



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

Levels of highest qualification held by working age adults: 2020

Presents key statistics on the highest qualification held by adults of working age in Wales for 2020.

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Data in this report relate to the 2020 calendar year, most of which was during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Examination and assessment arrangements, and therefore the awarding of some qualifications from Summer 2020 onwards, were affected by the pandemic. The statistics presented here cover working age adults aged 18 to 64, many of whom may not have been working towards achieving qualifications during the pandemic. Any impact is likely to be greater for younger age groups.

Main points

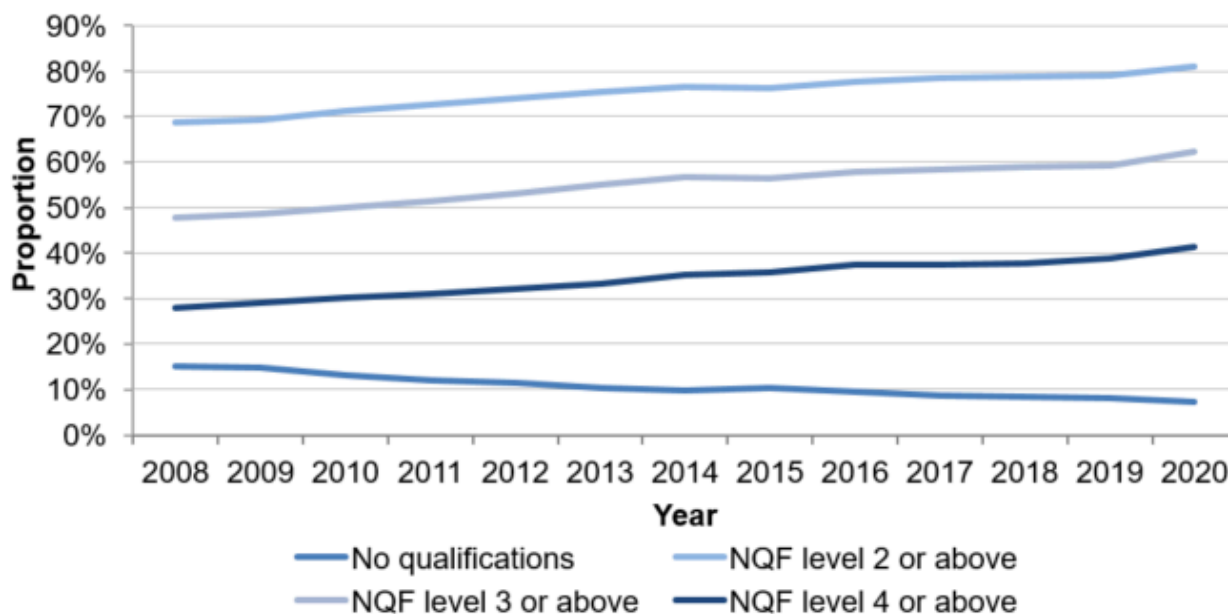
- Overall, qualification levels in Wales increased in 2020, continuing the general increase seen over time.
- An estimated 7.3% of working age adults in Wales reported having no qualifications compared with 8.2% in 2019.
- 80.9% of working age adults in Wales held at least level 2 qualifications compared with 79.1% in 2019.
- 62.3% of working age adults in Wales were qualified to the level 3 threshold compared with 59.4% in 2019.
- The proportion holding higher education or equivalent level qualifications (NQF level 4 or above) was 41.4% compared with 38.8% in 2019.
- The change in the proportion of working age adults in Wales holding qualifications at level 4 or above represented the largest year-on-year increase since statistics began being calculated under the 18 to 64 working age population definition in 2008. This also accounted for most of the increase in the proportion holding qualifications at level 3 or above, which was also the largest year-on-year increase since 2008.

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Chart 1: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age, 2008 to 2020



Source: Annual Population Survey

Highest qualification levels of working age adults by year and qualification on StatsWales

Level of highest qualification held, by characteristic

Gender and age

Overall, an estimated 7.8% of males held no qualifications in 2020 compared with 6.7% of females. There are higher proportions of males than females with no qualifications in all age groups except for the oldest age group of 60 to 64.

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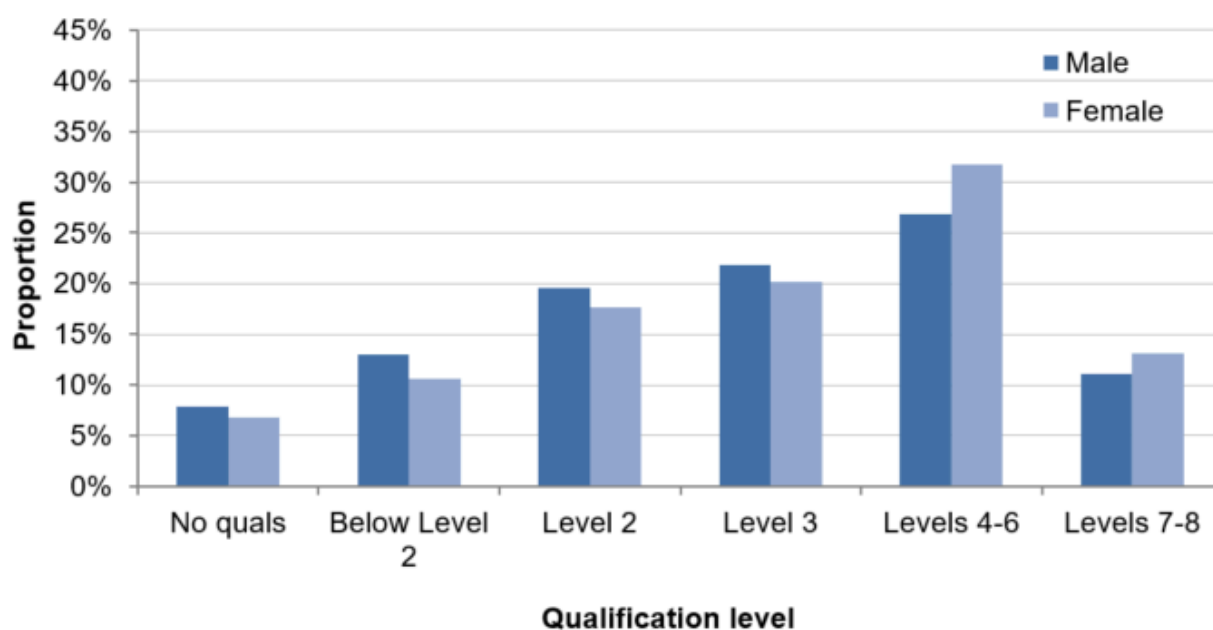
Females are more likely to hold qualifications at or above level 4.

The proportion of adults with qualifications decreases as age increases. In 2020, 86.8% of 18 to 24 year olds held at least level 2 qualifications compared with 72.0% of 60 to 64 year olds.

There were notable increases in the proportion of 18 to 24 year olds holding qualifications at or above level 3 (6.1 percentage points) and the proportion of 25-34 year olds holding qualifications at or above level 4 (5.6 percentage points) between 2019 and 2020.

The qualification profile is shown for all ages alongside that for those aged 18 to 24 and 60 to 64.

Chart 2a: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age (18 to 64) by gender, 2020



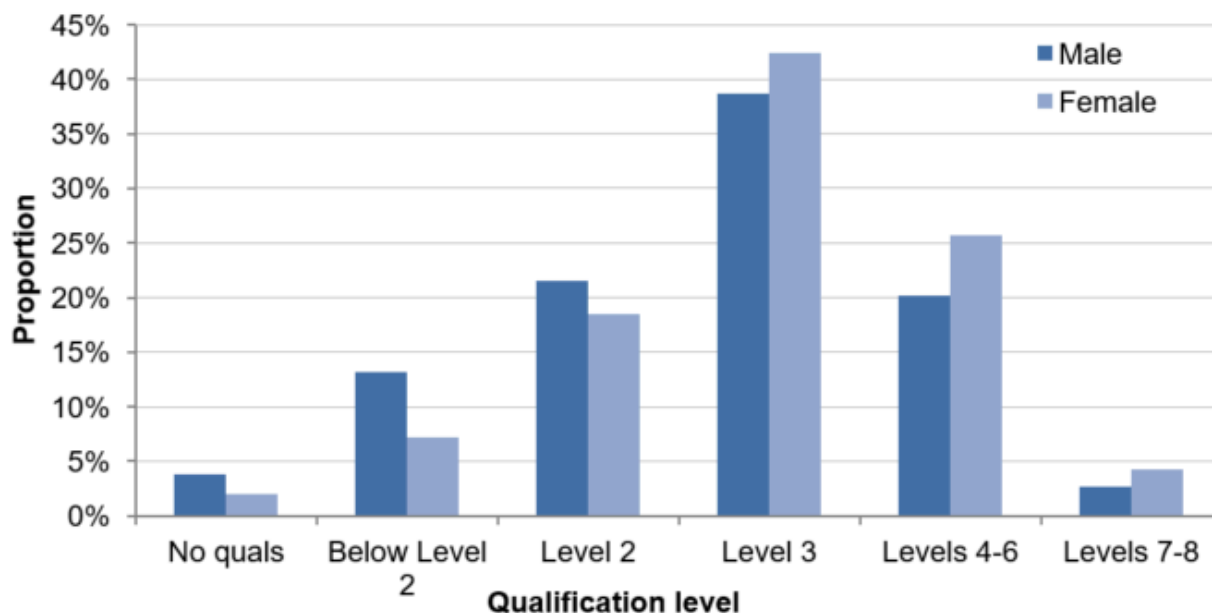
Source: Annual Population Survey

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Chart 2b: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age (18 to 24) by gender, 2020



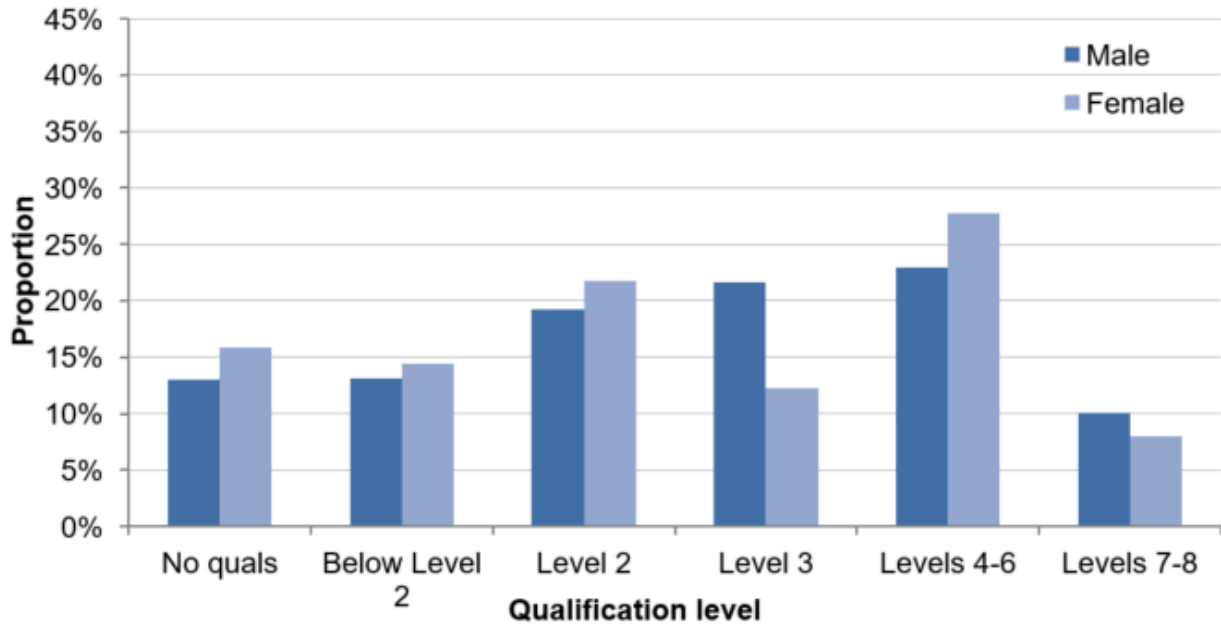
Source: Annual Population Survey

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Chart 2c: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age (60 to 64) by gender, 2020



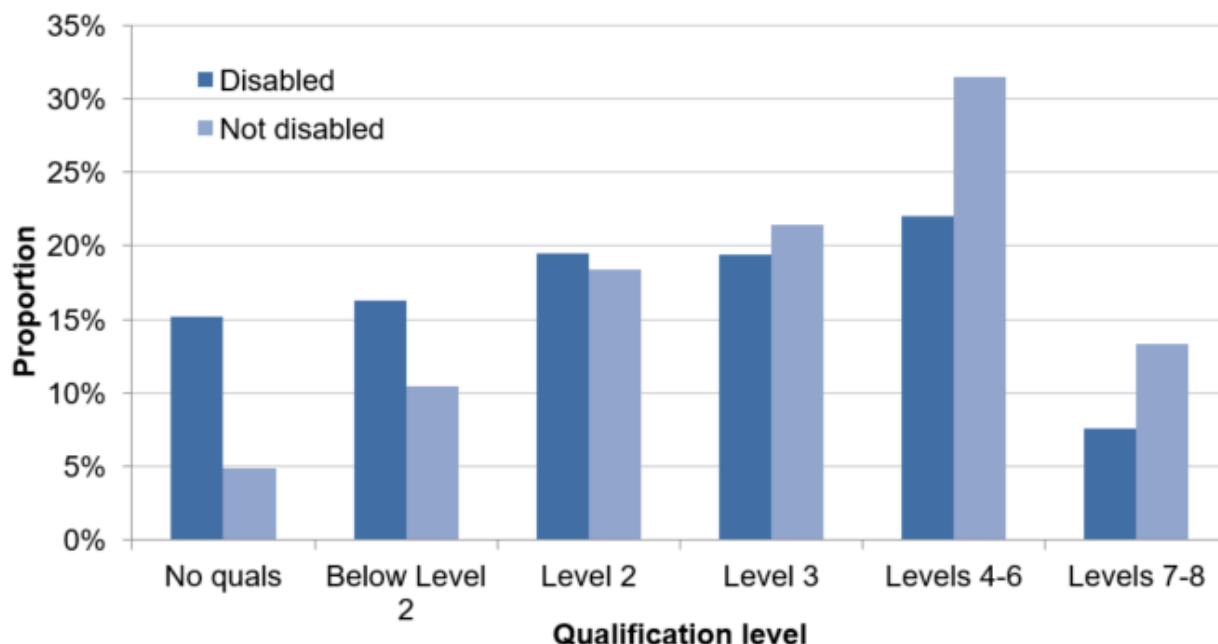
Source: Annual Population Survey

Highest qualification levels of working age adults by gender, age and qualification on StatsWales

Disability

Disabled people (15.2%) are more likely to have no qualifications than non-disabled people (4.9%) and are less likely to hold qualifications above level 2.

Chart 3: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age by disability, 2020

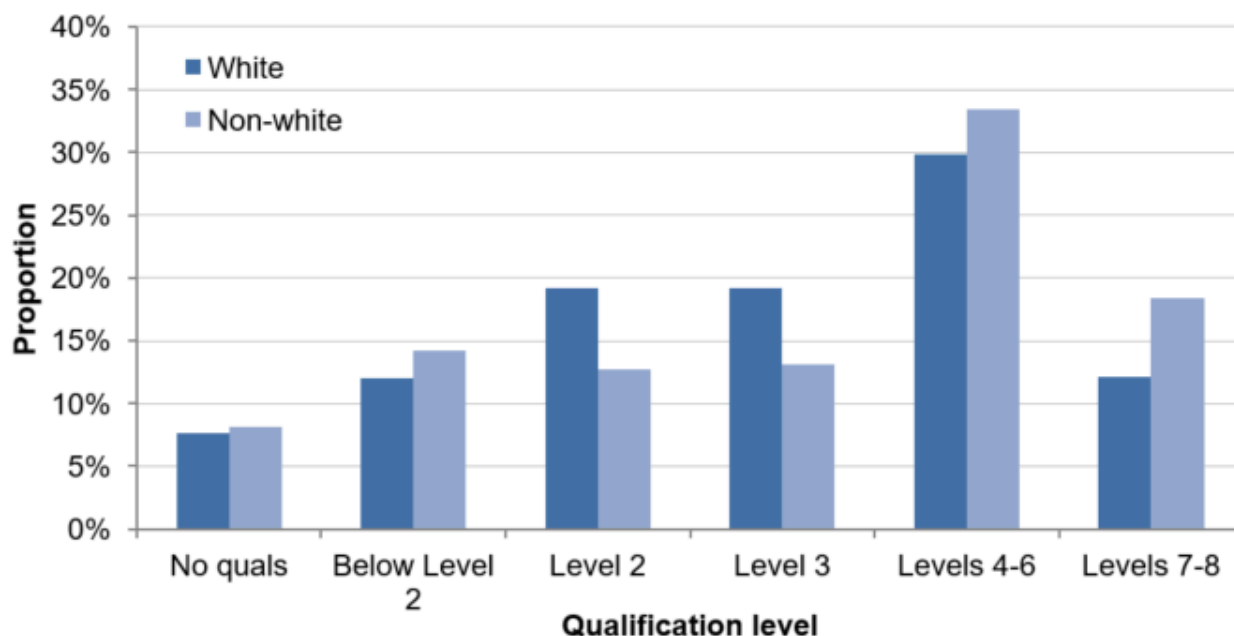


Source: Annual Population Survey

Ethnicity

Working age adults from a non-white background are more likely to hold higher level qualifications than white working age adults, but are also slightly more likely to have no qualifications.

Chart 4: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age by ethnicity, 2020



Source: Annual Population Survey

Welsh language

Higher qualification levels are reported amongst Welsh speakers than their non-Welsh speaking counterparts. The proportion of non-Welsh speakers with no qualifications was 8.5% compared with 3.5% of Welsh speakers.

Geography

The proportion of working age adults with higher education level or equivalent qualifications (Level 4+) was highest in the Vale of Glamorgan (56.6%), Cardiff (52.3%), Ceredigion (51.6%) and Monmouthshire (51.6%). This proportion was lowest in Blaenau Gwent (29.2%), and Neath Port Talbot (29.3%).

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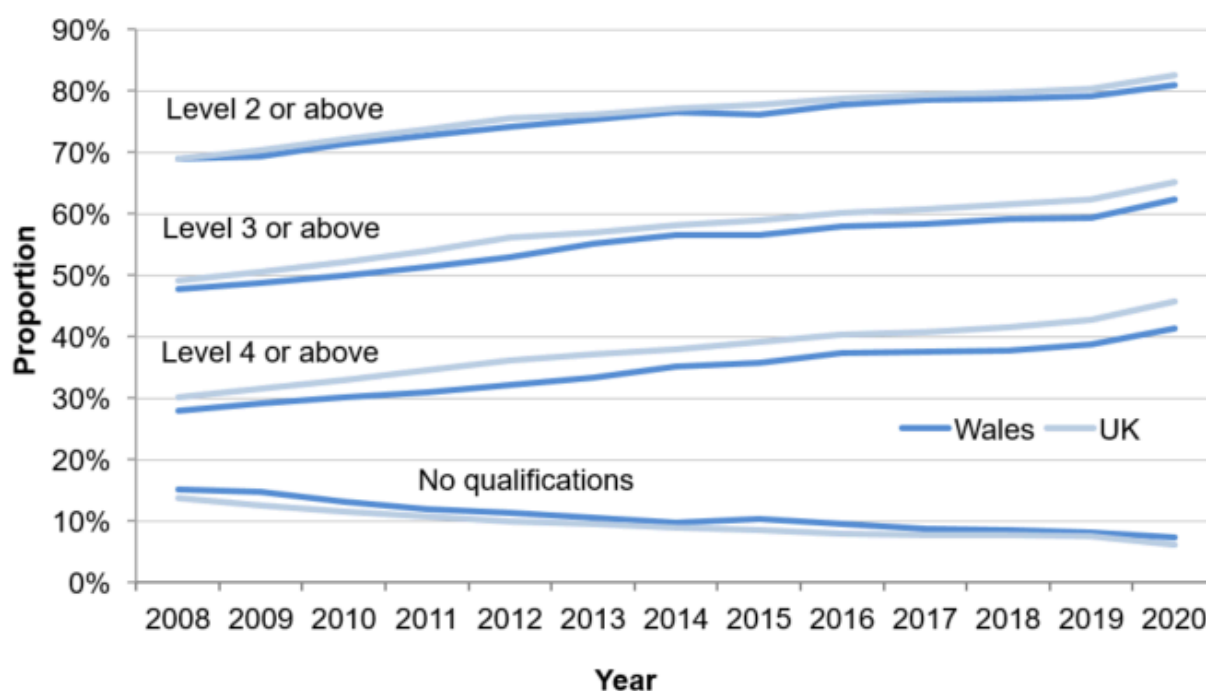
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The proportion of working age adults with no qualifications was highest in Merthyr Tydfil (13.9%) and Blaenau Gwent (11.1%) and lowest in the Vale of Glamorgan (3.2%) and Monmouthshire (3.8%).

Qualification levels in Wales were lower than in England, Scotland and the UK as a whole, but higher than in Northern Ireland and some English regions.

As part of its **Employability Plan** (published in March 2018) the Welsh Government established a target to eliminate the gap between Wales and the rest of the UK at all qualification levels in 10 years, and ensure in future as a minimum, to maintain performance relative to the rest of the UK. This target is to be assessed using this Annual Population Survey data.

Chart 5: Level of highest qualification held by adults of working age Wales and UK, 2008 to 2020



Source: Annual Population Survey

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Highest qualification levels of working age adults by qualification, UK country and year on StatsWales

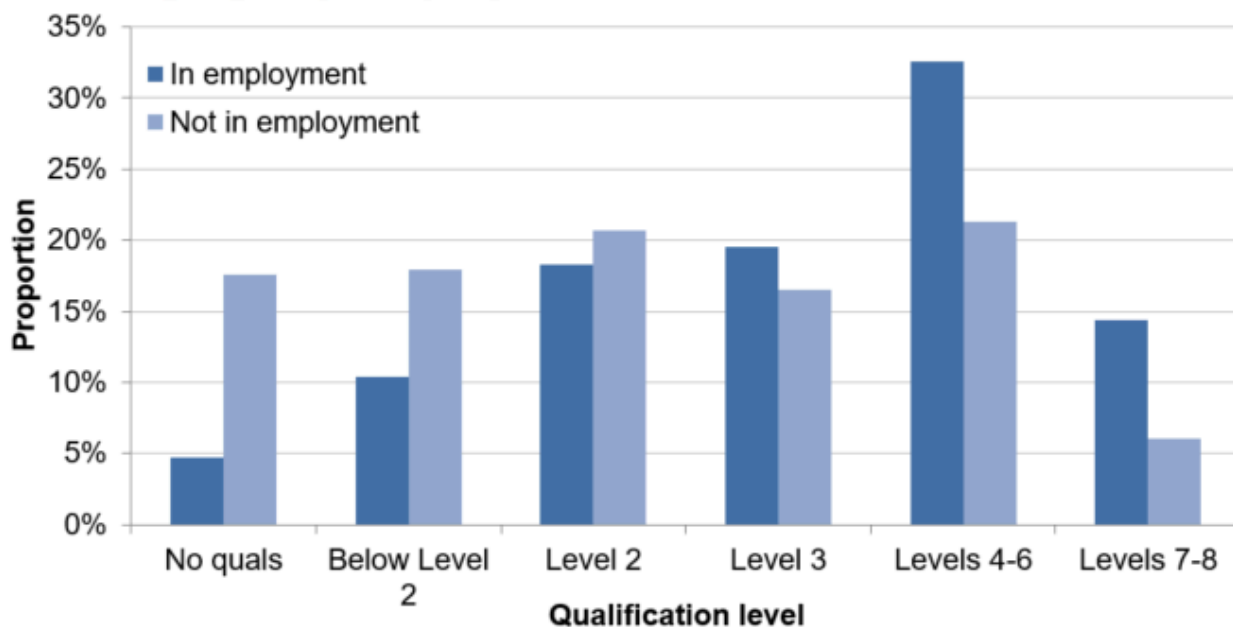
The proportion of working age adults with no qualifications in Wales was 1.1 percentage points higher than the UK in 2020. This gap increased slightly from 0.7 percentage points in 2019.

The changes in the gap between Wales and the UK at different qualification levels were also small between 2019 and 2020. At level 2 or above the gap increased by 0.2 percentage points, at level 3 or above it decreased by 0.2 percentage points and at level 4 or above it increased by 0.3 percentage points.

Employment status

In 2020, 17.6% of those who are either unemployed or economically inactive reported having no qualifications. This compares to 4.7% for those in employment (excluding those who are in full-time education).

Chart 6: Highest level of qualification held by adults of working age by employment, 2020



Source: Annual Population Survey

Highest qualification levels of working age adults by economic activity and qualification on StatsWales

Occupation

Persons employed in professional occupations are more likely to be qualified to at least level 2 than those in other jobs. In 2020, 97.9% of persons in professional occupations were qualified at this level.

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Notes

Policy and operational context

This statistical release presents the annual snapshot of qualification levels of the working age population in Wales.

The statistics are used within the Welsh Government to monitor trends in qualification levels and specifically are included within the Employability Plan targets and the Skills Performance measures. This release contains data for one of the **46 national well-being indicators** (8: percentage of adults with qualifications at the different levels of the National Qualifications Framework).

Background to the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey (APS)

The data presented in this release are based on the results of the APS for 2020. Data from the Annual Population Survey, a household survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is available from 2004, and prior to this comparable data are available from the annual Local Labour Force Survey (LFS) for Wales for 2001-2003.

Data in this release are presented for working age adults aged 18 to 64 according to their age at the start of the academic year. Between April 2010 and November 2018 the state pension age for women gradually increased from 60 to 65. Accordingly, the series has been amended to a working age definition of 18 to 64 for both males and females, rather than its earlier definition of 18 to 64 for males and 18 to 59 for females.

Estimates on the new basis are only available from 2008 onwards and figures within this release are therefore not directly comparable with those on the basis

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of the previously used definition.

Headline figures on the previous working age definition (18 to 59/64) are available on [StatsWales](#).

APS responses are weighted to official population projections. As the current projections are 2018-based they are based on demographic trends that pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic. Following government advice regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the APS as well as all other ONS face-to-face studies about people, families and households were suspended.

From mid-March 2020, the APS survey has been carried out by telephone only. A change in how a survey is administered can affect survey results.

ONS are analysing the population totals used in the weighting process and intend to make adjustments where appropriate. Rates published from the APS remain robust; however, levels and changes in levels should be used with caution. This will particularly affect estimates for country of birth, nationality, ethnicity and disability.

Definitions

Ethnicity

For the analysis of qualifications by ethnicity, people in full-time education have been excluded. This change has been made to remove the impact of international students who attend higher education in Wales and thus inflate the proportion with Level 3+ qualifications.

Disability

The Welsh Government accepts the social definition of disability, in which it is recognised that barriers in society act to disable people who have impairments or health conditions or who use British Sign Language.

The APS, which is the source of data for this release, captures data using the medical definition of disability used in the Equality Act 2010 (“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term impact on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”). Figures within this release are not comparable to those within releases prior to 2015, which reported those reporting DDA current disability or work-limiting disability.

Qualifications used in the Labour Force Survey and their National Qualification Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NQF EWNI) levels

At [Annex 1](#) is a list of the qualifications specifically included in the LFS questionnaire and provides details of the NQF EWNI level to which they have been assigned for the purposes of statistical analysis.

Data have previously been presented as NVQ equivalencies. The NQF EWNI has nine levels; Entry Level followed by Level 1 to Level 8. In Wales the NQF EWNI forms part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales; a meta framework which also includes all Higher Level learning within the University Sector and Quality Assured Lifelong Learning.

Further information about the [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales](#).

Please note the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework has different levels.

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Quality information

Relevance

The statistics are used within the Welsh Government to monitor trends in qualification levels and specifically are included within the Employability Plan targets and Skills Performance measures.

Other key users of these statistics include:

- ministers and Welsh Government officials
- members of the Senedd and researchers in the Senedd
- other government departments
- students, academics and universities

Accuracy

As the data come from a survey, the results are sample-based estimates and are therefore subject to differing degrees of sampling variability, i.e. the true value for any measure lies in a differing range about the estimated value. This range or sampling variability increases as the detail in the data increases; for example local authority data are subject to higher variability than regional data.

Proxy response

If the respondent is not available at the time of interview, questions may be answered by proxy through another member of the household. For information on highest qualifications, around two-thirds (66%) of responses have been derived from a respondent's own answers. 23% were obtained from a spouse or partner whilst 11% were obtained from another proxy.

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Section 11 of the **Labour Force Survey: user guidance** Volume 1, 2011 presents findings from a follow up study to test the accuracy of results from proxy respondents.

The results for highest type of qualification held show nearly two thirds matching with significant net error from proxies understating qualifications. However there was wide variation in the standard of proxy response. This variation is both in terms of the relationship of the proxy to the subject (parents were much better than spouses or children) and also by the level and type of qualifications held. Reporting was much better for those subjects holding degrees (80% matched) than for those holding lower or vocational qualifications (30% matched).

Non-response

Information on highest qualification is derived from a number of questions in the survey. Overall, the highest qualification was unknown or unable to be derived for 2% of respondents. These respondents have been excluded from the analysis in this release.

Allocation of qualifications with unknown levels

Whilst other questions in the survey are used to allocate qualifications to NQF levels as far as possible, for some categories the respondents are distributed into levels using proportions that have been fixed for many years. This is currently true for 'Other' qualifications, Trade Apprenticeships, Scottish CSYS qualifications and SCE Highers or equivalent. 'Other' qualifications are apportioned across NQF levels Below Level 2, Level 2 and Level 3 in the ratio 55:35:10; Trade apprenticeships are apportioned across Level 2 and Level 3 in the ratio 50:50 and Scottish CSYS qualifications are apportioned across Level 2 and Level 3 in the ratio 33:67. This is a long standing calculation based on detailed analysis of qualifications from the General Household Survey. SCE

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Highers are apportioned across Level 2 and Level 3 in the ratio 37:63 based on data from previous years.

Timeliness and punctuality

This statistical release is published annually in April and covers the preceding year ending 31 December.

Accessibility and clarity

This statistical release is pre-announced and then published on the Statistics & Research website of the Welsh Government. All underlying data for this release as well as other years are available on [StatsWales](#).

Comparability and coherence

The figures may differ to those published from statistical publications by other government departments due to a slight difference in source and/or methodologies for deriving levels of qualifications. Also other tables may be based on all persons of working age (16 to 64) whilst this release is restricted to those aged 18 to 64 (adults of working age).

The UK Department for Education have developed an enhanced method of producing qualification estimates from the LFS, including the use of administrative records to improve the quality of the attainment data recorded on the LFS and imputation of qualification levels for those with unknown qualifications. Details can be found on the [archive Data Service website](#).

Data is also available from the Census of Population on highest qualification levels. The 2011 census indicated that one in four of the population of Wales

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aged 16 and over (26%, 651,000) reported having no recognised qualifications and just under one in four of the population of Wales aged 16 and over (24%, 614,000) reported having a qualification at level 4 (degree level) or above. The difference between the level of qualifications reported through the Census and the APS data in this release is in part explained by the wider age range of the Census data. That is both including 16 and 17 year olds who may not yet have completed their education, and the older age groups. Additional factors to consider are the APS asks more detailed questions about qualifications than the Census. In addition the APS is an interviewer-administered survey whereas the Census is self-completed. Therefore the interviewer can probe the respondent with further questions to try to establish whether details have been recalled correctly. However, the APS is a sample survey whereas the Census is a more comprehensive count. Similar issues applied to the 2001 Census.

The biggest benefit of the Census data is to be able to analyse within local authority, down to community level, and in cross tabulations with small subgroups of the population not possible through the APS.

National Statistics status

The **United Kingdom Statistics Authority** has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the **Code of Practice for Statistics**.

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the

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value they add to public decisions and debate.

If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

These statistics last underwent a **full assessment** against the Code of Practice in 2011. Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- brought forward the annual publication timetable to a full release of data in April
- made more underlying data available through Statswales;
- publish to the new adults of working age population definition (18 to 64) but continue to make the longer time series of data available on the old definition (18 to 59/64) through Statswales.

Well-being of Future Generations Act

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016 and this release includes one of the national indicators.

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- (8) Percentage of adults with qualifications at the different levels of the National Qualifications Framework.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Well-being of Wales report](#).

As a national indicator under the Act they must be referred to in the analyses of local well-being produced by public services boards when they are analysing the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in their areas.

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to post16ed.stats@gov.wales.

Annex 1

Qualifications used in the Labour Force Survey and their National Qualification Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NQF EWNI) levels

NQF Levels 7 and 8 (previously NVQ level 5 or equivalent)

Higher degree

NVQ level 5

Level 8 Diploma ³

Level 8 Certificate ³

Level 7 Diploma ³

Level 7 Certificate ³

Level 8 Award ³

NQF Levels 4 to 6 (previously NVQ level 4 or equivalent)

First degree/Foundation degree

Other degree

NVQ level 4

Level 6 Diploma ³

Level 6 Certificate ³

Level 7 Award ³

Diploma in higher education

Level 5 Diploma ³

Level 5 Certificate ³

Level 6 Award ³

HNC, HND, BTEC higher etc.

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Teaching (further, secondary and primary education, foundation stage¹ and level not stated)

Nursing etc.

RSA higher diploma

Other higher education qualification below degree level

Level 4 Diploma³

Level 4 Certificate³

NQF Level 3 (previously NVQ level 3 or equivalent)

Level 5 award³

NVQ level 3

Advanced/Progression (14 to 19) Diploma³

Level 3 Diploma³

Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate¹

International Baccalaureate¹

Scottish Baccalaureate⁴

GNVQ/GSVQ Advanced

2+ A levels, 4+ AS levels or equivalent

RSA advanced diploma

OND, ONC, BTEC, SCOTVEC national etc.

City and Guilds advanced craft/Part 1

Scottish 6 Year Certificate/CSYS (67%)

3 or more SCE higher or equivalent

Access to HE qualifications¹

Trade apprenticeship (50%)

Other qualifications (10%)

Level 3 Certificate³

NQF Level 2 (previously NVQ level 2 or equivalent)

Level 4 Award ³

NVQ level 2

Intermediate Welsh Baccalaureate ¹

1 A level, or 2/3 AS levels, or equivalent

Trade apprenticeship (50%)

GNVQ/GSVQ intermediate

RSA diploma

City and Guilds craft/Part 2

BTEC, SCOTVEC first or general diploma

Higher (14 to 19) Diploma ³

Level 2 Diploma ³

5+ O levels, GCSE grade A*-C, CSE grade 1 or equivalent

Scottish 6 Year Certificate CSYS (33%)

1 or 2 SCE higher or equivalent

Other qualifications (35%)

Level 2 Certificate ³

Scottish National Level 5 ⁴

Level 3 Award ³

Below NQF Level 2 (previously NVQ level 1 or equivalent)

NVQ level 1

Foundation Welsh Baccalaureate2

GNVQ, GSVQ foundation level

Foundation (14-19) diploma

Level 1 Diploma ³

Scottish National Level 4 ⁴

Up to 4 O levels, GCSE grade A*-C, CSE grade 1 or equivalent

GCSE below grade C, CSE below grade 1

BTEC, SCOTVEC first or general certificate
SCOTVEC modules
RSA other
Scottish Nationals Level 3 ⁴
Scottish Nationals below Level 3 ⁴
City and Guilds foundation/part 1
Level 1 Certificate
Level 2 Award
YT, YTP certificate
Key skills qualification ¹
Basic skills qualification ¹
Entry level qualification ¹
Entry level Diploma ³
Entry level Certificate ³
Level 1 Award ³
Entry level award
Other qualifications (55%)

The percentages in brackets denote that a qualification is split across levels when calculating the number of persons with that qualification. This is done for those qualifications where the LFS does not collect sufficient information to allow a more accurate breakdown of the qualification.

(1) These qualifications were added to the list included on the LFS questionnaire in either 2004 or 2005. This slightly improved the estimates, as they may previously have been incorporated in “Other qualifications” or left out altogether by a respondent.

(2) This qualification was added to the list included on the LFS questionnaire in 2008

(3) This qualification was added to the list included on the LFS questionnaire in 2011

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(4) This qualification was added to the list included on the LFS questionnaire in 2015

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