Devolved Tribunals in Wales. What do you think about our ideas to change the laws for Devolved Tribunals

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What the words mean 50
We are the Law Commission of England and Wales.

We are independent (not part of the government).

We make suggestions to the Government about changing laws in England and Wales.

We have been asked to look at the laws for devolved tribunals in Wales.
Now we want to know what you think about them.

If you do not agree with a decision by a public organisation, a tribunal can look at this again and make a final decision that everyone must stick to.

Devolved powers are things the Welsh Parliament can do without asking the UK Government.

The main areas we have been asked to look at are:

- how tribunals can work fairly and well
● what rules **tribunals** should follow

● who should choose **tribunal** members

● how people can complain or **appeal** if they are not happy with something a **tribunal** decides.

This is an EasyRead version of the paper we wrote called **Devolved Tribunals in Wales Consultation**.

Because it is about the law there are still quite a lot of difficult words in it. These are in **bold** and a list of what they mean is at the back.
This paper has some important questions for you to think about. We would like to know what your answers are.

Please think about how you answer the questions. Do not give us information that means other people will know who you are or who you are talking about.
Our consultation is about the laws for devolved tribunals in Wales.

We want as many people as possible to read this paper and tell us what they think about it.

You can find the full paper at: https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/devolved-tribunals-in-wales/

It is not in EasyRead.

We need to hear from people by 19th March 2021.
You can tell us what you think by:

Using the online form here: 
https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/devolved-tribunals-in-wales/

Emailing: 
DevolvedTribunalsWales@lawcommission.gov.uk

Posting your thoughts to:
The Devolved Tribunals Team
Law Commission
1st Floor, 52 Queen Anne’s Gate
London. SW1H 9AG.

After we have read what everyone thinks, we will decide what to suggest to the Government.
Welsh **tribunals** were set up over many years. They are governed by different laws and work in different ways.

We need to make sure all **devolved tribunals** work well and come together in one system.

The Government in Westminster still makes rules about **tribunals** that affect all parts of the UK.

But the Welsh government makes laws about **devolved tribunals** that only affect Wales.
This can be confusing.

The **President of Welsh Tribunals** makes sure **devolved tribunals** in Wales work properly. We need clear rules about what this person can and cannot do.

The **Welsh Tribunals Unit** supports some **devolved tribunals** in Wales to run smoothly.

At the moment this unit is part of the Welsh Government. But it looks into many decisions made by the government or by local councils. We ask if it should be more independent.
Our main ideas for change and questions for you

Our main ideas for changes to laws for **devolved tribunals** are:

1. Make it clear which are **devolved tribunals** covered by these laws and which are not

2. Bring **tribunals** together to make one simpler system

3. Deal with **appeals** to all **devolved tribunals** in the same way

4. Have rules for all **devolved tribunals** to work in the same ways where possible
5. Have clear rules about who should choose members of all **tribunals**

6. Look into complaints about all **devolved tribunals** in the same way

7. Make the **Welsh Tribunals Unit** independent from the Welsh Government.

In the next part of this paper we tell you more about our ideas and ask what you think about them.
1. Make it clear which are devolved tribunals

We think a tribunal is any organisation that:

- settles arguments and looks at decisions made by public organisations
- makes a final decision.

Question 1

Do you agree with this?

**Devolved** or **Welsh tribunals** make decisions about things that only affect Wales.

The law says there are 7 Welsh **tribunals**.
They look at decisions about:

1. Farm land

2. Mental Health

3. Residential buildings

4. Education

5. School and nursery inspections

6. Members of councils that break rules about how they should behave

7. The Welsh Language
We think **devolved tribunals** should also include:

- the **Valuation Tribunal** for Wales that agrees how much property is worth for council tax or business rates

- panels (groups of people) that decide about **admissions** to schools

- panels that decide about school **exclusions**.

**Question 2**

Do you agree with our ideas for which are **devolved tribunals**?
Question 3

Do you agree that other tribunals or organisations that make decisions are not devolved tribunals?

2. A tribunals system for Wales

At the moment there is a large tribunal that brings together many tribunals in the UK.

We think the devolved Welsh tribunals could come together into one large tribunal for Wales.

Different parts of this large tribunal would look at different types of decisions.
This would make it easier to look at different cases without having to set up a new tribunal.

An independent tribunal would look at decisions about schools or how much property is worth. Not the local council that made the decision.

This might be easier and fairer for decisions about property and admission to schools.

But it might be difficult for panels that look at admissions to schools. They are only busy in the spring and need local experts who know about schools in their area.
It would also be important for the large **tribunal** to use the skills of experts who work in different **tribunals** now.

At the moment it is difficult to say what the different parts of the new large **tribunal** should be.

We have some ideas. But we think it should be set up in a way that makes it easy to add new sections when they are needed.

**Question 4**

Do you agree with the idea to bring all the **devolved tribunals** together into one large **tribunal**?
Question 5
Do you agree that Welsh Ministers should work with the President of Welsh Tribunals on laws to have a large tribunal with different parts?

Question 6
Do you agree that the Valuation Tribunal for Wales should be part of the large tribunal?

Question 7
Do you agree that school exclusion panels should join with other education tribunals and be part of the large tribunal?

Question 8
Do you agree that, for the moment, the school admission panels should not be part of the large tribunal?
Question 9
Do you agree other tribunals for decisions about schools and nurseries should join together as one part of the large tribunal?

Question 10
Do you agree that all tribunals for decisions about residential property should join together as part of the large tribunal?

Question 11
Do you think there should be one part of the new large tribunal that checks other government decisions? If so, which tribunals do you think should come together into this part?
Question 12

Do you think the tribunals for farm land and residential property should come together as one part of the larger tribunal to look at all types of property?

Question 13

Should any other devolved tribunals come together into one part of the large tribunal?

3. Appeals

If you are not happy with what a tribunal decides, you can appeal. You need permission to do this. Appeals against different tribunals are dealt with in different ways.
We think it would be simpler to bring everything together so you **appeal** in the same way and to the same organisation for decisions by any **tribunal**.

We have 4 suggestions for what could happen:

1. **Leave things as they are**

   Judges who lead **tribunals** are happy with the way things are.

   But it is complicated for people who use **tribunals** if they all work in different ways.

2. **Send appeals to the Administrative Court**

   This court can look at decisions made by other courts, **tribunals** or public organisations.

   It already looks at some **appeals** but is not part of the **tribunal** system.
3. **Send appeals to the Upper Tribunal.**

The Upper Tribunal already looks at many decisions made by other **tribunals**. It might be easier for them to hear all **appeals**. But it would mean keeping links to the English system.

4. **Set up a new Appeal Tribunal for Wales.**

This might make things easier. But there might not be enough appeals to be worth setting up a new **tribunal**.

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**Question 14**

Do you agree you should be able to **appeal** a decision by any **devolved tribunal** in the same way?
Question 15

If you agree, who should deal with these appeals;

1. The Upper Tribunal
2. The Administrative Court in Wales
3. A new Appeal Tribunal for Wales

Some tribunals do not have a set way to appeal their decisions. New tribunals might have to be set up to hear these appeals.

Question 16

1. Should the rules say how people can appeal decisions by these tribunals?
2. What should the rules say?
3. Which tribunals should have their appeals heard this way?
4. Should we gradually move tribunals to working this way?
At the moment there is no set way to appeal decisions about school admissions or exclusions. We think these appeals should be quick and easy so children do not miss out on school.

**Question 17**

1. Do you think appeals against school admission panels should go to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal?

2. If you agree, when should people have the right to appeal?

**Question 18**

Do you think people should only be able to appeal an admissions decision by the Special Educational Needs Tribunal if there is a serious problem with how the tribunal dealt with it?
At the moment, **appeals** about different decisions by the Residential Property Tribunal for Wales are dealt with in different ways. This includes getting permission to **appeal rent assessment** decisions.

**Question 19**

Do you agree that there should just be one way to **appeal** all decisions by the Valuation Tribunal for Wales? If so, what should this be?

**Question 20**

Do you agree there should be the same rules to get permission to **appeal** about **rent assessments** as other decisions by the Residential Property Tribunal?
4. Rules about how tribunals work

The rules for **devolved tribunals** in Wales are old and out of date.

**Tribunals** would be much easier for everyone if they worked in the same way where they can.

**Welsh Ministers** make the rules for most tribunals.

We cannot change these rules.

But we can suggest ways to make them work for better.

This includes checking the rules are working well and changing them if they need updating.
Question 21
Do you agree that rules for all devolved tribunals should say the tribunal must work fairly?

Question 22
Do you think rules for all devolved tribunals should have examples of what it means to work fairly? What sort of examples should they have?

Question 23
Do you think rules for all devolved tribunals should say everyone involved should work together and help the tribunal work fairly?
If so, should this include the Mental Health Review Tribunal?
Some **tribunals** can check their own decisions and put things right if they make a mistake. This is quicker and easier than having to appeal to a different **tribunal**.

Covid-19 means organisations are using **technology** so people can stay home and not go to busy places.

Some **tribunals** email official papers and use video to hold **remote hearings** where people do not have to come together in one place.

We think some of this will carry on after Covid-19 if it helps organisations work better.
Question 24
Do you agree the rules should allow all devolved tribunals to send official papers by email?

Question 25
Do you agree that rules for all devolved tribunals should allow them check their own decisions?

Question 26
Do you agree that all devolved tribunals should have the same rules about remote hearings?

Sometimes different devolved tribunals need different rules about how they work. For example, the same people use the Mental Health Tribunal for England and the Mental Health Tribunal for Wales so the rules must be the same for each country.
But all **tribunals** do things like sending official papers and it would make it easier for everyone if the rules for this were the same. Judges would not have to learn a whole set of new rules if they work on different **tribunals**. It would be easier for the public to understand.

It will take time to rewrite all the rules and look at where they could be the same. Our idea is to keep the separate rules for each **devolved tribunal** for a while to give people time to work on this.

But we do think the 3 sets of rules for the Residential Property Tribunal could be brought together into one set of rules.

**Question 27**

Do you agree the rules for all **devolved tribunals** should be the same if possible?
Question 28

Is it a problem if rules for **devolved tribunals** are different from rules for the large **tribunal**?

How should **tribunals** deal with this?

Question 29

Do you agree that each **devolved tribunal** should keep its own set of rules for a while?

Question 30

Do you agree that there should just be one set of rules for the Residential Property Tribunal?
A Tribunal Procedural Committee looks at rules for all **tribunals** in the UK. It checks they are up to date and work well.

We think there should be a committee like this just for **devolved tribunals** in Wales.

We think the **President of Welsh Tribunals** is the right person to lead this committee and choose who is on it.

The Welsh Tribunal Procedural Committee will only be able to change rules if most committee members or the **President of Welsh Tribunals** agree.
We think Welsh Ministers will also have to agree to changes.

**Question 31**

Do you agree that there should be a Tribunal Procedure Committee for Wales?

**Question 32**

Do you agree the President of Welsh Tribunals should lead the Tribunal Procedure Committee for Wales and choose its members?

**Question 33**

Do you agree there should be rules to help the President of Welsh Tribunals choose the right people to be members of the Tribunal Procedure Committee?
Question 34

Do you think the President of Welsh Tribunals or the Tribunal Procedure Committee for Wales should make rules for devolved tribunals?

5. Who decides on tribunal members

The public must be able to see how devolved tribunal members are chosen. This helps them trust tribunals and believe they are independent and fair.

But the rules have changed over time and different tribunals chose members in different ways.
We think members of all devolved tribunals should be chosen in the same way by a person or organisation that is:

- independent and not part of the government or local councils
- senior and important
- able to check that the person is right for the tribunal.

Some people think there should be a separate organisation to decide devolved tribunal members in Wales. But there is probably not enough work to need a new organisation.

Question 35

Do you agree that the same person or organisation should decide on members of all devolved tribunals in Wales?
Question 36
Do you agree that the President of Welsh Tribunals should decide on members of all devolved tribunals in Wales?

The Judicial Appointments Commission decides on judges for courts and tribunals in England and Wales. We think they could also choose members for other tribunals and appeal panels in Wales. But the way they decide might be too complicated for people who want to volunteer.

Question 37
Do you agree that Welsh Ministers should decide on lead judges and deputies for all devolved tribunals in Wales. But the President of Welsh Tribunals must agree with their choice?
Question 38
Who should decide who becomes the President of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales?

Question 39
Who should decide on members and the lead person for the Valuation Tribunal for Wales?

Question 40
Should the President of Welsh Tribunals decide the members of school admissions and exclusions appeal panels?

Question 41
Do you agree that we should not change the way the Judicial Appointments Commission chooses judges for devolved tribunals in Wales?
Question 42
How should the President of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales be chosen?

Question 43
How should members of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales be chosen?

Question 44
How should members of school admissions and exclusions appeal panels be chosen?

6. Complaints about tribunals

There are lots of different and complicated rules for complaining about members of devolved tribunals.
It makes it difficult for people to find out how to complain.

**Question 45**

Do you agree that all devolved tribunals in Wales should deal with complaints in the same way?

**Question 46**

Do you agree that everyone should be able to get information about how to complain online or ask for a paper copy?

In English and Welsh tribunals you often complain to the organisation that chose the judge or tribunal member. They might not be independent enough.
Some **devolved tribunals** in Wales work in this way. Others do not have rules about how to complain.

Complaints about school **admissions** or **exclusions** panels go to the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales** or to Welsh Ministers.

We think there should be a simple and fair way to complain about any **devolved tribunal**.

**Question 47**

Should there be information about how to complain about school **admission** or **exclusion** panels. As well as information about what the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales** can do?
Question 48
Do you agree that people should be able to complain about what members of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales do?

Question 49
Do you agree that people should be able to complain about how any devolved tribunal in Wales is run?

Question 50
Do you agree there should be just one way to complain about members and judges of devolved tribunals?

Question 51
Do you agree that complaints about members of devolved tribunals should deal be dealt with by the judge who leads the tribunal?
Question 52
Do you agree an organisation like the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office should deal with complaints about judges who lead devolved tribunals?

Question 53
Who should look into complaints about how members of school admission or exclusion panels behave?

Question 54
Do you agree that the President of the tribunal should deal with complaints about members of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales?
Question 55

Do you agree an organisation like the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office should deal with complaints about the President of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales?

There are different rules about who can make tribunal members and judges keep to the rules or sack them. Often this is an organisation or person who is involved with the tribunal or judge. We think it should be someone more independent.

We need laws to make sure different people work together on these decisions to make sure they are fair.

Question 56

Should the President of Welsh Tribunals have the power to make members of devolved tribunals keep to the rules or to sack them?
Question 57
Should the President of Welsh Tribunals have the power to make members of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales keep to the rules or to sack them?

Question 58
Should the President of Welsh Tribunals have the power to make members of the school admissions or exclusions panels keep to the rules or to sack them?

Question 59
Do you agree the President of Welsh Tribunals should make the judges who lead tribunals keep to the rules or to sack them. If Welsh Ministers agree?
Question 60

Do you agree that the President of Welsh Tribunals should make the President of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales keep to the rules or to sack them. If Welsh Ministers agree?

Question 61

Do we need any other rules to make sure tribunals stick to the law and keep judges independent?

7. The President of Welsh Tribunals

The President of Welsh Tribunals leads all the devolved tribunals. There are 2 parts to the job:

1. Make sure Welsh tribunals run well

2. Tell Welsh Ministers and the Welsh Parliament what is happening with the tribunals.
Some people think the **President of Welsh Tribunals** should be a judge who understands **tribunals**.

Our idea is to bring all the different **tribunals** together into one large **tribunal**. We looked at how this would work if the **President of Welsh Tribunals** managed other **tribunals** like school **admissions** and **exclusions** panels. This could make panels more independent.

**Question 62**

Do you agree the **President of Welsh Tribunals** should be allowed to work as a judge for the **tribunals** they manage?

**Question 63**

Do you agree the **President of Welsh Tribunals** should manage the school **admissions** and **exclusions** panels?
Question 64

Do you agree the President of Welsh Tribunals should manage the Valuation Tribunal for Wales?

8. The Welsh Tribunals Unit

The Welsh Tribunals Unit is the part of the Welsh government that manages the Welsh tribunals.

Because it is part of the government it is not independent.

We looked at how this is done in different parts of the UK.
Our suggestion is to separate the Tribunals Unit from the Welsh government. This would:

- stop judges being put under pressure to make decisions the government want

- show people who use tribunals that someone who is not linked to the government is checking the decision

- involve judges in running the Tribunals Unit

**Question 65**

Do you agree the **Welsh Tribunals Unit** should not be run by **Welsh Ministers**?
9. Keeping judges independent

Judges can only make fair decisions if they are independent.

This means separate from the government or other organisations that might want them to make certain decisions.

This is an important part of our work and we talk about it in different parts of this paper.

UK law says the government should not try to change what judges do or decide.

But this law does not apply to all devolved tribunals in Wales. We think this should change.
Question 66
Do you agree the law should make Welsh Ministers and the justice system in Wales keep all devolved tribunals independent of the Welsh government?

Judges in the UK must swear an oath. This means they promise to be loyal to the Queen, keep to the law and make fair decisions.

In Wales the President of Welsh Tribunals swears the oath. But tribunal judges do not have to.

Question 67
Do you agree judges and other legal members of devolved tribunals should swear an oath to make fair decisions?
What the words mean

**Appeal** – a way to complain and ask for things to be looked at again if you are not happy with what a tribunal decides.

**Appoint** – decide who does something.

**Admission** - allow someone to go somewhere. For example to a school.

**Devolved powers** - things the Welsh Parliament can do or make decisions about without asking the government in Westminster.

**Exclusion** – refuse to let someone do something or be somewhere. For example from a school.

**Hearings** – when a court or tribunals meets to look at information and decide what should happen.

**Law Commissions** - are independent and suggest changes to make laws better and fairer.

**Tribunals** – a group of people who settle arguments and look at decisions made by public organisations. They make a final decision about what should happen.

**President of Welsh Tribunals** – a senior judge who is in charge of Welsh tribunals.

**Public Services Ombudsman for Wales** – an organisation with legal powers to look into complaints about public services and independent care providers in Wales.
Remote hearings – when someone can be involved in a court case or tribunal using video instead of having to go to there.

Rent assessment – when your landlord decides what rent you have to pay or puts up your rent.

Technology – things like computers that help us do things

Welsh Ministers – members of the Welsh government.

Welsh Tribunals Unit – supports tribunals with paperwork and other things they need to run smoothly.
Credits

This paper has been designed and produced by the EasyRead service at Inspired Services Publishing Ltd. Ref ISL175 20. February 2021.

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