

# Wales to benefit from Army's radical transformation

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has announced that The Queen's Dragoon Guards, famously nicknamed, The Welsh Cavalry, who predominantly recruit from Wales will be moving to a revamped Caerwent Barracks from 2028.

This boost for Wales is part of 'Future Soldier', the Army's most radical transformation in over 20 years. This reconfiguration will see an overall increase in the number of soldiers based in Wales.

The Reserve Soldier footprint in Wales will continue to grow with a new location opened in Wrexham for elements of the 3rd Battalion The Royal Welsh as they assume principal responsibility for homeland protection operations as well as maintaining a warfighting role alongside Regular colleagues.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Future Soldier is reinforced by the ambition outlined in the Defence Command Paper to transform the Army into a more agile, integrated, lethal, expeditionary force.

We have underpinned this generational work with an extra £8.6bn for Army equipment, bringing the total investment to £41.3 billion.

Our army will operate across the globe, equipped with the capabilities to face down a myriad of threats from cyber warfare through to battlefield conflict.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The Armed Forces have long had a hugely significant presence in Wales and the announcement that this presence will be enhanced and increased is fantastic news.

The Welsh Cavalry's move to Monmouthshire, the basing of a new Reserve unit in Wrexham and an overall increase in the Army footprint underlines the vital role that Wales continues to play in the UK's defence and the importance of the Armed Forces to the Welsh economy.

Brigadier Andrew Dawes CBE, Head of the Army in Wales said:

We will welcome the Welsh Cavalry (Queen's Dragoon Guards) and an additional infantry unit to a new, purpose-built barracks in South Wales as well as a new sub-unit of 3 Royal Welsh in Wrexham. These

adjustments strengthen our presence across Wales and underlines the importance of Wales to the Army and to the wider UK.

The Barracks in Brecon will not be sold and will continue to house the military headquarters for the majority of troops based in Wales.

The increased Army footprint in Wales will be supported by £320 million investment.

Welsh infantry soldiers will remain at the heart of the Army's warfighting capability with the 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh receiving the Army's new Armoured Personnel Carrier, Boxer. They will continue to be based on Salisbury Plain, forming a crucial part of the Army's high-end warfighting division.

The Welsh Guards, based out of Windsor, will continue to balance prestigious ceremonial and protection duties of the Royal Household alongside their light Infantry role.

- The closure of Cawdor Barracks in Pembrokeshire has been delayed until 2028.
- Launched as part of the Government's Integrated Review in March 2021, Future Soldier outlines how the Army will be organised and structured in the future, and how it will deal with emerging threats across the world. The latest announcement follows ongoing work by the Army to implement the changes across the Army.
- The complete guide to [Future Soldier is available online](#)

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## [Chief Secretary to the Treasury praises "flourishing" FTSE companies for investing in skills](#)

Simon Clarke met business leaders who have set the gold standard for investing in their workforce and have collectively taken on thousands of apprentices.

At the roundtable Simon Clarke stressed the benefits for businesses of putting apprentices at the heart of any their recruitment and training strategy and learnt from senior leaders from Balfour Betty, BT, Microsoft,

IBM and Sage UK and Ireland and others on what works and how best practice can be shared across the country.

Throughout the pandemic the Government's Plan for Jobs has protected millions of jobs and businesses. As a result, the UK is set to have the fastest recovery in the G7.

The strength of the labour market means there are more opportunities for people to change career and get ahead. Now the Plan for Jobs is helping hundreds of thousands of people get the skills they need to make that change.

Apprenticeships are a crucial part of this plan and over 321,000 people starting a new apprenticeship last year.

**Simon Clarke, MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury said:**

With the labour market stronger than ever, apprenticeships are a fantastic way for people to get the skills they need to get on in life and for businesses to get the workers they need in their local area.

I was proud to learn how these leading businesses are flourishing after taking on apprentices and investing in the British people, I'm keen to make sure their experiences are replicated across the country.

Businesses boom when they take on apprentices, boosting the average employer's business by £1,500 in the first year and 98% of businesses who had taken on apprentices said they benefited through higher productivity, fewer skills shortages, and improved diversity.

Businesses will get £3,000 for each new apprentice they hire before 31 January 2022.

Apprenticeships were also boosted at the Autumn Budget with funding set to increase by £170 million to a record high of £2.7 billion by 2024-25.

Small businesses can benefit now more than ever by accessing unspent funds for training from larger companies. Apprenticeships are also becoming more agile, where multiple companies work on a single project the New Flexi-job Apprenticeships – supported by a £7 million fund – will provide skilled apprentices that can switch between businesses and see the project through.

There are over 600 different types of apprenticeships ranging from: HGV driver, butcher, electrician, data analyst, registered nurse, and business administrator.

**Hugh Milward, General Manager for Corporate, External and Legal Affairs at Microsoft said:**

Apprenticeships are key to supporting renewed growth of small and medium sized businesses across the UK economy. Digital apprenticeships in particular are one of the best routes to well-paid careers in businesses of all types, not just in tech.

This is why Microsoft have worked hard over the past 10 years to help provide thousands of people with the skills and training needed for the in-demand jobs of today and tomorrow.

**Paul Struthers, UK&I Managing Director, Sage said:**

As one of the largest employers in the North East of England, Sage has a key role to play in developing the tech talent of the future. Our apprenticeship programme ensures local people gain the skills needed for the jobs of the future, while boosting productivity and growing our economy.

**Kashif Taj, Senior Foundation Manager & Apprenticeships Lead, IBM UK, said:**

It was great to hear from other employers and we established a shared vision for apprenticeship advocacy. As an employer focus group, we made meaningful suggestions of how UK Government can break down the barriers to apprenticeships, thereby providing the essential skills to 'turbo-charge' the economy in the post-Brexit era.

**Helen Booth, Director of the HomeServe Foundation, said:**

We support the Government's whole system approach to bring together best practice from schools, training providers and employers to turbo charge apprenticeships even further in 2022. Incentives, the flexi-job apprenticeships scheme and an industry-wide enhanced recruitment service are all brilliant ways to help businesses to produce the next generation of skills the UK desperately needs.

By making use of the support available to develop Level Two and Level Three apprenticeship candidates in the trades sector, the small firms that dominate that industry have demonstrated the effectiveness and uplift in productivity taking on an apprentice can bring.

**Apprenticeship Roundtable attendees:**

- Balfour Beatty PLC
- BT
- McGinley
- Hable

- Red Systems
  - Microsoft UK.
  - IBM
  - HomeServe Foundation
  - Sage UK & Ireland
  - Achilles Therapeutics
  - London Progression Collaboration
  - Agenc
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## Seventh annual Rail Industry Forum

Thank you for inviting me here today. 'Unprecedented' has been the go-to word to describe much of the past 20 months. It's been a period of disruption, devastation and change not seen in many of our lifetimes.

And as Rail Minister, I've seen first hand how one of our great national industries has dug deep. Government has helped. We have provided £14 billion in financial support so that operators could focus on getting key workers, as well as essential goods and supplies, where they needed to go.

Yet, despite restrictions being lifted, passengers have not returned in the same numbers as before.

At the end of Q1, passenger levels stood at around 40% of 2019 levels with numbers now hovering around 60%. With revenues also down by an estimated £12 billion, our business model has become out of date overnight.

[Taxpayers have already propped up the economy to the tune of around £350 billion](#) over the past 20 months.

So delivering an efficient self-sustaining railway – where we reduce costs and raise revenues – has never been more pressing. That means striking a fair balance between the contribution of passengers and the unprecedented taxpayer support.

It also means pulling together as an industry to attract and retain new customers. This is no longer merely desirable, it's essential – indeed it's existential. The future of the industry depends on how we respond to this challenge.

### **Reforming government**

Now, such is the scale of the challenge that the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#) couldn't have come at a better time.

For years it's been clear that our rail operating model was unsustainable with:

- delays across 50% of services in the North
- the disastrous 2018 timetable change
- multiple franchise failures
- a sector increasingly propped up by the public purse

The pandemic has accelerated the need for change. And I am proud to be part of a reforming government, one that is unafraid to make bold decisions when needed.

The plan for rail will start by getting the basics right of punctual, reliable and comfortable services. But it will also secure a sustainable long-term future for the industry:

- encouraging customer-focused innovation
- delivering meaningful workforce reform
- helping to create a net zero railway
- and ensuring better co-ordination and efficiency for rail freight

As you know, we are bringing track and train, as well as revenue and cost, under a single guiding mind, [Great British Railways](#).

Based outside London and working with local partners, it will ensure skilled jobs, investment and economic benefits are focused beyond the capital.

And while Great British Railways (GBR) won't be fully operational until 2024, we're already delivering changes.

We've sold 100,000 of our recently launched flexible season tickets, giving passengers the freedom and choice to travel in their preferred way.

We're making journeys simpler, thanks to £360 million of funding to roll out contactless payments to 900 stations and make digital ticketing available at every National Rail station.

The passenger experience is improving, too, with the first nationwide accessibility audit underway.

We've already reviewed 200 stations and counting, helping to ensure everyone can access all parts of our rail network. And we're finding ways to better use data, following the £5 million funding commitment for the [Rail Data Marketplace](#) in the summer.

I believe, when it comes to data, an 'open by default approach' is best. Because only then can innovators and developers use rail data not only to deliver a more efficient network, but enhance the passenger experience too.

## Future milestones

Now this is all fantastic progress in such a short space of time. And it's thanks to a lot of hard work by people in this room and my team in the department.

But today, I also want to give you sight of what's coming up.

Firstly, the competition to determine the headquarters of Great British Railways will open [in a matter of weeks]. We want applications from towns and cities with a rich railway heritage with clear plans on how they will energise the local private sector, customers and sector workforce, while also maximising value to the taxpayer.

This week, we have also asked the Rail Delivery Group to start developing a best in class one-stop shop for rail tickets, so passengers will no longer have a confusing menu of options, but instead be able to purchase tickets via one Great British Railways website and app, as well as through third-party retailers who will continue to play an important role in expanding the market.

And finally, because we want to enhance the role the sector plays across the wider economy, GBR will soon kick off rail's 30 year strategic plan by launching a public call for evidence.

I want this strategic plan to be co-created by the best minds in the industry and beyond. It will be a rail map for the future, ensuring the industry can deliver on our long-term national priorities of levelling up, economic recovery and net zero by 2050. I hope you'll all get involved.

## **Role of the private sector**

A revolution, however, cannot be delivered alone – so let me turn to the role of the private sector.

These reforms aren't intended to clip your wings. After all, it was private sector competition that brought us the Mallard and the Flying Scotsman, iconic marketing campaigns, and a doubling of passenger numbers since the 1990s.

By engaging with commercial partners, we will preserve that entrepreneurial spirit and unlock more opportunities for innovation.

Yet, in some areas we must change. The franchising model, for example, has had its day.

We're making good progress, with 6 operators already moving to National Rail Contracts – a stepping stone to the future commercial model. And I'm pleased to say we've already started engagement – both with existing operators and new market entrants – for new [Passenger Service Contracts](#). These will focus operators on providing high-quality service for passengers as well as running services on time and more efficiently.

## **Improving our infrastructure**

Now, if delivering reform is getting the blood flowing, then improving our infrastructure is fixing the skeleton.

And this government is investing record amounts to improve speed, capacity and reliability across the network.

Indeed, according to one travel correspondent, we're the 'most pro-rail government' in a lifetime.

We're reconnecting towns and villages that suffered under the Beeching axe. Just last month, [communities along the Dartmoor Line between Okehampton and Exeter were able to board a local service for the first time in 50 years.](#)

However, it wasn't just any reopening, It was done under the principles of rail SPEED, bringing operators, local government and the supply chain together to deliver ahead of time and under budget.

Our electrification programme has completed 800 miles of track in 4 years. And our recent £96 billion [Integrated Rail Plan for the Midlands and the North](#) is the largest single investment since the railways were built.

So before I finish, and given the coverage to date, I think it's important I address some of the concerns around the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP).

It delivers the benefits of high-speed rail and improved east west links more quickly to more places, benefitting more people. Travel times between some of our biggest cities, such as Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham, will be slashed thanks to both HS2 and upgrades to the Transpennine Main Line. And towns such as Doncaster, Leicester and Kettering, which previous plans had largely ignored, will now benefit from improved services.

It's also a giant leap towards a greener railway, with 75% of the country's network set to be electrified. Yet, it was obvious that the IRP was not universally celebrated, with critics claiming it was too different from previously discussed plans.

Yet for me the benefits are clear. Millions of people across the Midlands and North, in big cities and smaller towns, who for decades have settled for substandard transport links will now benefit more quickly from faster trains, increased network capacity and electrified services.

Previous plans would have taken twice as long, cost taxpayers twice as much, and ignored the very towns and communities that we have promised to level up. For me the choice was crystal clear.

## **Conclusion**

I started by talking about an unprecedented time for the railways, and it is. But it's also a rare opportunity for truly transformational change.

Instead of paying lip service to the long-standing problems of infrastructure and governance, this government is delivering record investment and sector reform.

We're making the necessary changes to bring about a rail renaissance while preventing a rail retreat, something that would be devastating to our economy and environment.



That's why we need the continued support, expertise and engagement of industry, indeed, those of you in this room, to help turn this unprecedented time for our railways into a golden opportunity to safeguard its future.

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## [Education Secretary launches new attendance alliance](#)

The Education Secretary has today, Thursday 09 December, hosted the first meeting of leading experts working with children to improve school attendance.

All members of the new attendance alliance pledged to engage with their members, stakeholders and the professionals they represent to make sure they are following best practice in improving attendance within their day-to-day work.

Although recent trends in attendance levels have been largely driven by covid, which is outside the scope of the work of the alliance, the government is determined to address the wider underlying causes of children not being in school, because it is the best place for their development and wellbeing. Persistent absence increased to 16.3% in secondary schools in autumn 2020, compared with 15.0% in 2019, not including non-attendance in covid circumstances.

At the close of the meeting, the alliance members, including Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman, Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel De Souza and Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler, issued a joint call on all those that engage with children, whether as a parent, teacher, GP, police officer, social worker or anything else – to work together to break down any barriers they find to them being in school for every possible day.

There are a variety of factors which could affect school attendance, such as anxiety exacerbated by the pandemic, mental health issues, children's home life and issues at school like bullying. The alliance has brought together those who have the power and expertise to effect change across the full spectrum of issues.

There is a [wide range of evidence](#) as to the health and wellbeing benefits of school-age education, and the Chief Medical Officers have [been clear](#) that time out of school can hold back young people's development and wellbeing.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Where children aren't in school without good reason or don't want to be in school something has gone substantially wrong and needs

fixing. This new attendance alliance includes the people with the power to do just that.

They will be working over the coming months to make sure everyone working on the ground with children, as a teacher, football coach, mental health worker or in any other role, has the tools and resources they need to break down barriers to children attending school.

I will continue to prioritise taking action to make sure children have the opportunity to spend time in class with inspirational teachers and good friends – simply because it is the single most powerful tool at our disposal to make sure every child fulfils their potential.

This work follows the Education Secretary's commitment when he came into post that he couldn't and wouldn't let attendance fall, as children's education is too important.

The first alliance meeting began with analysis of data and evidence compiled from member organisations, and consideration of how members can exert their combined influence to address the issues identified.

Departmental data was presented that showed persistent absence can vary significantly across single areas, with some neighbouring local authorities having very different rates from each other.

Rachel De Souza, the Children's Commissioner, presented insights around school attendance from the Big Ask, the biggest survey of children ever conducted. Those with the power to drive change effectively heard directly from children about the issues standing in the way of them consistently going to school.

Children's Commissioner Rachel De Souza said:

As one girl told me in The Big Ask, 'people don't realise how much education is important for life in general...if they don't learn in school, they might not be able to enjoy life to the fullest'.

With this in mind, I was really pleased to bring children's voices and experiences to life at today's inaugural attendance alliance meeting. Over the last 18 months it has become clear that any vulnerable child being out of school can have a serious impact, which is why attendance is my number one priority.

Attendance needs to be everyone's business – it's not just an abstract metric, and we must do everything we can – at national, local and school level – to make sure children are in school, every day, and ready to learn. Not just for their future, but for their wellbeing and safety too.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted Chief Inspector, also spoke about the draft findings of her review into best practice by schools, due to be published in the New Year. She noted that the specific approaches taken by schools vary, but they tend to have a number of features in common – listening to children’s concerns, showing understanding and empathy, and providing support – while consistently challenging unauthorised absence.

Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman said:

Children only get one chance at school – and we know nothing beats being in a classroom, in front of a teacher.

It’s so important, after so much disruption for this generation, to make sure every child who can attend school, does attend school.

That’s the best way to help children catch up, achieve their potential and enjoy a full and rewarding childhood.

As a result, a number of pledges were made, including:

- Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families will be working with all social work leaders and local authorities that have had particular success driving high attendance rates amongst children with social workers to share their innovation and best practice widely.
- SOLACE and the Association of Directors of Children’s Services are to work together to better understand and formalise how the best results can be achieved when multiple organisations need to work together to address persistent and entrenched disengagement from school.
- The Northern Education Trust and Confederation of School Trusts, supported by leaders of special schools and alternative provision, will convene a working group of trust leaders to sit beneath the alliance to identify the best practice in supporting children to attend school regularly.

Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler said:

The impact of the pandemic on children’s wellbeing has emphasised the crucial importance of school attendance. Social workers play such a pivotal role in supporting families to help get their children back into school and attending every day.

Earlier this week senior social work leaders across England told me about their sterling efforts to make attendance a priority and the ways in which, they do this.

Sharing this best practice is critical. I have heard so many great examples of joint working between schools and children's social care services during the pandemic and look forward to strengthening those relationships through the work of the attendance alliance.

SOLACE Children and Families spokesperson Ade Adetosoye OBE said:

We welcome this alliance as we need to do all we can to ensure that there is real connectivity between social workers and education professionals and that there is a consistent cohesiveness across the country that supports schools, pupils and parents.

Our early years are our formative years and it is patently clear that when a child does not attend school, that there are reasons for this. Quite often, this non-attendance can act as an early warning alarm bell that all is not right in the life of that child.

It is something that the social work and teaching professions need to act on and build on what is already underway. Success here will not just improve the situation for children who no doubt need our help but also for society as a whole.

President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services Charlotte Ramsden said:

Schools play a vital role in keeping children safe; they are not just places where children develop academically, but socially and emotionally too.

We fully support the importance of maximizing attendance and understanding and addressing the reasons for persistent absence.

Being out of school places children at greater risk of long-term negative impact, therefore it's crucial that we work together to build an inclusive education system and ensure that pupils are in the classroom when they should be, because every day in school really counts.

Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts Leora Cruddas said:

I am very pleased to be invited to join the alliance and to make a contribution to the important matter of school attendance.

It is essential that we ensure all of our children are back at school. It is the routines and structures of schooling that we enable children to bounce back from the pandemic.

I am delighted to be working with Rob Tarn, chief executive of the

Northern Education Trust to convene a working group of trust leaders to consider what might be needed to ensure all children to attend school.

CEO of the Northern Education Trust Rob Tarn said:

As educationalists, we all understand the devastating impact that poor attendance has on student outcomes, not only on their academic achievements, but also on the development of essential social and emotional skills.

Over many years, I have been fortunate enough to work alongside numerous, talented people developing strategies, that have had a direct impact on improving attendance in even the most challenging of circumstances.

I am honoured and excited to work as part of an alliance with the Secretary of State for Education, Leora Cruddas Chief Executive Officer, Confederation of School Trusts and esteemed colleagues to further develop and share good practice across the sector.

The alliance will meet monthly for the remainder of the academic year, considering the impact of actions they have taken and what more may be required to address the full range of barriers to children's regular school attendance.

National Clinical Advisor on Children's Mental Health for NHS England Professor Peter Fonagy said:

Regular attendance at school is one of the best ways of protecting a child's mental health and wellbeing and laying down the foundations for their long-term success in life.

This is why we must all be very concerned whenever a child's absence from school is protracted, while at the same time recognising that the reasons for their absence may be complex and determined by multiple factors.

I am delighted to be part of this crucial initiative involving all the relevant agencies to ensure that we act in unison supporting children, families and schools to ensure the highest possible levels of school attendance for our children and young people.

President of the Royal College of General Practitioners Professor Dame Clare Gerada said:

I am delighted to be part of this group. As a GP for more than 30 years I am only too aware that what I see in my consulting room,

especially mental ill health, have their origins outside and in particular in childhood.

Keeping children in school – allowing them to reach their potential is an important predictor of later good mental health.

CEO of the Eden Academy Trust Susan Douglas said:

I welcome the opportunity to collaborate with others both within and outside of the alliance in order to contribute to the important area of improving school attendance.

2020 proved great things can be achieved when education providers and professionals work together to identify innovation and effective practice. I look forward to bringing the voice of the specialist sector into these discussions, a sector which has seen particular challenges and issues during this recent period.

Chief Executive of the NSPCC Sir Peter Wanless said:

School plays a crucial role in supporting children's wellbeing and keeping them safe, but during the pandemic the number of pupils not attending school regularly has increased.

The attendance alliance will help address barriers to attendance and I look forward to engaging with others in the sector to highlight why having children in school regularly is such a top priority.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Local Policing, Chief Constable Olivia Pinkney said:

We are pleased to be included within the alliance on this important issue.

Police will be playing their part, along with other leaders across society to ensure that children receive vital support and have access to education.

The NPCC will have a standing representative within this alliance, to ensure we are always able to offer our operational expertise and support wherever appropriate.

General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers Paul Whiteman said:

Schools work tirelessly to encourage good attendance and there is a range of excellent practice up and down the country.

School leaders know the importance of good attendance and that is why they work so hard to support pupils and families, particularly those where persistent absence becomes an issue.

We know that attendance has dropped during the pandemic. Obviously, a large proportion of this is due to Covid itself, but there appear to be other factors at play too.

It is important that as an alliance we understand those factors so that the right support mechanisms can be put in place. This important work will require a joined-up approach where schools are supported by the appropriate external agencies and partners.

Director of Policy at the Association of School and College Leaders Julie McCulloch said:

Persistent absence among some young people was a problem before the pandemic and may have become worse amidst the disruption to the routines of school life and anxiety caused by the virus.

It is of vital importance that we work collectively to identify practical measures which encourage and support young people to be where they need to be – learning in the classroom.

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## [Defence Secretary Ben Wallace's message to the UK Carrier Strike Group on their homecoming](#)

News story

Upon the return of the UK Carrier Strike Group, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace sent a message to personnel.



Merlin Mk2 Helicopter takes off from the flight deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth for the final time during CSG21. MOD Crown Copyright

The UK Carrier Strike Group have returned home following a historic seven-month global deployment.

3,700 personnel from nine ships, a submarine, five air squadrons and a company of Royal Marines have arrived home in time for Christmas having departed the UK in early May on the historic deployment.

The Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

I wish to express my gratitude to the men and women of the United Kingdom Carrier Strike Group upon the completion of your historic first deployment.

Although you have travelled great distances, we at home have followed your journey at every stage. The past seven months have been a muscular and majestic demonstration of British power and commitment at sea, in the skies and over the land. With our United States and Netherlands allies by your side, you have persuasively demonstrated our shared resolve to protect the rules and freedoms upon which peace and prosperity depend. Through your programme of exercises and engagements you have immeasurably strengthened UK partnerships within NATO and far beyond.

To have done all this against the challenges of Covid is remarkable. This has not always been easy for you or your families, but you have approached the task with the skill and professionalism which are the hallmark of the British armed forces.

The foundations you have laid on this deployment will serve those who follow in your wake for years to come. My admiration and gratitude for your dedication is shared across the government. Each of you has done your duty and done it well. The nation cannot ask for more.

I wish you a happy and restful Christmas with your families. Bravo Zulu.



Published 9 December 2021