

GOVERNANCE PROJECT



Annex 2 – The Background

- A.2.1. The Commission was formed reflecting widespread concern that the governance arrangements of the UK are not functioning well. In this sense, governance is taken to mean the effectiveness of the structures through which power is exercised and the quality of decision making and implementation, in regard to central UK Government activity. Annex 3 contains a brief description of the conceptual problem which the Commission has focussed on when formulating its Recommendations.
- A.2.2. Good governance leads to many benefits including:
- a) stronger democratic structures and protections;
 - b) more efficient use of public resources and better returns for the population;
 - c) more rational and better implemented policies; and
 - d) over time, an enhanced global reputation for the UK, leading to stronger soft power and lower borrowing costs.
- A.2.3. To set sensible limits on the scope of our work, and reflecting a focus on providing recommendations that could achieve a significant improvement in the short term, the Commission excluded certain areas from its thinking. This was, variously, because they were already the subject of detailed consideration and reports elsewhere; or carried substantial political and historical baggage; or were difficult to bring to a conclusion and implement promptly. Those areas were principally:
- a) devolution and Westminster’s relationships with the devolved administrations;
 - b) House of Lords reform (other than as regards entry thereto);
 - c) electoral reform; and
 - d) constitutional reform as such and the issues associated with a written constitution.
- A.2.4. Again, our focus is to make readily implementable proposals which can achieve material change, promptly. As the scope of our Recommendations indicate, there is much which can be achieved within those parameters.
- A.2.5. We were enormously assisted by the wide range of outstanding thinking, research, analysis and writing that has been published on this subject by academics, think tanks, public reviews and journalists, particularly over the past year or so. We have aimed not to duplicate that work but to build on it, from our own experience, to produce workable reforms. A list of primary sources reviewed is listed in the supporting background material, split by Recommendation, and the bibliography (also provided on the Commission website) contains a more extensive list.
- A.2.6. Not only is improvement in this area important for the UK substantively, it is a clear expectation of the electorate. Generally, voters are unlikely to be interested in the details of the changes needed, but it is clear from polling, citizens’ assembly work and the like that there is very strong public concern that: (i) the country is not being well run; and (ii) standards in public life are low. Commensurately, there is a strong public demand to see improvements. This is clear, for example, from the results of the survey and citizens’ assembly work carried out by the UCL Constitution Unit in 2022, which found that while most people expressed broad satisfaction with democracy, they had very little trust in politicians. Trust would improve, this work suggested, if politicians were seen to be honest, have integrity, and operate within clear rules. Finally, most people involved expressed concerns about the over-concentration of power in the hands of a few politicians. Annex 7 contains an overview of certain key elements of this work and of other polling, which we think are relevant background to the work of the Commission and to the support for it which we believe to exist, from the wider public as well as from individual experts and bodies.