there is a web of memories and relationships that bind our Union ’**

Now, with the barbarians pressing in on all sides, King Vortigern couldn't even build a castle. Every day, his masons worked to erect walls on a hill in what is now Gwynedd, North Wales. But every morning they found their stones toppled.

Despairing, the King was driven to the verge of sacrificing a local boy to appease whatever spirit had cursed the hillside. The boy in question, Myrddin (better known these days as Merlin), was understandably displeased with the idea and persuaded the King of a counter-proposal: excavate the hill. This proved a fateful choice, for when Vortigern's workmen drove their spades into the hillside, part of its exterior crumbled, and two ferocious dragons sprang forth – one Red and one White. Taking to the skies above the terrified retinue, the Red Dragon duly slew the White Dragon, casting its body down into the valley.



The message of all who would go on to repeat the tale was clear: the Britons (the Red Dragon) would one day defeat the Saxons (the White Dragon) and unite all of Britain under one banner.

This is not whimsy. Folk traditions are a serious thing. Innocuous as they may seem, contained within them is something potent: competing claims to a people's story. They can make nations or break them apart; it may be the soldiers who fight, but it is the storytellers who inspire bravery or fear, who define a sense of who is 'us' and who is 'them' and who give weight and passion to a cause.

**‘ Democracies work by the willingness of a person to have their property confiscated (taxes) and their liberty constricted (laws) at the behest of a group of people they do not know (the electorate) ’**

One thousand years on from Vortigern, Henry VII (of the upstart Welsh Tudor dynasty) was well aware of the potency of folk tales when he adopted the Red Dragon as his battle banner during his march through Wales against Richard III. His message was clear: 'I am "Y Mab Darogan" ["the Prophesied Son"], liberator of the Britons, here to re-establish our dominion over our ancient lands.'

When the victorious Henry presented the Red Dragon alongside the flag of Saint George at Saint Paul's Cathedral in 1485, he was consciously combining the tales, and fates, of the descendants of Vortigern and the tricky Saxon brothers. From this footing, his son, Henry VIII, went further – abolishing the legal distinctions between the two peoples.

And yet, in the minds of some, the two peoples remained forever separate. However enthusiastically the English adopted Welsh tales of Arthur, Merlin and dragons, however integrated their cultures and economies grew, some were never convinced by Wales's 15th-century 'liberation'. This anxiety grew during the industrial period, when English and Irish migration doubled Wales's population, contributing to a rapid decline of the Welsh language.



Yet most Welsh people proved willing to combine their concerns with those from different backgrounds. So long as the folk tradition had no competing claims of sovereignty to latch onto, enclaves of the Welsh language could join themselves to the wider British non-conformist, liberal tradition; even returning, among others, Britain's only Prime Minister to speak English as a second language – David Lloyd George. Welshmen and women fought bravely alongside their English cousins in defence of their island, married into English families and migrated across the UK (and, later, its colonies). As embodied by the likes of Aneurin Bevan, the Welsh played a crucial part in forging the modern British state.

The 21st century has been witness to a curious twist in the Tale of Two Dragons. When Tony Blair created the Welsh Assembly (now the Welsh Parliament, or 'Senedd'), he unwittingly created a vessel for a competing claim to sovereignty. In law, of course, the Westminster Parliament remains sovereign, but this claim must also convince those it binds.

**‘ Like most of North Wales, Aberconwy now votes Conservative in both general and Senedd elections, and I’m blessed with a good relationship with my Senedd colleague Janet Finch-Saunders ’**

Take, as an example, my own constituency – Aberconwy. Like most of North Wales, Aberconwy now votes Conservative in both general and Senedd elections, and I'm blessed with a good relationship with my Senedd colleague Janet Finch-Saunders. Imagine, however, that the constituency's Member of the Senedd (MS) was not from my party. Imagine, too, that the Conservative majority in the British Parliament voted for a project – say, a new railway station – that was opposed by Aberconwy's MS and a majority of her Senedd colleagues. Which one of us can rightly claim to speak for Aberconwy? And which of the two elected bodies can claim the right to make the ultimate decision over the project?

To answer these questions, we must look deeper than the legal literature – for a population must believe in the legitimacy of the law-making process for its laws to



hold them captive. Nor can an appeal to democracy aid us, for both sides vest their claims in democracy – the British Parliament in the notion of ‘one Briton, one vote’, and the Senedd in ‘one Welsh person, one vote’ (or, in the latter case, ‘an equal number of votes’). An appeal to localism can’t help us either – for both parliaments assert primacy over councils.

None of these methods are wholly satisfactory because at its heart, the answer to the question of sovereignty is by no means wholly objective. The answer also lies in whether you identify with the British story – that of the coming together of the descendants of Vortigern and his Saxon, Scots and Pictish rivals – or not. This does not preclude an identification with any one tradition (I consider myself Welsh and British), but it does require a belief in a covenant between the people of these islands – in the existence of a ‘British people’.

**‘ Every time a UK minister has been pushed around by a devolved administration, they have unwittingly sent a message to voters that ‘one briton, one vote’ does not prevail in Wales ’**

Successive British administrations have failed to recognise this truth – or, indeed, grasp that there is a web of memories and relationships that bind our Union. Faced with conflict between the Welsh and British executives, successive UK governments have deferred to the Welsh Assembly. Every time a UK minister has been pushed around by a devolved administration, they have unwittingly sent a message to voters that ‘one briton, one vote’ does not prevail in Wales. Welsh Government ministers, meanwhile, have explicitly founded their recent attacks on British authority in the tale that the Welsh are the ultimate source of authority in Wales – that there is no such national people as ‘the British’. This may be wrong in fact and in law, but it is a tale to tickle many listening ears.

While the claims of all sides are vested in ancient stories, it is the nationalists who have proved willing and adept at telling theirs. Herein lies the danger – an untold story becomes an unheard story and, over time, will be forgotten. The advocates of Britain, seemingly unaware of (or embarrassed to tell) a rich and contemporary story of British



sovereignty, have instead thrashed about for alternative arguments, such as the scale of fiscal transfers from England to Wales or the economic benefits of the Union.

Of course, these rational economic arguments are quite persuasive at one level. It is possible to be a Welsh nationalist – to believe in the sovereignty of Wales – and still want to remain part of the UK as a matter of Welsh self-interest. Indeed, this seems to be the philosophy of the Welsh Government, which furiously denounces any UK Government initiative in Wales – while simultaneously relying on its subsidy to remain solvent as an administration.

**‘ The UK’s story is a compelling one, complex and complete with heroism, tragedy, love, friendship, forgiveness and ingenuity ’**

However, dry economic arguments are unsatisfying to souls needing nourishment. They leave the Union in a precarious position – for ceding the narrative to nationalists will eventually undermine the very fiscal transfers upon which the new federal-style Unionism rests its case.

Democracies work by the willingness of a person to have their property confiscated (taxes) and their liberty constricted (laws) at the behest of a group of people they do not know (the electorate). But that also requires some sense that those people share with them the same interests and destiny. This starts to break down if a person sees the interests of the ruling group as separate from, or pitted against, their own. In assessing whether this is the case, such a person will often refer to a tale that reaches beyond the personal and identifies a collective ‘we’.

If those of us who love Britain want to secure the future of our country, we are going to have to tell such a story. This is a tall task, but we should take heart that we have much to say. The UK’s story is a compelling one, complex and complete with heroism, tragedy, love, friendship, forgiveness and ingenuity.

And if that isn’t enough, we can always throw in a couple of dragons.



## The data difference: solving our common challenges by *Chloe Smith MP*

Any policymaker will tell you that good policy design and delivery requires evidence. Data is essential for identifying the problems we want to solve, designing solutions and measuring the success of what can be done on behalf of citizens.

So-called 'big data' holds huge potential to map trends and improve our understanding of life in the United Kingdom today. Combining data from across government departments and devolved administrations can also help us tackle common challenges across the UK such as inequalities, deprivation or climate change, which require a multifaceted approach.

**‘ The pandemic has been enormously challenging for us all and brought with it a huge number of policy and delivery problems, faster than anybody knew how to solve ’**

And we do best when we do tackle things together as one UK. The most successful economic and political union we have known is all about getting the best for its citizens.

The benefits of the use of data have been clearly demonstrated throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been enormously challenging for us all and brought with it a huge number of policy and delivery problems, faster than anybody knew how to solve. For decisions to be made for the whole of the UK, a shared analytical picture was needed from across the four administrations, which in the beginning was hampered by a lack of resource and comparative datasets.

We have come a long way since then, and now No 10 has a whole data science unit, which creates interactive policy scenario dashboards that have been having a significant impact on decision-making.



The response to the pandemic required a collaborative effort and this was no different in terms of data. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), for example, established the 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey',<sup>12</sup> which brings together estimates from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to look at trends such as:

- the percentage of people who have had Covid-19 each month
- the number of people who have had Covid-19 at a subnational level
- the age of people who have had Covid-19
- the number of new Covid-19 infections
- the number of people testing positive for Covid-19 by variant

The ONS is also doing fantastic work on the novel use of data, such as using live financial data to map the effects of Covid-19, or using live data on the position of ships to estimate GDP.

## ‘ The Covid-19 pandemic has proven that there is an appetite for publicly available data ’

In addition to data relating to Covid-19 transmission, economic data has also been vital throughout the pandemic. UK-wide data allowed us to quickly put in place a scheme in April 2020 that millions have benefited from – the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (or ‘furlough’), which was widely used across the UK to maintain jobs during a difficult period.

The Institute for Government (IfG) recently published a report entitled *Devolved Public Services*, analysing the performance of the NHS, schools and social care across the UK. It found that UK-wide data and statistics were not always easy to come by and that the UK Government and the devolved administrations collect and publish ‘increasingly different data’, making comparison difficult.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Office for National Statistics, ‘Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey’, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey, UK Statistical bulletins. [link](#)

13 Institute for Government, ‘Devolved Public Services: The NHS, Schools and Social Care in the Four Nations’, (Institute for Government, 2021). [link](#)



This does not have to be the case. A key advantage of devolution is to allow us to learn from different approaches to policy and public services. It provides a fantastic and unique opportunity to test different spending and policy choices, to challenge ourselves about what works and to learn from each other to improve public services and outcomes.

Devolution means that decisions can be taken closest to the citizens they affect. Each administration may respond to different priorities in different ways. This provides the opportunity to experiment and find new, innovative ways to confront our shared challenges.

**‘ With events in Parliament on the 2021 Census and data masterclasses for ministers, the ONS is building the necessary capability we need to understand the value of UK-wide data and be confident in using it ’**

Collecting and analysing data that is easily comparable UK-wide helps us to share learning, from how much we spend and the design of our policies to the outcomes we measure. It gives us the power to scrutinise and learn from the success of a policy and ask ourselves if we can use it to deliver the best for citizens across the UK.

Any government must be able to show the people it is accountable to – its citizens – that it has made decisions based on robust evidence and demonstrate the positive impact of that policy.

The Covid-19 pandemic has proven that there is an appetite for publicly available data. Daily records and dashboards of case numbers, hospitalisations and Covid-19 deaths across the administrations of the UK enabled the public to scrutinise their Government’s decisions in daily briefings. This is central to open and transparent government – something we should uphold and encourage.

Making sure the relevant data is open and transparent means the people we are accountable to need to know what we are doing to improve their public services – and we cannot shy away from the areas we need to do better in.





But the IfG rightly identified a number of challenges to accessing UK-wide data, as well as recommending solutions.

First, although all the administrations use taxpayers' money, this is not accounted for in the same way. If we can achieve a more consistent method of accounting for public money, it will give policymakers the opportunity to make sure they are spending on the right things and understand where England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are making different decisions. It will also give taxpayers across the UK clarity about how that money is spent.

**‘ Discussions on data cannot be as reductive as simply how much money is spent on different issues by different partners. It is important that we focus on the value that is delivered by that spending ’**

Second, the administrations often measure or publish different performance metrics, which means it is very difficult to compare outcomes. Published data is often highly variable which makes comparisons between different data sources time-consuming. Would it not be useful if parents could compare the education their child is receiving in their school to schools elsewhere in the UK? Or the quality of social care their elderly parents receive?

Third, some priority policies not only lack consistent data but also have serious data gaps across all the administrations. It is important that we collect this important information, or there is a risk of designing policy without the full picture.

Finally, discussions on data cannot be as reductive as simply how much money is spent on different issues by different partners. It is important that we focus on the value that is delivered by that spending. As the IfG report makes plain, there is currently no way to accurately compare spending in the administrations and whether this is based on need, the policy of the day or the cost of delivery. Without this information we cannot hope to learn from each other – and for citizens to get one of the key benefits of devolution.



To achieve that goal, we need to build the tools to deliver it. That is why it is essential that we work to improve the comparability of data so that we can more accurately compare the effectiveness of public policy across the UK, and make sure all citizens have the opportunity to benefit from the best ideas.

**‘ We have a lot to learn from international organisations such as Statistics Canada and the Federal Statistics Authority of Germany, which bring together their national data under one umbrella ’**

The challenges we face in accessing the right data can be overcome. We have a lot to learn from international organisations such as Statistics Canada<sup>14</sup> and the Federal Statistics Authority of Germany,<sup>15</sup> which bring together their national data under one umbrella. So I am hugely supportive of the work of the ONS, National Records of Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and StatsWales. Other countries have used data that the UK has produced – from spatial and Covid-19 modelling to treatment trial result data. We have provided a massive global public good since March 2020, and it often goes unrecognised.

The ONS is also central to the new *National Data Strategy*<sup>16</sup> and the work it has already achieved in the statistical coherence programme<sup>17</sup> is only the start. With events in Parliament on the 2021 Census and data masterclasses for ministers, the ONS is building the necessary capability we need to understand the value of UK-wide data and be confident in using it.

For that reason, I am proud of the progress we have made thus far in building relationships and learning from each other, and I have high hopes for how we can go on delivering for citizens as we continue to build up our data picture for individual people, and their families, wherever they live, and for all of us as part of the UK.

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14 Statistics Canada. [link](#)

15 Statistisches Bundesamt. [link](#)

16 Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, ‘National Data Strategy’ (GOV.UK, 2019, last updated June 2021). [link](#)

17 Government Statistical Service, ‘Coherence of statistics’. [link](#)



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## Reconciling with Northern Ireland's past, looking to its future

*by the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP*

This year is the centenary of Northern Ireland, and the Union as we know it. As we mark this historic occasion, I know many will be reflecting on the past as well as looking to the century ahead. But building the brighter future we all wish to see requires us to be honest and upfront about some uncomfortable truths.

There are some generations both in Northern Ireland itself and elsewhere in the United Kingdom whose first instinct on this anniversary will be to think of The Troubles – the descent into bloody violence that began in the late 1960s, claiming the lives of more than 3,500 people, and which only came to some sort of a close with the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

**“ Twenty-three years on from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, we have an opportunity to help build a better future for the generations to come, which is less tainted by the legacy of Northern Ireland's difficult past ”**

I do not propose to go back in discussion here to the roots of the problems. But we must take a moment to reflect on the communities that were bitterly riven, memoirs which speak of streets like ‘war zones’, the pervading menace of paramilitaries, the bombings and the innocents on all sides who were killed, injured or grievously affected in some way.

Twenty-three years on from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, we have an opportunity to help build a better future for the generations to come, which is less tainted by the legacy of Northern Ireland's difficult past. Earlier this year the Government set out its proposals for how we might take this next step forward.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> HM Government, ‘Northern Ireland Protocol: the way forward’ (July, 27 2021)



It would be foolish to claim or believe there is anything at all straightforward about this. But we must, now, do something to enable those who want to find out the truth about what happened to their loved ones to be able to do so. If we are to build a Northern Ireland that can look forwards with confidence, some measure of reconciliation with the past is essential.

I am hopeful of progress, but we should be under no illusion that the situation in Northern Ireland is complicated. Today, there is significant overlap between terrorist, paramilitary and organised crime groups. These groups exist in the same ecosystem and cause significant harm.

**‘Vibrant and cohesive communities are the key to helping more sustained economic progress, to becoming more tolerant and open, and to ensuring that current and future generations can reap the benefits of a safer, brighter future’**

We will continue to support the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the National Crime Agency against those operating in pure criminality (smuggling, modern slavery, protection racketeering), bushelled under the guise of political paramilitarism and exploiting the border for their own ends. They should be called out for what they are.

This might have seemed a rather strange way to open a piece on the centenary of Northern Ireland and indeed the Union of today. But my point is that we would be doing ourselves no favours by trying to ignore the long shadow of the legacy of the past. We should be clear that one of the Government’s primary objectives for Northern Ireland is to continue to ensure that it is ever safer and more free from paramilitarism and terrorism, because only this way will it flourish, prosper and reach its fullest potential.

Communities must be supported by this government and the Northern Ireland Executive to become ever stronger, more resilient and more reconciled. Vibrant and cohesive communities are the key to helping more sustained economic progress,



to becoming more tolerant and open, and to ensuring that current and future generations can reap the benefits of a safer, brighter future.

Against this backdrop, everyone can really see how far society in Northern Ireland has come – and the very real and exciting potential for what the future looks like too. We want to see a stable Northern Ireland where democracy is mature, and integration is embraced.

**‘Northern Ireland has been one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK. Its economic model has previously been built around relatively low-skilled and low-wage jobs – resulting in poor productivity, and indeed living standards’**

Progress has not stalled – but this past year has, of course, been particularly difficult. The response to the pandemic has shown the importance of all parts of the UK working together. We have delivered a world-leading vaccination programme, ensured everyone across the UK can access testing, and delivered a substantial economic package to get us all through these extremely challenging times. It is this story of resilience against the pandemic that has demonstrated the true value of our Union in Northern Ireland’s centenary year.

We have wrapped up these past 100 years of history in the campaign ‘Our Story in the Making: NI Beyond 100’, which tells of communities and individuals in a spirit of mutual respect, inclusivity and optimism. With these stories of the past and present we can really put the spirit of our ambition for Northern Ireland in context.

The programme is a comprehensive way to truly highlight all that Northern Ireland has to offer as a place to live, work, invest or visit – from events to celebrate the achievements of young people in arts, sports and culture, to our Business Showcase later this year, to academic and historic events and a Shared History Fund, which through 39 projects is bringing together the diverse and previously untold stories of Northern Ireland.



Beyond the centenary year itself, there are ambitious plans on the Levelling Up agenda. To me, a levelled-up Northern Ireland means one where economic opportunity is more evenly distributed, society is more integrated and confident in itself, and great public services are delivering the best possible outcomes for everyone.

Northern Ireland has been one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK. Its economic model has previously been built around relatively low-skilled and low-wage jobs – resulting in poor productivity, and indeed living standards.

**‘As we look to the century ahead, we must continue working hard to deliver on the issues that matter to Northern Ireland’s people. Stability. Rewarding jobs. Great schools. Excellent healthcare’**

But that is the old modus. And it is one that is now belied by what I have seen to be the truth on the ground. Microsoft has recently chosen Northern Ireland as the location for a new Cyber Security Centre. Anyone with a Fitbit – that’s supported by technology out of Northern Ireland. The wildly popular television series *Game of Thrones* was, of course, filmed in part in Northern Ireland – but the cultural landscape does not stop there, with Netflix, now the largest production company in the world, earlier this year beginning its first major production.

Long a pioneering hub of aerospace manufacturing, the Northern Ireland of today is also developing breakthroughs in drone technology. These may be used to deliver emergency medicines or in search and rescue operations, helping to save lives. And if you have travelled on a bus in Aberdeen, Belfast or London, it may well have been a hydrogen-powered bus made in Northern Ireland by Wrightbus, showing we can help reach our climate targets with brilliant home-grown ingenuity.

These are just a clutch of examples of how Northern Ireland is powering forward in fintech, aerospace, R&D, the arts and more.



But there is more we need to do to meet our levelling up ambition. We want to help ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has the skills to succeed and benefit from its new and highly innovative economy. Just as the Union provided us with the strength to fight the pandemic, it is important we continue working together to ensure the health services in Northern Ireland, and indeed in all four nations of the UK, provide the best possible care in the years ahead. And I am keen to find a pathway to a more integrated education system in Northern Ireland that delivers a high-quality education for every child. A recent survey found that the overwhelming majority (69%) would prefer to send their children to a mixed-religion school.<sup>19</sup> And yet at present, less than 10% of children receive education in an integrated school.<sup>20</sup>

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So the bedrocks for Northern Ireland’s future are: prosperity and levelling up its economy with the rest of the UK; greater inclusion, tolerance and openness; and keeping society safe and stable.

I believe the best way for Northern Ireland to achieve all of these objectives is as part of the UK, with a responsive and effective Northern Ireland Executive, backed by the UK Government. By working together we have gotten through the pandemic, and we can deliver the good healthcare, good schools and the opportunity of good jobs that will help Northern Ireland thrive.

This government has invested a great deal in Northern Ireland – which reflects our scale of ambition and belief in the future. Taken in the round, we have made the most substantial investment in Northern Ireland for pretty much a generation. The back-end of last year saw an additional £400m guaranteed through the ‘New Deal for Northern Ireland’. This was on top of £650m for the Trader Support Service;

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19 ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2020 (June 2021)

20 Integrated Education Bill as introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 1 June 2021, (Bill 23/17 22) (June 01, 2021)



investment in new technology to support traders; and our contribution to the PEACE PLUS Programme, funding activities that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to the cross-border economic and territorial development of the region – and that all on top of the £2bn committed to the Northern Ireland Executive under the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement of January 2020.<sup>21</sup>

**‘As we look to the century ahead, we must continue working hard to deliver on the issues that matter to Northern Ireland’s people. Stability. Rewarding jobs’**

That is not to say that everything is perfect. The Government is seeking to negotiate with the EU significant changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol, which is not working in its current form. We cannot ignore, as I set out earlier, the legacy of some of those issues that still trouble us today regarding Northern Ireland’s relatively recent past.

As we look to the century ahead, we must continue working hard to deliver on the issues that matter to Northern Ireland’s people. Stability. Rewarding jobs. Great schools. Excellent healthcare. But the story of Northern Ireland and our Union has always been about so much more than that. Like the emotional and cultural ties that bind us together and are cherished, on both sides of the water.

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<sup>21</sup> *New Decade, New Approach* (2020)





## Preserving the greatest experiment *by Andrew Bowie MP*

I am a Scot. I was born in Scotland and brought up and educated in Scotland. I now have the immense privilege to represent the north-east of Scotland, my home, in the House of Commons. And I happen to believe it is the best part of the best country in the world.

But I am also a Brit. And proud to be so.

I am as at home in London as I am in Aberdeen.

That, for me, is the greatness of our country. We are four peoples in one. The British: a hotchpotch of backgrounds and identities but with shared values. We can be proud Scots, Welsh, Northern Irish, English. We can be proud Londoners or Aberdonians. Muslim or Christian. We can be a mixture of all of the above and more and still be British. That is the beauty of our brilliantly confused melting pot of a country. It is what makes us who we are.

**‘It is a matter of demonstrable fact that this country achieves much more together than it ever could apart – you simply need to look at the incredible pace of the Covid vaccine rollout to see that’**

And it saddens me – no, more than that, it is heartbreaking – to hear people talk of the break-up of this nation, my home, as if they are speaking of nothing more than the end of a business relationship, a trading agreement. As if the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland represents nothing more than a corporate, business, economic arrangement between four distinct and separate nations.

Of course, the economic and business relationships between the home nations are deep and vitally important – not least to the millions of people who rely on the continuation of the UK’s internal market for their jobs, income and security. But it is



so much more than that: this country, my country, the UK, is about the familial ties across our islands. It is about our shared history and the shared values that together we stood up for over the past century and more.

This is the country that abolished slavery; that fought with the Commonwealth and our other allies to free the world from oppression, Nazism and Communism; that helped found the European Court of Human Rights, the United Nations and Nato; and that has stood as a beacon for the poor and dispossessed of the world as a symbol of hope that good will, forever, overcome evil.

I will never forget one hazy summer's evening, about 14 years ago, being aboard HMS Edinburgh, having crossed the Atlantic from Brazil. We were slowly sailing into the English Channel. It must have been about July and the sky was that glorious reddish/blue/magenta colour you only see at the end of a hot summer's day when you are down by the coast.

**‘I often like to think of the UK as a family: Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Comfortable and happy together for the most part but shaken sometimes when one of the family tries something new or admits to wanting to do something different’**

On the upper deck, looking across a sea that was flat calm, and just visible through the fine mist, was the Cornish coast. I could smell the air, almost taste the fish and chips. And I remember thinking to myself, that is my coast. My home. And as long as there remains breath in my body, that is what it will remain.

Very often you hear the United States described as the great experiment. But, to my mind, the original great experiment, launched 70 years before the Bostonians inexplicably decided to chuck what was, by all accounts, perfectly drinkable tea into the ocean, was ours: the experiment of the United Kingdom.

As with any experiment, you change and adapt the processes in order to achieve the desired outcome – in this case a country, diverse and different, but united and



at peace with itself. And in 314 years, in an attempt to succeed, we have seen the shape of our Union change and evolve. We have seen our systems of government adapt and develop in order to achieve what the Americans might describe as a more perfect Union.

This is a state, I have to admit, that we seem quite far from achieving. But that does not mean we should stop trying. It is the duty of all of us to strive to improve our United Kingdom. For if our small islands in the North Sea, with so many ties, with so much in common, cannot stay united, what signal does that send to the rest of this sorely divided world?

**‘ The United Kingdom. Imperfect? Certainly.  
Failed? Certainly not. Unfinished? Probably.  
We are determined to make it work ’**

That is the exciting challenge we all have. And what a challenge. What an opportunity. Inheriting the struggle from the shoulders of giants like the great Donald Dewar, who himself described devolution as a journey, we can make this country work for all its people.

It is a matter of demonstrable fact that this country achieves much more together than it ever could apart – you simply need to look at the incredible pace of the Covid vaccine rollout to see that. Why would we put that at risk? Why would we want to create a border where there has been none for over 300 years?

That is the depressing vision of the nationalist separatists. That is the defeatist attitude of those who look on our Union as a mistake or a remnant of history. That is the sorry analysis of those who cannot believe that our future can be better than our past.

It is not my attitude.

I often like to think of the UK as a family: Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Comfortable and happy together for the most part but shaken sometimes when one of the family tries something new or admits to wanting to do something



different. It takes a while for the family to get used to the idea, but eventually, when it does, it usually makes for a better and more rounded situation. That is the UK with devolution in 2021.

The United Kingdom. Imperfect? Certainly. Failed? Certainly not. Unfinished? Probably. We are determined to make it work.

**‘ Unlike the nationalists, I am an optimist. I believe we can do it. With imagination, with courage, with determination, we can build that better Union. We can complete the experiment. This kingdom is united. And, working together, we can unite it still further ’**

To admit we cannot adapt, to admit that our great experiment of maintaining our Union has failed, to break up our country simply because we are uncomfortable with one part of our constituent parts doing its own thing – would be the easy way out. Democracy is difficult. Maintaining this Union is difficult.

But we must persevere.

Does that mean trying new ways, again changing how we do things? Adapting our processes to achieve a more perfect result? Maybe. And we should not be afraid of that.

The unwritten constitution of our UK is not some museum piece – stuck in aspic, incapable of flexibility and radical thought. From its earliest days it has proven, quite simply because it is by its nature unwritten, to be able to adapt, flex and change with the pressures, challenges and demands of the times we have found ourselves in.

Unlike the nationalists, I am an optimist. I believe we can do it. With imagination, with courage, with determination, we can build that better Union. We can complete the experiment. This kingdom is united. And, working together, we can unite it still further.



## Making the Union relevant *by the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP*

The value of the Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is under intense scrutiny – and its relevance in the 21st century is being seriously challenged. Far from settling the matter ‘for a generation’, the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 has motivated those who would wish to see the end of the Union. The creation of the devolved institutions in Wales and Scotland and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, agreeing to power-sharing arrangements in Northern Ireland in the late 1990s, has, perhaps predictably, not sated the demand for greater autonomy but driven the demand for more.

**‘ We live in the long shadow of the golden era of globalisation and the Western liberal order; the rise of separatist politics is a symptom of this ’**

We live in the long shadow of the golden era of globalisation and the Western liberal order; the rise of separatist politics is a symptom of this. Despite the Union having survived industrial revolutions, global power shifts, internal strife and world wars, those who support the Union are struggling to justify its existence in the 21st century: from the Scottish independence referendum, the Brexit referendum and the tensions arising from the Northern Ireland Protocol, to the increasing powers of devolved authorities and the devolved responses to the Covid-19 crisis, the Union is facing unprecedented pressures.

Despite these stresses, I believe that it would be a mistake of historical proportions to fail to fight for this Union.

The trends we see in the UK, after all, are not unique to these islands. The global system is undergoing profound change, and there is uncertainty about the UK’s continued standing within that global system. Globalisation may have fewer vocal champions than it used to, but at the practical level of day-to-day business and trade, it continues unabated. Enthusiasm for the liberal project of freedom and



democracy, however, has declined. Western politics is increasingly insular, with four years of Donald Trump's anti-trade agenda in the US, and the success of populist, nationalistic parties across Europe. Meanwhile, China and Russia are expanding their global influence – and China, in particular, is demonstrating that a very different political model, one without civil liberties, can be effective in raising living standards.

In this geopolitical landscape, the case for the Union is stronger now than ever before. I believe this, not only because of the well trodden arguments about our economies being 'stronger together', with all the benefits of a welfare and fiscal union, but also because of the emotional resonance of centuries of shared history and culture.

**‘As a Union, the UK has over 300 years of shared history, which has formed an identity and fostered an environment of solidarity, uniting us despite different legal systems, local government structures, churches, education systems, accents, climate and topography’**

While I find these arguments compelling, I accept that some people will never be convinced of the Union's benefits based on these arguments alone. The shared British identity that forms the glue holding the Union together seems to be drying out, resonating with fewer and fewer young people and first- and second-generation Britons. The once-strong ties between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, although unparalleled among nations, are fraying.

The classic defence of the Union is two-fold. First, proponents will make the practical case for staying together: there are tangible benefits from being part of a larger state, including access to stronger institutions, to a globally influential centre of finance, to a fiscal system that facilitates the transfers of welfare and to Her Majesty's Armed Forces, not just to defend us from security risks but also to step in at times of crisis.



The absence of borders facilitates trade and ensures freedom of movement so that we don't even notice we have entered a different country when visiting our families. Our national vaccination programme is only the most recent example showing that all parts of the UK can work together far more effectively than we would do if we were apart.

Unionists will then move on to the second part of their argument: the emotional defence. As a Union, the UK has over 300 years of shared history, which has formed an identity and fostered an environment of solidarity, uniting us despite different legal systems, local government structures, churches, education systems, accents, climate and topography.

**‘ Our national vaccination programme is only the most recent example showing that all parts of the UK can work together far more effectively than we would do if we were apart ’**

The British identity is elusive and difficult to encapsulate in one definition. I know that I ‘feel’ British when I see the Union Flag flown on an embassy overseas, when I am assured that I don't have to think about paying for emergency healthcare, when I see the fierce rivalry between our nations' teams in competitions such as this summer's European Championship, but then watch with pride when we come together to compete at the Olympics and Paralympics.

While I am in no doubt about the value of the Union, there are those who are willing to countenance significant economic damage in order to restore their national identity. The economic case for the Union will not convince those who place more value on their separate, national identity than on a marginal addition to their economic welfare. And there are those who simply do not feel that they possess the elusive ‘British identity’ that is often talked about. It is futile to make a case for the Union based on emotional resonance and solidarity to those who feel no such solidarity.



However, there is another piece of the argument that is often overlooked: foreign policy. How would a post-Union England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland behave as separate countries in the world?

As a liberal internationalist, I have always championed the importance of Global Britain. My time in politics, and particularly as Minister for Modern Slavery and Organised Crime, has only reinforced this belief. As such, I feel compelled to make the case for the Union from this too-often neglected perspective.

**‘ Since the decline of the British Empire, the UK’s continued role as a global power sitting alongside the US, China and Russia is not as clear ’**

The Union’s status on the world stage may not be a priority for all our constituents, many of whom feel their day-to-day lives are not affected by whether or not the UK has a veto power at the UN Security Council or the influence of our ambassador in a foreign capital. This is where the role of politicians in public diplomacy comes into action. It is crucial that we show people why they should care about the UK’s global standing, why, in turn, they should support the Union and why the value of Global Britain, as a whole union, is imperative in the 21st century.

The UK has a reputation for punching above its weight in international affairs. We have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, we are a key member of the G7 and Nato, and we can be instrumental in international peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Our leadership role today emanates from the historical success of Britain in trade, commerce, diplomacy and industry. Since the decline of the British Empire, the UK’s continued role as a global power sitting alongside the US, China and Russia is not as clear. Looking at the metrics of population, territory, resource endowment, economic capability and military strength leads us no closer to explaining the global influence the UK has today. The UK’s post-imperial claim to global leadership rests on British heritage, history and culture, all of which fall under the soft power of the Union. As four distinct and separate nations, our global soft power would be exponentially weaker.





Britain's global standing and our ability to make progress with our foreign policy objectives do not get the blood pumping in the way that singing *Flower of Scotland* before the Calcutta Cup at Murrayfield does, but it has an equal, if not greater, effect on all our lives.

Advocating for civil liberties around the world, countering authoritarianism and human rights abuses, and seeking to drive prosperity worldwide is not only morally important but doing so also benefits millions in the UK. Moreover, multilateral organisations form the bedrock of international security through intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Access to, and power within, these institutions provide benefits to us all that we do not even realise.

### ‘Britishness’ has evolved over hundreds of years and has embraced change and flexibility’

One of the aims of Global Britain, and our foreign policy, is prevention and mitigation: preventing bad things from happening. This is why many of us do not appreciate the value and importance of our foreign policy – because the aim is to avoid disasters. The moment we realise how important these alliances are, is the moment it is too late. The devastation created by the Covid-19 pandemic has been an object lesson in the importance of global co-operation in preventing disaster from happening.

Let us consider, for the sake of argument, what would happen to foreign policy if the Union were to break up into its constituent nation states. Undoubtedly, British international influence would be diluted. Who would the world recognise as the successor state of the UK – the state with the right to inherit the former UK's formal claims and capabilities? While England would remain in the world's top 10 economies in terms of GDP, its military capabilities would be diminished with the loss of the Scottish, Welsh and Ulster regiments and the important submarine base at Faslane, which is of such vital importance to our nuclear deterrent, not to mention our ability to monitor Russian naval and air activities in the Greenland–Iceland–UK



Gap. Which, if any, of the four newly emerged and clearly defined political units would claim the UK's veto power on the UN Security Council? I am certain that there are other countries, like India, who may feel far more entitled to a seat than England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland alone.

**‘ We have a duty, to those in need internationally, and to our compatriots, to take an active role in meeting our global commitments and leading the world ’**

We have a duty, to those in need internationally, and to our compatriots, to take an active role in meeting our global commitments and leading the world. We are best placed to do this as one Global Britain, not four separate nations.

How, then, do we save the Union?

First, we must recognise that the Union means different things to different people, which is why ‘muscular Unionism’, imposing a specific Anglo-centric form of the Union on British people, fails as a unifying strategy. Rather than uniting people, it alienates those who hitherto felt British, but not ‘this kind’ of British.

‘Britishness’ has evolved over hundreds of years and has embraced change and flexibility. Often, we find that we share more with people in other parts of the UK than we do with those in the same nation as us. Dairy farmers in my part of Staffordshire can empathise with the problems facing dairy farmers in County Down in Northern Ireland more than they do with arable farmers in East Anglia. Bar owners in Manchester will almost certainly share more experiences with bar owners in Glasgow than those in the Welsh Valleys. Villages in Cornwall, Aberdeenshire, Fermanagh and Brecon will have similar needs, different from the needs of those in Leeds, Edinburgh, Belfast or Swansea.

The proposals of the Cabinet Office’s ‘Union Directorate’ to strengthen British patriotism – which often appear to revolve primarily around better branding and “flag mania” – often risk overlooking the regional variations of the British identity. The increase in both the size and number of Union Flags plastered on vaccine



vials and face masks, or used as official wallpaper, will not convince people of the value of the Union. The Union does not require conformity to one exclusive strand of thinking and the British people famously do not appreciate being told what to think.

On the other hand, maximum devolution ('devo-max') is not the answer either. While appreciating the diversity of 'Britishness', we must accept that we do share a transcendental identity. Our Union is far more than the threadbare Union of the EU, a series of treaties holding together a diplomatic community with little personality; separatists seem to be advocating to reduce the UK to a similar set of contractual entitlements, expectations and duties. The logical end of maximum devolution is federalism, a system that is simply unworkable in the UK's complex constitutional setting and not, therefore, a viable means of effective governance.

**‘As the world becomes more closely interlinked, the UK cannot turn its back on the sea and look inwards. Nor can we turn our backs on each other’**

All nationalities experience regional variations in national identity, the UK perhaps more so than others. This is what makes us great: diversity, freedom and tolerance. We must not let these core values be forgotten. The effects of breaking apart at a time when the world is more interconnected would ripple through each of our lives in unthinkable ways.

This Union, which has proven its value by virtue of its continued existence after centuries, is crucial to our ability, as British people, to be heard on a global scale. Not only does the Union make life easier for us domestically, in terms of a shared system, but also the democratic platform it provides for British people on the world stage means that we, in the UK, can influence global decisions; this is vital in a time of multilateral policy and global politics.

As the world becomes more closely interlinked, the UK cannot turn its back on the sea and look inwards. Nor can we turn our backs on each other.



## Welsh democracy isn't working – but here's how we can fix it *by Andrew RT Davies MS*

Since the Welsh Parliament elections in May, I've had many people come up and ask me why I'm not First Minister. It's a simple question with a simple answer: we didn't get enough votes. Often Conservatives in Wales are frustrated that we have perpetual Labour government in Cardiff Bay. The only way to change that is to engage, to campaign and to get out and vote.

If the Wales rugby team is playing badly, you sack the coach; you do not abolish the Welsh Rugby Union. So the Welsh Conservatives have to engage with devolution and be a credible force for government in 2026 when the next Senedd elections roll around.

When you look at the constitutional set-up of the United Kingdom, we have devolved parliaments and assemblies, local mayors, police and crime commissioners, and local authorities. The idea that Wales can be the only nation in the UK without proper devolution is for the birds.

**‘ Whether Wales is a net contributor to or beneficiary from the UK Treasury, separatists will always demand separatism ’**

It's time for all Conservatives to accept the constitutional settlement of the UK – and that isn't a message I want to send solely to Conservatives, but to Labour in Wales too. Wales's ills will not be solved by more and more powers for the Welsh Parliament. Wages, education, the NHS and the economy in Wales have been behind other UK nations during the devolution era. The only thing that will improve results across the board is a change of management.

The May 2021 Senedd elections were very positive for us. We grew the Conservative vote and our number of Senedd Members to record numbers. Going forward, we have to create a distinct Welsh Conservative narrative that does not just celebrate the Union, but also celebrates Wales and how Wales contributes to the Union.



Far too often I hear people talk only about what the Union gives to Wales, not about how Wales contributes so much to the Union in so many ways, from cultural and linguistic diversity, to the ancient historical bonds, to the integrated economies that cross the Wales/England border, and so much more that we should be proud of. The Welsh Conservative case for the Union cannot just simply be an argument about fiscal transfers.

Whether Wales is a net contributor to or beneficiary from the UK Treasury, separatists will always demand separatism. We have to win the argument on an emotional and historical basis, because if there is one thing we learned in terms of campaigning during the 2016 EU referendum, it is that emotion and patriotism trump hollow economic arguments. Identity, history and patriotism cannot be something you push to one side because of an economic arrangement. We need to continue to foster pride in the Union and Wales's place within it.

**‘If we do not engage, and simply write devolution off, we risk losing the chance to push back against this tide, whereby devolution is always a one-way street towards more and more separation’**

I'm immensely proud of many of the achievements of successive UK governments and the impact those achievements have had in Wales. But with health and education, among many other areas, devolved to Wales, we cannot have our fortunes reliant on Plaid Cymru and Labour's agenda of more and more powers for the Welsh Parliament.

The pandemic has caused serious damage to the Welsh economy, and recovery has to be the priority going forward. People in Welsh communities who have lost work, whose businesses have struggled and whose cost of living may increase as inflation takes hold, want to see economic recovery, not constitutional chaos.

Yet, seven weeks after the May Senedd elections, the Welsh Labour administration in Cardiff Bay brought forward their 'Reforming our Union' plan.<sup>22</sup> It laid bare the priorities of the soft nationalists in Welsh Labour.

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<sup>22</sup> Welsh Government, 'Reforming our Union: Shared Governance in the UK' (Welsh Government, 2021)



Before bringing forward a plan to tackle NHS waiting lists or the lost months of education, before bringing forward a credible plan to rebuild Wales's economy, the Welsh Labour Government decided to start a constitutional debate. Out of touch doesn't even begin to cover it.

Sitting around in Cardiff Bay offices and talking about the intricacies of the UK's constitutional set-up may interest anoraks and professors, but it does not address the real and serious problems people in Wales face.

While the NHS backlog looms large over the Welsh Government in Cathays Park, Mark Drakeford prefers to spend his time firing shots at the Prime Minister, ironically accusing Boris Johnson of being a threat to the Union. 'Give me more powers,' comes the message from the First Minister, 'or else!'

**‘ Voters in Wales turn out in greater numbers in general elections, so there is the appetite and engagement for politics, but not so much when it comes to the devolved Parliament ’**

Strangely, we are also told by Labour and Plaid Cymru that Senedd Members are so busy that we need more of them. There are far more pressing issues for Welsh democracy than the number of Members or the sign on the door. Too many in the Senedd are obsessed with having more powers and more politicians rather than how to effectively use the powers and politicians that are already in Cardiff Bay.

Welsh Government ministers now want to see devolution of justice too. More and more you see an effort from Welsh Labour to make the values of the UK less relevant in our lives, and the push for devolution of justice is just another example of that.

The end result is that we no longer feel an attachment to the most successful union in history: the UK. I think this needs to be challenged by Welsh Conservatives within the devolved context, because no other party in the Senedd will do so.



Sadly, most in the Welsh media hang on every word of Welsh ministers, merely amplifying the Welsh Government's talking points rather than challenging them or creating their own. Why? Because they rely on the Welsh Government for their own existence. Welsh Government directly or indirectly funds the largest media organisations in Wales.

If we do not engage, and simply write devolution off, we risk losing the chance to push back against this tide, whereby devolution is always a one-way street towards more and more separation.

**‘I’ve written before about the Senedd’s engagement problem: in the most recent general election turnout was over 67%; in this year’s Senedd elections, less than half of eligible voters turned out. Voter turnout in Welsh devolved elections has never breached the halfway mark’**

We also risk losing the chance to govern Wales with Welsh Conservative values – values of personal freedom, a small state that doesn’t interfere with people’s lives and is business-friendly, and a belief that our place in the Union is something to be celebrated and protected.

We have to accept that devolution is here to stay, and unless we make our voices heard within a devolved setting, the nationalist forces in the Welsh Labour Party and Plaid Cymru will bulldoze Wales’ place from within the UK.

So the Welsh Conservatives, the only true Unionist force within the Welsh devolved context, have to be loud and proud – proud of Wales, proud of Wales’s place within the Union and proud of our achievements in Wales and the world.

That’s not to say that there aren’t things that we need to do to improve devolution and how it works. As it stands, Welsh democracy isn’t working. I’ve written before about the Senedd’s engagement problem: in the most recent general election turnout was over



67%; in this year's Senedd elections, less than half of eligible voters turned out.<sup>23</sup> Voter turnout in Welsh devolved elections has never breached the halfway mark.

Awareness of the Welsh Parliament and its powers has undoubtedly improved throughout the pandemic, but it is still relatively very low, and I don't believe it is healthy for laws to be made that have a significant impact on people's health and education services when awareness of and engagement in the Parliament making those laws are so poor.

**‘ In May 2026, if somebody asks me who I am, I want to be able to say that I am the First Minister of Wales, as a result of Conservatives in Wales engaging and voting for it. That is the challenge Welsh Conservatives have to rise to in the next five years ’**

Voters in Wales turn out in greater numbers in general elections, so there is the appetite and engagement for politics, but not so much when it comes to the devolved Parliament.

Indeed, since I joined the Senedd in 2007, turnout has grown by barely 3%, but the powers of the body have grown enormously. It now has primary legislative powers, it can raise taxes and it is now known as the Welsh Parliament rather than the Welsh Assembly. But while the Parliament's legislative capabilities have grown at an exponential rate, voter engagement has not.

Any person who values democracy has to be concerned, and I believe it is the responsibility of people elected to the Senedd to try to work out why people are not engaged in its work.

I have been quite inspired by The Hundred, a new format of cricket which shortens a game to 100 balls each way and drops some of the more niche lingo in an effort to broaden the sport's appeal to a wider and more diverse audience.

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23 Institute for Welsh Affairs, 'Solving the Senedd's Engagement Problem' (July 08, 2021)





I think we need an injection of that sort of energy into Senedd proceedings. It's time for this rather lethargic Parliament to try new things to break out to more people. Not everything will stick, but we have to try to be innovative and dynamic or we risk our mandate being called into question.

Like The Hundred, we cannot simply sit back and expect new people to become engaged – to secure relevance, we have to meet them halfway and provide a gateway in.

**‘ Since I joined the Senedd in 2007, turnout has grown by barely 3%, but the powers of the body have grown enormously ’**

I readily accept there are far greater minds than mine who can ponder this. But when I offered my ideas in an article for the Institute for Welsh Affairs,<sup>24</sup> the Senedd's Presiding Officer was quite dismissive, suggesting that it wasn't the quality of the Senedd that was the problem, but rather the Members themselves. If the Presiding Officer is correct, perhaps a better-run Senedd might attract better Members.

Indeed, I think this attitude is quite telling. Many people in the Senedd are happy with things as they are. Too many Members in the Senedd are content to have insular and exclusionary debates, often inconsequential and often just to fill the business time.

One example of how inward-looking the Senedd is, is that First Minister's Questions (FMQs) starts at 1:30pm on a Tuesday afternoon, and has done ever since I was elected in 2007. Now that's a very leisurely way of conducting business, but if the Senedd is to reach beyond its current appeal, it has to bring FMQs forward so it can feed into the news cycle. Most people in Wales get their news from UK providers, and I have argued that FMQs should start earlier in the day to feed into the One O'Clock News and help form part of the national news agenda.

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24 Ibid



As I mentioned earlier, the problem is not that people in Wales aren't engaged in politics as a whole. So we need to find new ways of reaching them where they get their news.

**‘ If we could turn out people who vote Conservative at general elections, we would be even stronger than we are now, and our record-breaking Senedd Group would be even larger ’**

I want us to find solutions and I want those solutions to work. We have to engage with the Senedd, because it is not going anywhere. And Conservatives have an interest in boosting turnout at Welsh elections. If we could turn out people who vote Conservative at general elections, we would be even stronger than we are now, and our record-breaking Senedd Group would be even larger. We'll then get to a position where we will see the first Conservative-led Welsh Government in Cardiff Bay.

In May 2026, if somebody asks me who I am, I want to be able to say that I am the First Minister of Wales, as a result of Conservatives in Wales engaging and voting for it. That is the challenge Welsh Conservatives have to rise to in the next five years.



## Together, an exporting superpower *by Anthony Mangnall MP*

The 2020s are set to become an increasingly strange time for international trade, with countries seeking to expand their trade links overseas, beset with both extraordinary difficulties and boundless opportunities.

On the one hand, international trade has been badly buffeted by Covid-19, as the pandemic exacerbates existing problems, from growing protectionism, with countries seeking to reshore essential supply chains, to paralysis in the World Trade Organisation – further undermined by states such as China, who pay only lip service to the international rules-based system.

Such an environment offers little reassurance to small countries, as an independent Scotland and the remainder of the UK would both be, that they will be able to flourish within this divisive and complicated international landscape.

**‘As Western countries, appalled by China’s actions in Xinjiang, in Hong Kong and in Tibet, seek to wean themselves off its cheap imports, there are new trade opportunities to be had by those countries who value human rights’**

And yet, the 2020s also offer the chance for nimble countries to expand to new markets overseas. As Western countries, appalled by China’s actions in Xinjiang, in Hong Kong and in Tibet, seek to wean themselves off its cheap imports, there are new trade opportunities to be had by those countries who value human rights. In this environment, it is the lethargic leviathans of protectionism, like the European Union, that will miss out.

So who will thrive in this topsy-turvy trade landscape, which punishes both small states and big blocs alike? The answer must surely be those ‘goldilocks’ countries, such as the UK, who are both big enough to survive in an increasingly protectionist



world, but also nimble enough to make the most of the trade opportunities presented by the China-US trade war.

As we navigate these uncharted waters, it is only by working together, with Scotland as part of the Union, that we will be able to deliver better exporting opportunities, more jobs and stronger growth.

## Trade opportunities for Scotland's leading sectors

Last year, the UK regained control over its international trade policy for the first time in almost 50 years, providing control over the direction and speed at which trade deals can be struck. Regardless of how one voted on Brexit – and of course a majority of people in Scotland voted to Remain – this independence is already delivering real dividends in terms of trade.

**‘ In March, the Trade Secretary negotiated a suspension of US tariffs to the tune of 25%, which had been slapped on Scotch whisky as part of the Airbus and Boeing dispute, following years of can-kicking by the European Commission ’**

The UK has already begun building upon many of the 67 continuity trade deals rolled over from our EU membership. In 2020, we signed a new free trade agreement with Japan, going beyond the base agreement negotiated by the EU, with big benefits for financial services and our food and drink sector. The Government has also announced plans to improve our trade agreements with countries such as Canada and Mexico, and for new sector-specific deals to complement existing agreements, such as the Digital Economy Agreement we are negotiating with Singapore.

Perhaps most exciting of all, the UK has secured an agreement in principle with Australia for our country's first brand-new trade agreement as an independent



country. Once this new agreement comes into effect, it will confine Australia's 5% tariffs on Scotch whisky to the history books and offer new export opportunities for Scottish meat farmers. In fact, according to the Government's initial assessment conducted in 2020, Scottish businesses can expect to benefit more than any other region or nation of the UK from this new agreement.<sup>25</sup>

The UK Government has also been busy cleaning up the EU's messes, extricating Scotland from Brussels's 17-year aircraft trade dispute with the US. In March, the Trade Secretary negotiated a suspension of US tariffs to the tune of 25%, which had been slapped on Scotch whisky as part of the Airbus and Boeing dispute, following years of can-kicking by the European Commission. The Government followed this up with a historic agreement with the Biden administration in June, in which both sides agreed to keep these tariffs suspended for at least five years and to work more closely on tackling aircraft trade issues going forwards, providing certainty for distilleries exporting to the US.

**‘ Talks with New Zealand for a bilateral free trade agreement are proceeding apace, while the UK Government has also launched negotiations to accede to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), covering the major economies of the Indo-Pacific region ’**

Looking ahead, there are more deals to boost Scotland's export markets in the pipeline. Talks with New Zealand for a bilateral free trade agreement are proceeding apace, while the UK Government has also launched negotiations to accede to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), covering the major economies of the Indo-Pacific region. In the longer term, talks to improve our trade ties with Canada, India and the US are also expected to deliver greater opportunities for Scotland and the rest of the UK.

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25 Department for International Trade, 'Policy Paper: UK-Australia free trade agreement – the UK's strategic approach' (July 17, 2020): "The highest regional benefits from an UK-Australia FTA are expected to go to Scotland"



Improved trade deals and new agreements will both go a long way towards boosting exports, delivering more jobs and driving stronger growth in established industries across both Scotland and the wider UK.

While this is to be welcomed, the most exciting impacts of these new trade deals will not just be felt by existing world-leading sectors like the Scotch whisky and Scottish salmon industries, but also by new, emerging ones.

## Trade opportunities for emerging sectors

Despite being at opposite ends of Great Britain, Scotland and the South-West of England, which I am fortunate enough to represent in Parliament, have a great deal in common. They are home to growing tech industries, from the space sector to the photonics industry, both of which are playing a part in powering the fourth industrial revolution. Moreover, both are well placed to benefit from the exciting export opportunities that the UK's new international trade programme will present to these sectors.

**‘ A potential new trade agreement with the US would help Scottish and South-Western businesses in the space industry – which already provide 10,000 and 34,000 jobs respectively – to export our expertise to NASA, as well as supporting our own domestic projects ’**

The great power rivalry between the US and China, longstanding but accelerated by the Covid pandemic, is spurring innovation as each side seeks technological dominance and the US strives to reduce its reliance on strategic imports from China. This provides greater opportunities for technology developed right here in the UK to be exported to our allies and those with whom we have signed trade agreements.

One specific example is the photonics sector – an industry concerned with the physical science of light, and its applications towards a whole host of related



technology, from telecommunications and military equipment to agtech and healthtech. In 2018, the US levied tariffs on Chinese imports of photonics as part of their escalating trade war. If properly leveraged, this provides an opportunity for the UK photonics industry to step into the gap and provide cheaper exports to the US.

Scotland's billion-pound photonics sector, with a proud history stretching back to James Gregory's invention of the modern reflecting telescope in the 17th century, has long been ahead of the rest of the world. Similarly, Paignton in my constituency of Totnes is an innovation hub for photonics, home to the renowned EPIC Centre. By removing tariffs and other barriers through free trade agreements, the Government can help Scotland and South-West England to export their world-leading technology to new markets, including the US.

**‘ The UK is well placed to benefit from Space Race 2.0, with the new Spaceport Cornwall and Space Hub Sutherland in Scotland expected to boost jobs, investment and growth in our emerging space tech sector ’**

Perhaps most interesting of all, the current international landscape provides Scotland and South-West England with the opportunity to lead the world in space tech. The world is engaged in a 21st-century version of the space race, with China, India, Russia and the US all seeking to lead mankind's journey into the stars. The UK is well placed to benefit from Space Race 2.0, with the new Spaceport Cornwall and Space Hub Sutherland in Scotland expected to boost jobs, investment and growth in our emerging space tech sector.

A potential new trade agreement with the US would help Scottish and South-Western businesses in the space industry – which already provide 10,000 and 34,000 jobs respectively – to export our expertise to NASA, as well as supporting our own domestic projects.

Australia, New Zealand and the CPTPP trade bloc are also becoming increasingly ambitious about space. Last October, Australia demonstrated its growing space



ambitions by signing the Artemis Accords, which committed nations to co-operate over the exploration and peaceful use of celestial bodies, such as the Moon. In January of this year, the New Zealand Government approved the launch of the country's first space plane, which will send satellites into space. Looking to the wider region, the think tank Policy Exchange has stated that the new space race will be 'particularly intense in the Indo-Pacific given the increasingly acute regional strategic competition', and has called for a new UK-led 'Space Technology Alliance',<sup>26</sup> grouping space agencies from countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan and New Zealand.

Such co-operation, which will be made easier by the closer trade ties we are pursuing with these countries, would provide new markets for Scottish and South-West England space tech.

## Support for Scottish exporters

Opening up new markets for both established and emerging sectors is just half of the challenge, however. A modern international trade programme also needs to help businesses, particularly SMEs, to spot these opportunities and support companies to make the most of them.

**‘New research commissioned by the Department and published in a recent paper by the Board of Trade shows that the UK’s exports support more than 468,000 jobs in Scotland’**

Despite its relative youth, being formed just five years ago, the Department for International Trade is already supporting businesses across the breadth of the UK to realise their exporting potential.

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<sup>26</sup> Policy Exchange, 'A Very British Tilt: Towards a new UK strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region – An interim report by Policy Exchange's Indo-Pacific Commission', chaired by Rt Hon Stephen J Harper, p.36 (November 22, 2020)





The Board of Trade, set up by the then International Trade Secretary Liam Fox to advise the Department, includes the Scottish Secretary and, in normal times, meets in each of the four nations of the UK at least once a year. This ensures that Scotland has a continued strong voice on the UK's international trade policy, and that all parts of our country benefit from the opportunities that derive from our new trade agreements. More recently, the Department has launched a new UK Trade Hub in Edinburgh's Queen Elizabeth House, dedicated to helping Scottish businesses to grow their exports as we seek to bounce back from the pandemic.

**‘ With Department staff in over 100 countries across the world, Scottish businesses can access expert advice on exporting to a myriad of different countries ’**

Looking more broadly at the support available for businesses across the UK, Scottish businesses benefit from the billions of pounds that UK Export Finance makes available to support exporters with individual projects each and every year. The Department's [great.gov.uk](http://great.gov.uk) website helps Scottish businesses to expand their reach overseas by listing thousands of export opportunities worth millions of pounds. Finally, with Department staff in over 100 countries across the world, Scottish businesses can access expert advice on exporting to a myriad of different countries.

All of this work by the Department's expert team has had a strong impact on Scotland's economy. New research commissioned by the Department and published in a recent paper by the Board of Trade shows that the UK's exports support more than 468,000 jobs in Scotland. Furthermore, the work of the Department in attracting inward investment has helped deliver almost 340 foreign direct investment projects in Scotland since 2018, creating 9,500 new jobs and protecting almost 2,000 existing ones.<sup>27</sup> No one can tell how much of this progress could be lost if Scotland decides to leave the UK.

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27 Department for International Trade – UK Board of Trade, 'Global Britain, Local Jobs' (March 10, 2021)



## The trade travails of EU membership

Of course, the separatists have a familiar silver bullet for all the woes that could befall an independent Scotland, including issues relating to international trade: the EU.

Leaving aside the thorny issues relating to whether an independent Scotland *could* join the EU, given the country's high spending deficit, and the people of Scotland's aversion to the euro and Schengen – both requirements for new member states – there would be many drawbacks to doing so.

**‘ To unpick 300 years of economic integration would be profoundly damaging on both sides of the border. Indeed, the latest figures show that three fifths of Scotland's exports go to the rest of the UK, while less than one fifth go to the EU ’**

First, dissolving our precious 300-year-old Union will damage businesses in Scotland trading with the rest of the UK, and vice versa. The Union of 1707 was driven as much by economics as by politics, intertwining not just the nations of Scotland and England, but our economies as well. To unpick 300 years of economic integration would be profoundly damaging on both sides of the border. Indeed, the latest figures show that three fifths of Scotland's exports go to the rest of the UK, while less than one fifth go to the EU.<sup>28</sup>

Throwing up trade barriers and tariffs against your biggest export market is always a poor economic decision, and one that will have real implications on lives and livelihoods. Scotland leaving the UK will likely damage businesses, destroy jobs and dampen growth, across all parts of our country.

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28 Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, 'Scotland's biggest trading partner continues to be the UK' (January 29, 2020)



Second, leaving the UK for the EU will result in far worse trade terms for Scottish businesses internationally. We have already seen from our time as a member of the EU how little value the EU placed on the trade priorities of Scotland. Its lethargic approach to trade negotiations with the US led to the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership breaking down. Instead, the EU engaged the US in a damaging trade dispute over aerospace, resulting in the aforementioned 25% tariffs on Scotch whisky, which the Scotch Whisky Association says have resulted in exports to the US falling by 30% – a cost of £500m in lost exports.

**‘ The EU engaged the US in a damaging trade dispute over aerospace, resulting in the aforementioned 25% tariffs on Scotch whisky, which the Scotch Whisky Association says have resulted in exports to the US falling by 30% – a cost of £500m in lost exports ’**

The European Commission has also shown it is willing to use trade issues to actively damage the interests of its member states to score political points. In January, Brussels invoked Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol, without even bothering to consult the Irish Taoiseach, in an impotent rage over the UK’s successful vaccine rollout. That the European Commission was prepared to damage peace in Northern Ireland to save political face – damaging the rest of Ireland in the process – is a strong indication of the treatment an independent Scotland could expect within the EU.

The UK has made excellent progress in negotiating new trade deals with important export markets for Scotland, like Australia and New Zealand, in the little over a year we have been able to do so. In contrast, the EU has wasted decades negotiating association agreements with countries like Albania and Moldova that are more to do with tying more and more European countries into the political orbit of the EU than providing important export markets for Scottish and UK businesses. Why would the EU’s priorities in the future be any different?



## Together, Scotland and the rest of the UK can become an exporting superpower

As we look ahead to a decade of juxtaposed protectionism and opportunity, the countries that thrive will be medium-sized powers like the UK, big enough to pack a punch on the world stage, but nimble enough to make the most of the fast-changing international trade landscape.

**‘United, together, we can chart a path through the choppy waters ahead and seize the opportunities that our newly independent trade policy affords us’**

Scotland leaving the UK to be tied up in the bureaucratic behemoth of the EU would damage its trade, both with the UK and the rest of the world, and prevent Scottish businesses from benefiting from the trade opportunities of the 2020s. Likewise, ‘Scexit’ would damage the rest of the UK, weakening our bargaining power in trade negotiations.

United, together, we can chart a path through the choppy waters ahead and seize the opportunities that our newly independent trade policy affords us. Doing so will drive growth and boost jobs across our country, ensuring that both Scotland and the rest of our United Kingdom continue to thrive.



## Union is strength *by the Rt Hon Alister Jack MP*

'Union is strength' has been the motto of Glasgow's Trades Hall since 1605. And how true those words still ring, four centuries and more later. Back then, the finest craftsmen of the age knew that joining forces would help them agree and enforce standards, give them a forum for discussion and arbitration, boost trade and lift their standing in society. We might look at the United Kingdom in the same light. The Union is something which binds together apparently disparate concepts and delivers something far greater than the sum of its parts.

**‘ The Union is something which binds together  
apparently disparate concepts and delivers  
something far greater than the sum of its parts ’**

I am no fan of the 'four nations' expression, for the Union gives us one great nation. Yes, we can still celebrate the differences within our borders. Of course, it is possible to be, say, a proud Scot and at the same time be a proud Briton. We can all take pleasure in the regional variations that make us different. Across the land there is a rich tapestry of dialects and the vernacular of our cities, towns and villages is as diverse as our glorious countryside. We can enjoy local delicacies – Scotch beef is something I am proud to have been a producer of – and specialities. Melton Mowbray pork pies, Northern Irish soda farls, Glamorgan sausages – this land offers a larder of delights for all to savour.

Yet while the Union has a storied history, and can rightly claim to be the most successful political accord the world has yet seen, its glories are not all in the past. Indeed, I believe we stand on the threshold of a new era for Britain, one which draws from the successes wrought by generations long gone and which can benefit Britons yet unborn. It is all built on the bedrock of that living, breathing Union.

Brexit is now firmly in the rearview mirror. Of course, any change on the scale of our departure from the EU was always going to present difficulties, and some of



them reverberate still. That said, the problems are dissipating thanks to hard work from government and business in partnership and I firmly believe that, with the perspective of time, Brexit will come to be seen to be, at heart, a readjustment of trading regulations. Europeans are still our friends and allies; and Britain remains at the heart of Nato, staunch guardian of peace.

So let us now look forward, not back. With decision-making firmly centred here in the UK and no longer ceded to Brussels or Strasbourg, we have the tools we need to forge ahead on a global stage, striking mutually beneficial trade deals with friends old and new.

**‘ The respected Fraser of Allander Institute tells us that UK exports support some 6.5 million British jobs. Remarkably, 74% of those are outwith London and approximately 468,000 are here in Scotland ’**

It might feel very novel for some but actually we are tapping into a wealth of past experience as we sign concords around the world. Where once we struck deals for claret and sherry, spices and sugar, now we are in the world of high-tech, of precision-machined components, of professional services and of knowledge flashing over the internet at lightning speed.

Our 21st-century trade deals are fully compliant with the way modern business operates. Take, for example, our Digital Economy Agreement with Singapore – the first of its kind for a European country. It will allow innovative British firms to expand into new digital markets, encourage collaboration across the tech industries, tackle cyber threats and aid personal data protection.

Britain was an early and enthusiastic adopter of trade as an economic driver. The French traduced our visionary thinker Adam Smith when they twisted his words to deride us as ‘a nation of shopkeepers’. In fact, Smith advocated a government influenced by shopkeepers: prudent, yet innovative and ambitious for expansion and improvement.



It is an approach that serves us well now and which can drive the growth we need as we seek to rebuild from the horrors of the pandemic. As Harvard Professor of Economics Gregory Mankiw said: 'Few propositions command as much consensus among professional economists as that open world trade increases economic growth and raises living standards.'<sup>29</sup>

Despite that contemporary and ringing endorsement of free trade, the arguments of the isolationists and protectionists remain superficially seductive. They advocate hurling up trade barriers and hunkering down behind tariffs and quotas. Time and again they have been proved wrong as the rising tide of free trade lifts all boats.

**‘ The great hunt these days is for a unicorn firm, technically a private start-up business that goes on to be valued at over \$1 billion ’**

So the short-termists then fall back on tired canards about diminished standards and how signing a trade deal means you must accept the other side's shoddy goods. It is a monumental misunderstanding of what modern commerce represents.

The Board of Trade has been revised and revitalised and I am delighted to be an advisor to a body issuing a clarion call to boost exports. The respected Fraser of Allander Institute tells us that UK exports support some 6.5 million British jobs.<sup>30</sup> Remarkably, 74% of those are outwith London and approximately 468,000 are here in Scotland. Those who work in export-related jobs tend to be higher paid and more productive than the national average.

Ramping up our exports, therefore, offers a rapid route to boosting the country as a whole, and a route to levelling up the regions within the UK, a pivotal part of our mission to maintain the Union, constantly underscoring its direct relevance to people in every corner of these islands.

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29 Gregory Mankiw's Blog, 'Random Observations for Students of Economics' (May 07, 2006)

30 Fraser of Allander Institute, University of Strathclyde, 'Exports support 6.5 million UK jobs – New FAI report', (10 March, 2021)



Being in the vanguard of modernising international trade and embracing its manifold opportunities, Britain can engender prosperity at home. Though mature markets such as the EU remain open to us – critics like to pretend the Channel is closed, but we negotiated a tariff- and quota-free deal for access – we are looking to the increasingly affluent Indo-Pacific region and the South American Mercosur bloc. We can do so because the fundamentals of British business are sound – and there the Union yet again played a vital part.

**‘UKIM protects businesses, jobs and livelihoods by ensuring there are no harmful new barriers to trade between all parts of the UK, underpinning the foundations of businesses great and small’**

To thrive, business needs stability. That may not sound very dynamic to the layperson but, regardless, it remains a prerequisite. Going into business – and here I speak with personal knowledge – is never entirely risk-free. That is an immutable fact as market forces have a habit of testing some business ideas to destruction. That said, the rewards can be great too. The satisfaction of seeing a concept take flight, of creating jobs – and yes, of reaping the benefits, as success and profit are nothing to be ashamed of – are joys to cherish.

The great hunt these days is for a unicorn firm, technically a private start-up business that goes on to be valued at over \$1 billion. If you like this sort of thing, variants include a decacorn, valued at over \$10bn, and a hectocorn, valued at over \$100bn. Rare beasts indeed but, in common with more modest ventures, they require the correct conditions in which to flourish. That’s where government comes in, providing a stable and transparent regulatory and taxation regime.

Look at how the UK Internal Market (UKIM) Act delivered exactly the stability needed as the transition period for our EU departure came to an end. UKIM protects businesses, jobs and livelihoods by ensuring there are no harmful new barriers to trade between all parts of the UK, underpinning the foundations of businesses great and small. This adroit legislation has, from 1 January, meant businesses can continue to trade seamlessly across the entire UK, as they have done for centuries,





and ensured that the world-leading standards for British consumers and workers are maintained, especially for our food and the precious environment.

UKIM will enable this Government to boost the UK's economic recovery, increase investment across the whole country, create new jobs and help us emerge stronger from the pandemic. And it is only one small piece of the picture from a government which fundamentally understands business and its needs. Others may think commerce is a dangerous beast best isolated in a thicket of petty red tape, or that every firm is a dripping roast for avaricious tax collectors. We know it is the engine room of the economy, the wellspring of wealth that allows employment and world-class services such as the NHS to flourish.

**‘I believe with a passion that the UK offers our children and grandchildren the maximum opportunity for safety, security, prosperity and wellbeing’**

Over centuries, the Union has endured thanks to the shared purpose of people from across Britain. Today, it faces great peril – and that's because the threat is internal. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum ought to have been a watershed. Both sides agreed to respect the outcome, whichever way it went, and so the decisive decision in favour of Scotland remaining part of the UK should have been conclusive.

Instead, the separatists carried on regardless, shamelessly repurposing Remain votes in the Brexit referendum as votes for independence and constantly trying to make Scotland a different country. Shabbily, the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood is used less for the betterment of Scots than as a battering ram to hammer ‘Westminster’.

It means we in Scotland are still embroiled in a hot war for the very survival of the United Kingdom. That matters a great deal for those who care about the Union, and not just as an esoteric concept or historic artefact. I believe with a passion that the UK offers our children and grandchildren the maximum opportunity for safety, security, prosperity and wellbeing. And I mean all our offspring, for the loss of



Scotland would have devastating consequences from the southernmost tip of the Isles of Scilly to the northernmost edge of Shetland.

The loss of oil and gas reserves; abundant renewable energy; seafood; salmon; whisky. The loss of vital defence facilities such as the Faslane submarine base; the key RAF interceptor and maritime patrol airfield at Lossiemouth; the shipyards of the Clyde and Forth. These would be a tragedy for those south of the border.

**‘ Unlike separatist moonshine, our vision is based on a first-class track record and a roadmap to how we capitalise on future opportunities ’**

Worse for us all would be allowing the separatists to divide us as a people. I live close to the Scotland/England border and it's little more than a sign that people pass daily, with no thought of moving from one country to another. Under the SNP, a hard border would be required with all the associated paperwork, an impediment to business and individuals. With more that unites us than divides us as people, that would be a heartbreaking situation and one most Britons want to prevent.

Rather than a cogent explanation of how our fortunes are going to be improved by fragmenting the Union, the SNP continue to offer only unctuous promises. Sweep away flimsy buzzwords such as 'progressive' and 'welcoming' and they are proposing demolishing the UK, leaving Scotland isolated and impoverished and the rest of Britain much diminished.

While theirs is a false prospectus, the Union continues to offer a level playing field now and the genuine prospect of betterment. Unlike separatist moonshine, our vision is based on a first-class track record and a roadmap to how we capitalise on future opportunities. Constant agitation for a breakaway is itself damaging. Those looking to invest in a country will evaluate all risks and the prospect of an entirely different regime with a shaky economic prospectus taking over would give anyone pause for thought.



I believe the Union is like a family. There is the odd difference of opinion, a squabble or two, but ultimately we all get along and are comfortable in each other's company. We have common goals no matter our postcodes: we want the chance to be happy and healthy, to better ourselves and to look forward to future generations enjoying the same benefits. We want Britain to be an outward-looking country playing a full role in peacekeeping, a beacon of justice and a leader in the fight to tackle the environmental crisis engulfing the globe.

**‘The Union can be the launchpad for successful economic recovery, allowing us to build back better and fairer’**

This is no time for petty division and we must not be hindered by the wreckers trying to lure us onto the rocks of division. The Union can be the launchpad for successful economic recovery, allowing us to build back better and fairer.

Union is strength. Amen to that.



## The military and the Union *by Sarah Atherton MP*

In the run-up to my election, and since becoming the first ever Conservative MP for Wrexham, it has become painfully clear to me that extreme nationalism is on the rise. I have seen repeated protests outside my constituency office, criminal damage to the office, toxic behaviour on social media and death threats. Is this really democracy? Much like their inability to accept me as their democratically elected MP, nationalists refuse to accept the Union and the benefits it brings to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**‘ Much like their inability to accept me as their democratically elected MP, nationalists refuse to accept the Union and the benefits it brings to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland ’**

Separatism is rising across the UK and it would not be unfair to attribute some of the moves towards independence in Wales and Scotland to the creation of the devolved administrations in the late 1990s.

In 1979, Welsh voters overwhelmingly rejected devolution in a Labour Government referendum on the subject. In the same year, Scotland narrowly voted in favour of a devolved assembly, although turnout was too low to give the vote credibility.

Fast-forward to the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014, when again the Union campaign won. The big difference was the turnout: more than double what it was in 1979, indicating the awakening of the Scottish public to the issue of independence. Under the SNP, the Scottish Government will continue to push for independence – and hopefully it will not be successful. In Wales, we have a small but vocal nationalist party. As Conservatives and Unionist MPs, many for the first time in North Wales particularly, it's important that we use this platform to ensure that Wales does not take inspiration from Scotland's nationalist agenda.



The Covid-19 pandemic has also have brought devolution to the forefront of the political agenda again, illustrated by each country having jurisdiction on policy and adopting their own nuanced Covid regulations, giving nationalists the ammunition to adopt the 'us and them' approach that suits their political aims.

Nationalists would do well to remember the benefits of the Union. And foremost among them, for me, is our military.

**‘ The military is one of the largest employers in the UK, with a total strength of nearly 200,000 service personnel ’**

As a Welsh woman – the first ever female Conservative MP representing a Welsh constituency and the only sitting female MP with a regular military background – it would be remiss of me not to argue that the military is the cornerstone of our United Kingdom. Being a veteran myself, with a military family and a large veteran population in my constituency, championing our Armed Forces community was high on my agenda after being elected in 2019. As a passionate Unionist, it seems obvious to me to use the military as a vehicle to promote the strength of our Union and the opportunities that it brings.

Today, each nation within the United Kingdom has a proud individual identity – but too often this can be used to feed separatism and division.

The defence sector, however, bridges these divides and has stood the test of time against growing nationalism. The military is an institution which has been steadfast in its loyalty to protecting our Union – and, more importantly, the people within it – while celebrating the individualism of each of our four nations. It is the epitome of Unionism and, more than that, it is good for our Union and we should celebrate that.

No one can deny the crucial role of the military in the fight against Covid-19, which is a prime example of its importance to our Union. The Armed Forces delivered food parcels to those shielding, set up testing centres and facilitated the rollout of the vaccine. Our Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, produced in England, bottled in my



constituency in Wales, trialled in Northern Ireland and rolled out in Scotland, was supported by the military throughout.

There is no nation-bias when it comes to our Armed Forces: there was a job to be done to protect the entire UK from this invisible enemy and that is exactly what they did, while displaying the Union Flag on their uniform.

**‘ The defence sector provides countless jobs in all four nations of the UK, which is essential for our employment and Levelling Up agendas ’**

Moreover, the military is a constant emblem of our Union, with the various units proudly maintaining their national and cultural individuality. The Welsh Guards are a good example. While they are the ceremonial guardians of the royal palaces, they fiercely uphold their Welsh roots. Many a Welsh MP has courageously eaten a raw leek at mess dinners, under the scrutinising gaze of the troops.

The Royal Welch Fusiliers, ‘The Welsh Warriors’, once based at Hightown Barracks in my constituency of Wrexham, are steeped in history dating back to 1689. Although there is now only a residual military presence at Hightown, the military legacy is deeply woven into Wrexham’s fabric and, with that, the ties to the Union.

However, if the nationalists get their way, this history – and the bonds that tie our four nations as one country – would be dismissed to the four winds. Therefore, it is incumbent on us Conservative MPs with seats in devolved nations, with nationalists nipping at our heels, to keep our military heritage alive.

The military can and does celebrate the different nations’ identities within the UK while remaining loyal to the Union. This begs the real question as to why some political parties cannot accept the fact that you can be a proud Scot, or a proud Walian, while still being a patriotic Unionist. You can be both – as I am.

Not only is our military refreshingly apathetic to nationalism in its uncompromising delivery of our country’s defence, but it also proves its significance for the Union in defence procurement, recruitment, job creation and disaster support across the UK.



The military is one of the largest employers in the UK, with a total strength of nearly 200,000 service personnel. But more widely, the defence sector provides countless jobs in all four nations of the UK, which is essential for our employment and Levelling Up agendas.

As a member of the Defence Select Committee, I recently had the privilege of visiting the aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales. Although now based in Portsmouth, she was built at Rosyth Dockyard in Scotland. Built in Scotland, based in England and now serving our Union.

**‘ We have a large military footprint in Wales, too, with defence creating over 4,000 jobs in the military supply chain such as at Qioptiq in north-east Wales ’**

We have a large military footprint in Wales, too, with defence creating over 4,000 jobs in the military supply chain such as at Qioptiq in north-east Wales. The defence procurement sector is a perfect example of the significance of the military to the Union: we have the best military in the world and some of the best equipment in the world, made and assembled in the UK. It would be simply impossible to have the best in the world, if we did not combine the talents of the people across the UK.

As a veteran, I have a personal interest in supporting others who have served in our Armed Forces. One of my biggest concerns, and where the devolved administrations fail our ex-service personnel, is with the disparity of veteran services.

In Wales, health is a devolved power. This has resulted in a gap in the level and accessibility of services for a veteran in Wrexham versus, say, a veteran in Chester, only four miles away across the border. There is no disparity in what we expect of our service personnel on the front line, so we should not allow postcodes to be a barrier to the service we provide them when they leave the Armed Forces. Another example is that a veterans' commissioner exists in Northern Ireland and Scotland but not in Wales.



And although the UK Government has the Office of Veterans' Affairs, it has no powers to provide veteran services in Wales. The result is that veterans living in the devolved nations often receive a diminished level of support. The military doesn't subscribe to nation-bias, and neither should we when providing services for those who have served this country.

**‘ We should champion the contribution made by all four home nations that make our Armed Forces the best in the world ’**

The military is the cornerstone of the Union and we, as Unionists, should capitalise on this as we face the bellicose voice of separatism. Service personnel, military contractors and defence companies in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England are essential for the effective and continued defence, security and protection of the whole of the UK. We should champion the contribution made by all four home nations that make our Armed Forces the best in the world.





## Leading the world into a green industrial revolution *by the Rt Hon Simon Hart MP*

Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution more than 200 years ago, the United Kingdom has led the world in science, industry and trade. As the world's first industrialised economy, we have for centuries played a key role in tackling the greatest challenges faced by humankind.

This is just one reason why the Union matters. Endorsing Unionism is not an alternative to national identity, pride or patriotism. It is not a party-political statement nor is it a gesture of superiority or an admission of weakness. Quite simply it is a common-sense position.

Many have said that together we are greater than the sum of our parts. Our combined ingenuity, resource and productivity led the world during the Industrial Revolution. We invented the steam engine, developed the theory of evolution and pioneered the first telephone. Together, British resilience held back the tide of fascism in the 1940s, and in the past year has led the world with a vaccine rollout to overcome the most severe pandemic in modern history.

**‘ Together, British resilience held back the tide of fascism in the 1940s, and in the past year has led the world with a vaccine rollout to overcome the most severe pandemic in modern history ’**

As this ‘family of four’, we have always punched well above our weight – a collection of nations which so much of the world takes for granted.

Our successes are not because of England, any more than they are down to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. We achieved them as the UK, working together as one.

Our ideals and culture are global benchmarks – our world-leading universities, the influence of our music industry that has inspired every corner of the globe,



our sporting prestige and our literary greats, inspiring figures from Gareth Bale to William Shakespeare. The UK has so often set the bar.

For me this is what our Union is all about. It is not just about economic unity or might; it is about a shared history of driving progress, not trying to keep abreast of it. It is what we are good at, and it is this strong leadership that is needed as we face the new challenges of the modern world.

**‘ Between 1990 and 2016, the UK cut emissions by 41%, more than any other country in the G7, and we were also the first country to introduce statutory carbon emission reduction targets in 2008 ’**

In November the UK will play host to the COP26 climate conference. World leaders will arrive in Glasgow, alongside tens of thousands of negotiators, government representatives, businesses and citizens, for days of talks and negotiations – and maybe even decisions which will prove crucial to the future of our planet.

With the UK as president of the conference, we are once again leading when the biggest issue of our time is being confronted.

To focus close to home, a recent report from the Climate Change Committee showed that Wales is more acutely at risk from rising sea levels because of its long coastline.<sup>31</sup> Cardiff has been deemed one of the most ‘at risk’ cities because of this.

Nearly every investment that this Government has brought to Wales since 2019 has been through the prism of jobs, and particularly those that are sustainable and green. In a two-month period earlier this year, we announced a series of new investments to support and create up to 20,000 new green jobs across Wales, ranging from the decarbonisation of the South Wales industrial corridor to investing in new technologies such as hydrogen and tidal streams.<sup>32</sup>

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31 The Climate Change Committee, ‘Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk’, (June 16, 2021)

32 The UK Government’s Plan for Wales (May 06, 2021)



The UK accepts that it has a historical responsibility to tackle these questions as the country where the Industrial Revolution began. For more than two centuries, our inventions have helped power a heavily industrialised global economy and have led to unprecedented prosperity.

The modern economy was ignited in the coal mines of South Wales, the factories of Manchester and Birmingham, and the shipyards of Glasgow and Belfast. The technology and industry unleashed in the UK's Industrial Revolution set in train the changes to our climate that we have generated, which we must tackle urgently today.

And we have already made a significant start in fulfilling our end of the bargain. Between 1990 and 2016, the UK cut emissions by 41%, more than any other country in the G7, and we were also the first country to introduce statutory carbon emission reduction targets in 2008. But we are under no illusion as to how much work there is left to do.

**‘ The UK was home to the world’s first full-scale civil nuclear power station more than 60 years ago, and this industry now employs around 60,000 people across the UK ’**

Our ambitions are huge, and tough decisions and changes of lifestyle will have to be made to meet them, but this what COP26 is all about.

And as Secretary of State for Wales it is inspiring that Wales is the engine at the centre of this green revolution, just as it was during the Industrial Revolution – and for similar reasons. The nation's natural resources and climate brought the coal barons and iron mongers and they will be vital in developing the green industries of the future.

The UK was home to the world's first full-scale civil nuclear power station more than 60 years ago, and this industry now employs around 60,000 people across the UK. It is a technology that we are going to be relying on for years into the future, with



some estimates that as much as 50GW of nuclear energy will be needed to hit our 2050 climate targets.<sup>33</sup> Whether a large-scale power plant, or next-generation technologies such as advanced small modular reactors, new nuclear will both produce low-carbon power and create jobs and growth across the UK.

**‘ Our vision in the UK Government is for the UK to be a global leader in the technologies needed to decarbonise our economies and transition to Net Zero ’**

The Wylfa Newydd site in North Wales is one of the best sites in the world and continues to be a priority location for the UK Government as we continue to pursue clean energy sources. But with the costs of this energy still being extraordinarily high, it is hard to foresee a scenario in which this could happen in Wales without the heft of the combined UK Treasury. Tens of billions of pounds of investment is needed.

But we are not just looking at technologies that already exist; we are pushing the boundaries of technological advancement to put us ahead of the world. This includes both the development of small modular reactors and the creation of the world's first nuclear fusion plant. It is this expertise and the sharing of resources among our nations that allow us to compete to answer the big questions of our time, and the whole of the UK will benefit.

Unleashing this innovation and developing new sources of finance are fundamental for further developing the green technologies to achieve our climate targets. Our vision in the UK Government is for the UK to be a global leader in the technologies needed to decarbonise our economies and transition to Net Zero. Through our world-class innovators, entrepreneurs and finance institutions, we will focus progress on the key technologies of the future. This will require shared effort and pooled resources across Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

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33 UK's Energy Systems Catapult (ESC), 'Nuclear for Net Zero' (June 18, 2020)



The UK is the world's largest offshore wind energy producer, outscaling even the United States and China. It was the first country to install a floating offshore wind farm, off the coast of Peterhead in Scotland in 2017, and in 2021 another landmark was hit with the establishment of the biggest offshore floating windfarm, 15km south-east of Aberdeen. With a single turn of their blades, the latest wind turbines generate enough electricity to power a house for more than 24 hours. As an island nation, we are collectively harnessing the best of our assets, and the benefits and contributions are equally shared between every corner of it.

**‘ Together as one United Kingdom we will deliver  
the promises of the 2015 Paris Agreement and  
drive progress towards global Net Zero ’**

But these only scrape the surface of ideas and areas in which our country is world-leading and driving the agenda. We are still looking into the feasibility of the world's first tidal lagoon, following in the footsteps of our millers of over 1,000 years ago who harnessed the power of tides. Only recently we announced a Hydrogen Strategy that will position the UK as the world-leading hydrogen economy.<sup>34</sup>

Our ambition, potential and hope are boundless when we are working together as a collection of four nations, as we have done for so many years. For me, our ability to make progress in reversing the climate trends around the world is intrinsically linked with the way in which we function as a Union. It is just as important for our efforts to reverse global warming as it is in maintaining our military capabilities, generating inward foreign investment, delivering major transport infrastructure or tackling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Climate change shows how important it is to avoid getting tangled up and slowed down by political and theoretical problems when swift action is required. Piecemeal, uncoordinated initiatives dotted across the UK would simply not solve a problem of this scale. Apart from damaging the economy and costing jobs, it would compromise public cooperation too.

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34 HM Government, UK Hydrogen Strategy (August 17, 2021)



Together and united, the UK has the technology, expertise and resource to tackle this challenge head on. It will mean harnessing energy from the natural resources all around us, including new technologies in tidal and wave-energy sectors – in which Wales, particularly, is ideally placed to deliver. It will mean accelerating the investment and development of the infrastructure to enable people to embrace green technology and innovation with ease and accessibility, and without high cost. It will mean protecting the remaining biodiversity of the globe and of the UK, from the North Sea to Land's End, from the English Channel to the Atlantic Ocean.

**‘In November, alongside our friends and partners from across the world, as a family of nations we will host COP26 to rally the world behind the goal of a greener, more resilient and sustainable future for everyone’**

Climate change does not recognise administrative political boundaries. The coastline of the UK does not end at Hadrian's Wall and our river and drainage systems – just like our workforce and economy – criss-cross the Wales-England border. The consequences of air pollution and the more extreme weather conditions do not pass across Offa's Dyke and change into something different, or less severe.

So today we will mobilise the same forces to level up our country and enable our proud industrial heartlands to forge the future once again. By investing in clean technologies – wind, carbon capture, hydrogen and many others – Britain will lead the world into a new Green Industrial Revolution.

Together as one United Kingdom we will deliver the promises of the 2015 Paris Agreement and drive progress towards global Net Zero. In November, alongside our friends and partners from across the world, as a family of nations we will host COP26 to rally the world behind the goal of a greener, more resilient and sustainable future for everyone.



## Building a better Wales crosses borders by Dr James Davies MP

For those of us who are lucky enough to have been born British, it can be all too easy to take the United Kingdom for granted. The Prime Minister regularly trumpets our country's abilities and prospects, but its significant historical achievements and international economic, political, scientific and cultural influence are still often overlooked by even the most ardent of patriots.

It may be that Brexit, combined with an outward-looking and internationalist approach, will yet engender an increased sense of national confidence and unity. However, for now, Britain remains under attack from within. The extent to which this is the case in different parts of the country is of course variable.

**‘A noisy minority might suggest that Wales is itching for independence. Fortunately, that couldn't be further from the truth’**

As a North Walian born and bred, I can offer an informed perspective from my community and region. I represented my hometown as a town and county councillor for 11 years, before being elected to represent the local constituency (Vale of Clwyd) at Parliament. I am also a practising medical doctor, as I have been since 2004, working regularly as a GP in north-east Wales and west Cheshire. My assessment of the Union, therefore, has been formed through first-hand personal, professional and political experiences, and focuses primarily on the relationship between Wales and England.

A noisy minority, fuelled by Twitter, a skewed media and academia in Wales – and often naive London-based news outlets – might suggest that Wales is itching for independence. Fortunately, that couldn't be further from the truth. At the 2019 general election, Plaid Cymru's vote share dropped and its parliamentary representation remained static, at just four out of the 40 seats in Wales. In my



constituency, the party lost its deposit. Even more strikingly, opinion polling has suggested Wales to be the most pro-Union part of the UK.<sup>35</sup>

Yes, there are exceptions in the Welsh-speaking heartlands of north-west Wales in particular, but the majority of the population of Wales generally reflects northern England in its politics. This was demonstrated in the EU referendum, when a majority in Wales voted for Leave, very much rejecting the nationalists' claim that our future lies as an independent nation in the EU. That Leave vote extended just as much to the Valleys as it did to borderland areas.

**‘ Mobile phone data from 2019 demonstrates that in normal times, over a 24-hour period, 153,000 journeys are made between North Wales and North-West England ’**

Of course, unlike Scotland, Wales has never essentially functioned as a single, united political entity. Its population is only just over three million – one third of the population of Greater London. Its shape, topography and lengthy border have, since the industrial revolution, led to the development of several social and economic units involving adjacent areas of England. Indeed, 50% of the Welsh population live within 25 miles of the border, clustered within easy access of cities such as Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool and Manchester. As a result, transport infrastructure, crime patterns, shopping and employment opportunities, catchment areas for specialist NHS care, family links and media footprints all tend to run in a west-east fashion.

Mobile phone data from 2019 demonstrates that in normal times, over a 24-hour period, 153,000 journeys are made between North Wales and North-West England.<sup>36</sup> That figure is 20 times higher than the number of journeys from North Wales to other regions of Wales. The truth is that Wales comprises areas as diverse as any that

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35 See Savanta ComRes Wales Voting Intention (April 29, 2021) and YouGov / Welsh Barometer Survey Results (April 18-21, 2021)

36 Llwybr Newydd, 'A New Wales Transport Strategy, Consultation Draft – Supporting information: Transport data and trends' (November 17, 2020)





can be found in the UK, and my clear belief is that attempts to force North, Mid and South Wales together, to the exclusion of neighbouring areas of England, are neither realistic nor desirable.

Anyone who has followed the political response to the pandemic across the UK will, however, know that such realities have often not always been reflected by the behaviours of our various layers of government.

**‘ Early on in the pandemic, it became convenient parlance for nationalist-leaning politicians to refer to the UK as ‘the four nations’ – a divisive term which pretends to equate our single nation state with an association of sovereign states ’**

Early on in the pandemic, it became convenient parlance for nationalist-leaning politicians to refer to the UK as ‘the four nations’ – a divisive term which pretends to equate our single nation state with an association of sovereign states. The term successfully found its way into common usage, including via the BBC and wider media. This is indicative of the need for all of us who believe in Britain’s ongoing unity to think carefully about the language we use.

Furthermore, at times BBC Wales even chose not to air the Prime Minister’s pandemic press conferences, on the basis that the measures were a devolved competence. We must remind the BBC, as our state broadcaster, not to forget that the word ‘British’ features prominently within its name.

Much of my time during the last 18 months has been spent dealing with the fallout arising from the divergence and disparity in policy between England and Wales. Remember, devolution *permits* the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to step away from much of the policy agreed in Westminster, but it does not compel them to do so. ‘Decisions that affect Wales should be made in Wales’ is the mantra – but, logically, this is nothing short of an argument for breaking up the UK. Wales has two governments and we should be strident in the indisputable observation that for islands as small and homogenous as ours, there are many decisions best made collectively as one nation state, including by Welsh politicians elected to Westminster.



Real devolution should be about harnessing the benefits of truly local decision-making. While it was not intended as such by Tony Blair, Welsh devolution has become a project of nation-building, whereby an ever-increasing transfer of national powers to a competing and centralising power base in Cardiff is sought. The consequence is an increasing divide between Wales and England, with the UK Government, British institutions and ultimately British identity all becoming less relevant.

Whitehall has not always been cognisant of this reality when faced with apparently anodyne requests to gift another tranche of competencies. An ever-inward-looking mentality within devolved politics also results in Wales exerting increasingly less influence on British and foreign affairs. Evidence from polling suggests that a significant proportion of the electorate have been oblivious to the extent of ongoing constitutional change.<sup>37</sup>

**‘ In Wales, turnout at devolved elections is over 20% lower than for general elections – suggesting many voters are either uninterested in or actively antagonistic towards the whole devolution concept ’**

Cardiff is, ironically, less accessible to many Welsh residents outside of South Wales than London. More ironically still, since devolution the bespoke solutions, services and regional offices associated with public and charitable services in North Wales have very often been subsumed within ‘All-Wales’ entities, mostly overseen from Cardiff.

The devolved administrations have generally sought divergence of policy with enthusiasm, but even where there has been some degree of alignment, this has typically involved inferior, costly and often delayed duplication of efforts already taking place at the UK Government level. The political barriers formed as a consequence have disrupted many long-term and successful cross-border arrangements and have often hampered efforts to seek the best for residents – for

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<sup>37</sup> ICM Research for BBC Wales (2014) – see ‘Fewer than half the population know who runs Welsh NHS, says poll’ (June 09, 2014)



example, with respect to NHS recruitment, data sharing and provision, and transport infrastructure.

Compared with the rest of the UK, Wales has, since devolution, fallen behind in terms of productivity, household income, earnings and countless other measures, disadvantaging many businesses, organisations, individuals and the population as a whole.

In Wales, turnout at devolved elections is over 20% lower than for general elections – suggesting many voters are either uninterested in or actively antagonistic towards the whole devolution concept. That means we end up with a set of politicians who are more nationalist and left-leaning than Wales as a whole. Scrutiny and awareness of Cardiff Bay among voters remain poor. While the pandemic has raised people's understanding of where decisions are taken, in general political attitudes remain overwhelmingly based on the agenda at Westminster, and most people seek out UK media for their news.

**‘In basic terms, since its remit commenced in 1999, the Welsh Government has failed to embrace the kind of reform and modernisation of the NHS seen in England’**

In this environment, politicians in Cardiff Bay can criticise the UK Government, while concealing their own usually inferior record. Worse still, the Welsh Government's own failures are generally attributed to Westminster, feeding into an 'oppressed victimhood' narrative. This agenda is promoted not only by Plaid Cymru, but also by Labour, whose short-term thirst for power results in an opportunistic quasi-nationalist approach – the same one it employed so disastrously in Scotland – which disregards the eventual divisive consequences.

Since my re-election in 2019, I have been joined by several like-minded Conservative colleagues representing seats in North Wales and we are making progress on regional priorities such as transport, energy and community facilities. We also work with MPs of different political colours, and I see my chairing of the Mersey Dee



North Wales All-Party Parliamentary Group as a critical element of my current role and my aims as a political representative.

Investment in green energy in North Wales, Cheshire and Merseyside will help my region contribute to the UK-wide Net Zero aspirations, as well as creating jobs. The UK Internal Market Act 2020 will allow effective economic regeneration of areas that Cardiff Bay has ignored, and updates to our transport infrastructure will make regional, national and global connectivity easier.

**‘Perhaps unsurprisingly, currently only 1% of cross-border commuting in my region is by rail, some 80% less than the national average’**

Although not exclusively the case, when a rejection of the status quo takes place, it is often because people feel ‘left behind’ or financially disadvantaged. It is therefore crucial that the Levelling Up agenda ensures that areas with lower incomes and productivity are seen to benefit from attention at the UK level.

At present, a 65-mile journey by train from Prestatyn in my constituency to central Manchester takes at least one hour and 45 minutes. Travelling by car is a quicker option, at just over an hour. A rail journey of the same distance in the South East takes as little as 40 minutes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, currently only 1% of cross-border commuting in my region is by rail, some 80% less than the national average.

Improving east–west trunk roads must be a key objective, as must rapid and overdue improvements to the rail network. Sir Peter Hendy, in his *Union Connectivity Review*, recognises that such changes, which can be achieved in a matter of years, can open up all manner of opportunities for residents in England and Wales, and act to directly strengthen the unity of our country.<sup>38</sup>

The NHS is perhaps one of the most quintessentially British of institutions. However, even it has been allowed to become increasingly fragmented over the last couple of decades.

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38 Union Connectivity Review, ‘Union Connectivity Review: Interim Report – March 2021’ (Department for Transport, 2021)



It is clear to me through my work in the NHS that North Wales is suffering from the prolonged underperformance of its health services. Healthcare in North Wales is frequently difficult to access and is too often unsafe. The North Wales Health Board, Betsi Cadwaladr, was in special measures for six years – longer than any other in the UK. It was only lifted out of special measures ahead of the May 2021 elections – and only then as a result of a funding package being agreed, not because of improved performance.

**‘ The Welsh Government receives £1.20 per head of the population for every £1 spent on public services in England ’**

The current situation is not inevitable; as recently as 15 years ago, the healthcare benchmarking company CHKS named my local District General Hospital, Glan Clwyd, as one of the top 40 hospitals in the UK.

Healthcare powers were transferred to Cardiff almost in their entirety 20 years ago – including the very organisation and structure of the NHS. There remains much confusion among the public over where powers lie, making it harder to hold those responsible to account.

Attempts to highlight the Welsh Government’s numerous failures have thus far largely failed, and even been dismissed by some as political game-playing. Some members of the public remain in the dark over the disparity between Wales and England and some are sufficiently persuaded of the merits of apparent freebies and gimmicks so as not to delve any deeper.

In basic terms, since its remit commenced in 1999, the Welsh Government has failed to embrace the kind of reform and modernisation of the NHS seen in England. The inward-looking behaviour generally engendered by Welsh devolution has prevented sensible strategic planning with the UK Department of Health and Social Care and, in my view, has in fact created some of the cross-border issues which are the basis of many of Betsi Cadwaladr’s problems. The NHS in Wales is dealing with



much increased throughput while trying to operate in a similar way as it did across the UK two decades ago. The situation has been compounded by poor corporate governance and leadership.

The Welsh Government receives £1.20 per head of the population for every £1 spent on public services in England. After weighting for age and deprivation, the Welsh Government can and does spend a broadly equivalent amount per head on health services as is the case in England. Therefore, the situation in North Wales implies worse outcomes for similar expenditure – which primarily relates to how the service is run, rather than resources that have been made available.

**‘ I question whether it is sensible, or even viable, for a Cardiff Bay with limited expertise to attempt to run an entirely autonomous and complex 21st-century health service ’**

Two and half years ago, Professor Siobhan McClelland, a Welsh-born senior manager in the NHS in South Wales, quit her post and moved to England in an effort to secure better cancer care for her husband, saying: ‘There is neither capacity nor capability in Welsh Government to be making really good health policy.’<sup>39</sup> I question whether it is sensible, or even viable, for a Cardiff Bay with limited expertise to attempt to run an entirely autonomous and complex 21st-century health service. This is especially the case given Wales’ small population, geography and dependency on hospitals located in England.

In my view, HM Government needs to apply its Levelling Up agenda to the NHS, through putting into practice a duty of care for all of its citizens, including where there is a devolved settlement in place.

First, the government should mandate the collection of an agreed set of UK-wide directly comparable data on NHS performance and outcomes, for clinical and research purposes.

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39 BBC Wales, ‘Ex-health boss ‘leaving Wales’ after losing confidence in NHS’ (October 17, 2018)



The arguments once made in favour of devolution included learning from the comparison of different policy approaches across the UK. Transparent comparison of performance and outcomes would assist scrutiny, clarify where disparities lie, promote equality and assist in the democratic accountability of governments across the UK.

Second, data interoperability must be improved. It is unacceptable that the health service in Wales often cannot communicate in a fit-for-purpose way with services in England, and vice versa.

**‘ Those who are managing inferior services must be able to learn lessons from more effectively run areas and, ultimately, be held to account ’**

Third, my direct experience of working within the NHS leads me to feel very strongly that inspection, safety and audit mechanisms should be introduced at a national level to ensure a minimum standard of care for all British citizens. UK-wide public inquiries and investigations by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch would ensure all parts of the country benefit from lessons learned.

Those who are managing inferior services must be able to learn lessons from more effectively run areas and, ultimately, be held to account.

Finally, I believe there should be equal access to and choice over secondary and tertiary healthcare services across the country, regardless of where in the UK a patient lives.

One of my constituents was diagnosed with cancer in 2015. As a result of his treatment, he developed problems with his vision and required cataract surgery in both eyes. Like so many in North Wales, when he was advised of a two-year waiting list, he was forced to fundraise for private healthcare. Similarly, patients in my constituency are routinely being advised at present of two-year waits, solely for their first outpatient clinic appointment.

The NHS remains the number one domestic priority for many voters and the UK Government has an opportunity to address issues which are currently letting too many people down, while simultaneously strengthening the Union.



There are, of course, numerous other areas in which the British state could and should re-establish greater relevance across the country. Education is certainly one of these.

Such efforts need, if at all possible, to be cross-party in nature. Former Labour MP Ann Clwyd is on the record as saying [translated from Welsh]: ‘I’m very critical of the NHS in Wales and education in Wales and I’ve been critical of devolution too ... I do believe it was a mistake.’<sup>40</sup> Her views are shared by many on the left but all too often those voices continue to be suppressed.

### ‘Cardiff Bay is currently contemplating increasing its own size by up to 50% – an additional 30 politicians’

It comes as no surprise to me that efforts at Westminster to make the devolved institutions more powerful, and more accountable, have served only to play into the hands of the separatists. I believe that the Welsh Government will never be properly accountable unless and until either the people of Wales feel less British and behave so, or the devolved administration has overwhelming control of policies that impact on the electorate. Both of these situations are, in my view, very undesirable.

Further appeasement of the nationalists will never work in the long term, as their sole priority is always further separatism. The Welsh Government’s latest requests – for powers over policing and justice, and other worrying elements buried in the detail of the recent Welsh Labour manifesto<sup>41</sup> – should be resisted vehemently. Alarming, current British Labour Party policy calls for a ‘federal’ UK, which would fatally weaken most of the remaining ties that bind us together.

Earlier this year, the Labour First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, told the Welsh Affairs Select Committee that the UK ‘is over’.<sup>42</sup> Apart from again providing a vivid insight into the current state of the Labour Party, such astonishing words should

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40 Ann Clwyd, ‘Rebel with a cause: a political life’, Biteback Publishing, (March 29, 2017)

41 Welsh Labour, ‘Moving Wales Forward: Welsh Labour Manifesto 2021’ (Welsh Labour, 2021)

42 Mark Drakeford’s appearance before the Welsh Affairs Committee (March 04, 2021)





be an urgent wake-up call for us all. I fear that we have been sleepwalking towards a scenario whereby the balkanisation of the UK, and inevitably therefore of Wales itself, is closer than any of us may wish to believe. This is certainly not the prevailing wish of the electorate. It is, however, a realistic threat arising from the political forces unleashed by a devolution settlement which we have been told is a 'process, not an event'. Cardiff Bay is currently contemplating increasing its own size by up to 50% – an additional 30 politicians.

**‘It is not too late to turn the tide, but doing so will mean concerted action over many years. That action needs to centre around a clear recognition that a unified country must be based on interwoven interests and shared identity, not ever-increasing divergence’**

Looking to the future, I am concerned that all my constituents who currently enjoy both British and Welsh identities will be forced to select one side of a sectarian battle. Rather than the Welsh dragon flourishing in an increasingly competitive world, as part of a dynamic Global Britain, it will be further crippled by growing division.

It is not within the gift of one politician or even of Parliament itself to address all of the forces at play currently, but more must be done to reflect the fact that strengthening the UK is the most important challenge facing us today. Success in this battle will require a greater focus on reversing, albeit gradually, the erosion of cultural ties and British identity of recent decades.

While the financial benefits of the Union are self-evident to most, simply sending unhypothecated packages of money to Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast is not a sustainable basis for any country to continue to exist.

Through the Community Renewal Fund, Community Ownership Fund, Levelling Up Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund, Union Connectivity Review and simply a greater



visibility and presence in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the UK Government is belatedly but actively championing the importance of the UK, and embracing true devolution by way of local authority involvement. The return of powers from Brussels to London has required steadfast determination to ensure UK-wide frameworks in important areas, for example to ensure a continuing UK internal market and state subsidy system.

**‘Tens of millions of people in the UK are proud to be British and many regard our country as the best in the world. We are looked up to worldwide as a beacon of democracy, freedom, progress and stability’**

Fortunately, the present UK Government has understood this, despite heated protest from the devolved administrations and their allies. In rejecting such protests, the UK Government has stood up for the quiet majority and for vital common sense.

Tens of millions of people in the UK are proud to be British and many regard our country as the best in the world. We are looked up to worldwide as a beacon of democracy, freedom, progress and stability. As a united entity, the UK enjoys an international standing and clout much greater than the sum of its parts. Yet through a careless, one-way process of ‘devolve and forget’ in recent decades, often aided and abetted by British institutions themselves, the very foundations of our nation state have been eroded.

It is not too late to turn the tide, but doing so will mean concerted action over many years. That action needs to centre around a clear recognition that a unified country must be based on interwoven interests and shared identity, not ever-increasing divergence.



## Sharing our strengths makes us all stronger *by Felicity Buchan MP*

I am proud to be a child of the Union. I was born and bred in Fraserburgh in the north-east of Scotland. I have lived for most of my adult life in England and now represent the parliamentary seat of Kensington in Central London. Earlier in life I ran for Parliament in Northern Ireland. Perhaps at some point I will have a Welsh stage of my life too, beyond the occasional holiday on the beautiful beaches of Pembrokeshire.

I feel as Unionists we can benefit from the best of what every part of this country can offer. I am proud to be both British and Scottish, representing a British and English seat.

**‘ Financial services are critically important to our economy, accounting for 11% of the UK’s total tax take, and we are stronger together ’**

Growing up in Scotland, I benefited from a great comprehensive school education. It gave me huge opportunities not only academically but also in sports: I played golf at Fraserburgh, the seventh-oldest course in the world. That Scottish comprehensive school education allowed me to pass the Oxford University entrance exam. This did not in any way conflict with my Scottish upbringing – I simply wanted to go to one of the top universities in the world. At Oxford, I benefited from excellent teaching in Law, and look back at my time at Christ Church, Oxford with extremely fond memories.

I did not pursue the Law, but went to work in financial services in London, where the United Kingdom is a true global leader. I was fortunate to work in a very dynamic and innovative environment. London and the UK are a huge pull for talent from across the world and a successful Union is inextricably linked with our global presence. The very fact that 5.3 million people have applied for EU settled status is a huge testament to the draw of our Union.



In 2015, I ran for Parliament in South Down in Northern Ireland. This was a remarkable experience and I saw up close the huge talent of the Northern Irish people, a talent we need to harness to its maximum going forward. This experience has also proved invaluable in Parliament as it gives me a deep understanding of Northern Irish politics, which is critical given the pivotal position Northern Ireland has in Brexit-related matters.

**‘ The UK’s economic strength has allowed us to offer one of the most generous pandemic support programmes in the world, and to make a huge investment in the NHS ’**

I have now lived in Kensington and Chelsea for more than 25 years and I was delighted to be selected as the Conservative candidate for Kensington in June 2019. I can honestly say that throughout the selection process, the fact that I was Scottish-born was never raised as an issue at all; indeed, it may even have been seen as a positive. We north-eastern-born Scots often have a reputation for being no-nonsense, plain-speaking hard workers in London. And I am not the first Scot to represent the constituency. The Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind QC was MP for Kensington from 2005 to 2015, and I have no doubt there will be more.

In December 2019, I was honoured to be elected as my local MP, winning the seat back from Labour with a very slim majority of 150. I am told that a big cheer went up at the Banff & Buchan count in Aberdeenshire when the result came up on the TV screens, showing the strength of the links between the different parts of the Union.

I am so proud to represent Kensington. It is home to the world-leading museums of South Kensington, many embassies and residencies, and one of the most diverse communities in the country. When drafting my maiden speech, it was almost impossible to reference all the historical and cultural landmarks of the constituency, from the embassies and museums to Kensington Palace, Imperial College and Kensington Gardens, to the Notting Hill Carnival, Portobello Market and the incredibly diverse north Kensington community. Because of my constituency’s variety, every day is a learning experience and I do believe it has also been integral in furthering my understanding of what it means to live in the UK.



Kensington has very close ties to the rest of the Union, in particular with Scotland. We are home to St Columba's Church, Knightsbridge – the leading Church of Scotland church in London. Knightsbridge is also well known as a major international shopping centre, attracting shoppers from the Middle East, Asia and across the globe. Many of the goods sold in our stores are Scottish-made luxuries such as tweed and cashmere. It was therefore no surprise that when I worked on a project to attract international shoppers back to the UK, I worked closely with Scottish MPs as our interests were so aligned. Kensington is also a major centre for travel agents and many international visitors will come first to London and then add on a few days in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

**‘I truly believe that my own background and personal journey show how intertwined and aligned our Union is’**

My constituency, in other words, benefits from the Union in the same way the Union benefits from my constituency. That is why, as I have mentioned, I work closely in Parliament with colleagues from across the Union. In my constituency, many residents work in professional services such as banking and finance – that leads to co-operation with MPs representing Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, which are major centres for asset management. Financial services are critically important to our economy, accounting for 11% of the UK's total tax take, and we are stronger together.

In Parliament, I have conversations with MPs from across the Union and across parties – whether in the Chamber, Select Committees or in the Tea Room. Often there is alignment; often there are constituency-specific interests; sometimes there is disagreement. But I know that these interactions have deepened my understanding of not only my constituents, but of the implications of policies across the board.

I truly believe that my own background and personal journey show how intertwined and aligned our Union is.



I look at the huge talent pool in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Scotland has always been a centre of the Enlightenment, producing leading thinkers such as David Hume, Adam Smith and James Boswell, to name but a few. Recently, Scotland has contributed so much in financial services and energy; and going forward will be critical in renewables. Northern Ireland has one of the strongest education systems in the Union. In recent years, it has also seen a resurgence as a major centre of the television and film sector, where hit series such as *Game of Thrones* are filmed. Wales has a proud history in terms the arts, music and sport. Dylan Thomas, Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey – that is quite a line-up!

**‘Our voice on the international stage is far stronger when we speak as one nation. This year sees us holding the presidency of the G7 and jointly hosting COP26 in Glasgow – one of the most significant summits in a generation’**

As I said above, I believe we are stronger together. The coronavirus pandemic, while so difficult for so many, has shown us the benefits of being one united country. We have all collectively benefited from the enormous success of the vaccine rollout. We sourced these vaccines as one country and administered them as one country, with the help of the British Army. Army medics administered many vaccines and the Royal Logistical Corps helped organise the national deployment.

The UK’s economic strength has allowed us to offer one of the most generous pandemic support programmes in the world, and to make a huge investment in the NHS. The UK has invested the third most of any developed country as a percentage of GDP in tackling the pandemic – only ranking behind the United States and New Zealand.<sup>43</sup> It is only because of the combined strength of the Union’s economy that we can make that sort of investment.

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<sup>43</sup> Office for Budget Responsibility, ‘Fiscal risks report’, p.6 (July, 2021). The figures and chart in the report come from IMF estimates of measures between January 2020 and April 2021 in 10 economies which detailed data are available – source: IMF, OBR



During the pandemic, we have had to borrow in the international bond markets to fund our spending packages. We have been able to access these markets with confidence because of the combined strength of our UK economy.

Undoubtedly, as one United Kingdom, we benefit from that stronger economy. We have a substantial tariff-free internal market. Scotland, for instance, sells more than twice as many goods by value to England, Wales and Northern Ireland as it does to the rest of the world.

**‘Here, the UK has been a trailblazer. We were the first major country to legislate for Net Zero by 2050 and, since 1990, we have decarbonised at the fastest rate of any G20 country’**

Our voice on the international stage is far stronger when we speak as one nation. This year sees us holding the presidency of the G7 and jointly hosting COP26 in Glasgow – one of the most significant summits in a generation. We hold, as the UK, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. It is because we are combined that we have such influence. If we are a power for good on the world stage, which I firmly believe we are, we need to retain that influence.

One of my key focuses is the environment. Here, the UK has been a trailblazer. We were the first major country to legislate for Net Zero by 2050 and, since 1990, we have decarbonised at the fastest rate of any G20 country. I want the UK to lead that agenda going forward, encouraging developing nations to also be ambitious in their goals. We have a stronger voice to do that as one United Kingdom.

In writing this essay, I have reflected on my own personal experience and on my role as the MP for Kensington. It all points strongly in favour of the Union. The whole concept of the Union is collaborative, open and inclusive. It allows us to draw on all the strengths, resources and talent that England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have to offer. It allows us to support each other when support is required. And it allows us to speak with a strong, confident voice on the international stage.

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
The Rt Hon Theresa May MP  
The Rt Hon Lord Hague of Richmond  
The Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon  
Robin Millar MP  
Chloe Smith MP  
The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP  
Andrew Bowie MP  
The Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP  
Andrew RT Davies MS  
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