



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

# Welsh language by population characteristics (Census 2021)

Estimates of the population who are able to speak Welsh by demography, national identity, economic activity, health, and several other characteristics from Census 2021.

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# Introduction

On 6 December, a statistical bulletin was published summarising the **initial results from Census 2021 on the Welsh language skills of the population living in Wales**.

On 28 March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published additional data from Census 2021 in a resource which allows the user to **create custom datasets (ONS)** based on a number of other characteristics. The ONS has also already created and published some **specific data tables (ONS)**, for example, Welsh language by country of birth and Welsh language by sex and age.

Some of the key findings from this additional data are summarized below.

Information about Welsh language skills in the census is based on a person's self-assessment of their ability. In some cases, especially for children, Welsh language ability was reported by another person – for example, a parent or guardian.

Census 2021 was held during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, on 21 March 2021. This followed periods of lockdown, remote learning for children and many people were working from home. It is not known how the pandemic may have impacted people's reported Welsh language ability (or perception of the Welsh language ability of others).

Unless otherwise stated, all the data in this statistical bulletin is from the **ONS 'Census of Population 2011 and 2021'**.

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# Main points

## Sex and age

- The age profile of Welsh speakers is younger than that of the general population. Of those who reported being able to speak Welsh in 2021, more than half were younger than 33 years old, and three-quarters were younger than 57 years old.
- The percentage of females aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh remains higher than the equivalent percentage for males, with the gap being widest for the 16- to 18-year-old population.
- The numbers and percentage of females aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh fell from 300,300 (19.9%) in 2011 to 288,540 (18.7%) in 2021.
- There has also been a decrease in the numbers and percentage of males aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh, which fell from 261,720 (18.1%) in 2011 to 249,750 (16.9%) in 2021.

## Ethnic group

- There was an increase in the number of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh and identifying with the high-level ethnic groups "Mixed or multiple ethnic groups", "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British", "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" and the "Other ethnic group" from nearly 11,000 in 2011 to just over 16,000 in 2021.
- There was also an increase in the *percentage* who are able to speak Welsh among the population identifying with the ethnic groups "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British", "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" and the "Other ethnic group".
- The percentage who are able to speak Welsh among the population

identifying with the "White" ethnic group fell from 19.5% in 2011 to 18.4% in 2021.

## Country of birth

- There was a decrease in the numbers and percentage of people aged three years or older who were born in Wales and able to speak Welsh – they fell from 495,580 (23.3%) in 2011 to 473,060 (22.3%) in 2021.
- There has also been a decrease in the numbers and percentage of people aged three years or older who were born outside Wales and able to speak Welsh – they fell from 66,430 (8.0%) in 2011 to 65,240 (7.3%) in 2021.
- Of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of those born outside Wales, which rose from 11.8% in 2011 to 12.1% in 2021.

## National identity

- In 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers was at its highest for people aged three years or older who identified with a Welsh only identity (24.8%) and at its lowest for people who identified with an English only identity (4.2%) and an English and British identity (4.2%).
- Between 2011 and 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers in all national identity groups decreased, except for the population with a "UK identity and non-UK identity" and "a non-UK identity only".

## Labour market and qualifications

- There has been an increase in the number and percentage of the population aged 16 years or older in employment who are able to speak Welsh, which rose from 227,760 (16.6%) in the 2011 Census to 231,400 (16.9%) in the

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2021 Census.

- In 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers from the population aged 16 or older in employment was at its highest for the Professional Occupations (21.0%) and at its lowest for Process, Plant, and Machine Operatives (11.8%).
- Over half of the population in employment who are able to speak Welsh worked in one of four industries: "Human Health and Social Work activities", "Education", "Wholesale, Retail Trade and Motor industry" and "Public Administration and Defence".
- The percentage of Welsh speakers was lowest among the population groups with lower qualification levels. In 2021, 9.8% of the population who reported as having no qualifications were able to speak Welsh.

## Health, disability and the provision of unpaid care

- Of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh, 462,760 (86.0%) reported that their health was very good or good – an increase of 1.6 percentage points since 2011 and reflecting the improvement in the health of the general population.
- In 2021, 86,750 (13.0%) of disabled people aged three years or older were able to speak Welsh.
- 15.0% of the population aged 5 years or older who provided any amount of unpaid care were able to speak Welsh. This percentage falls to 12.2% among the population providing care for 50 or more hours a week.

## Welsh language by sex and age

The age profile of Welsh speakers is younger than that of the general population. Of those who reported as being able to speak Welsh in 2021, more than half were younger than 33 years old and three quarters were younger than

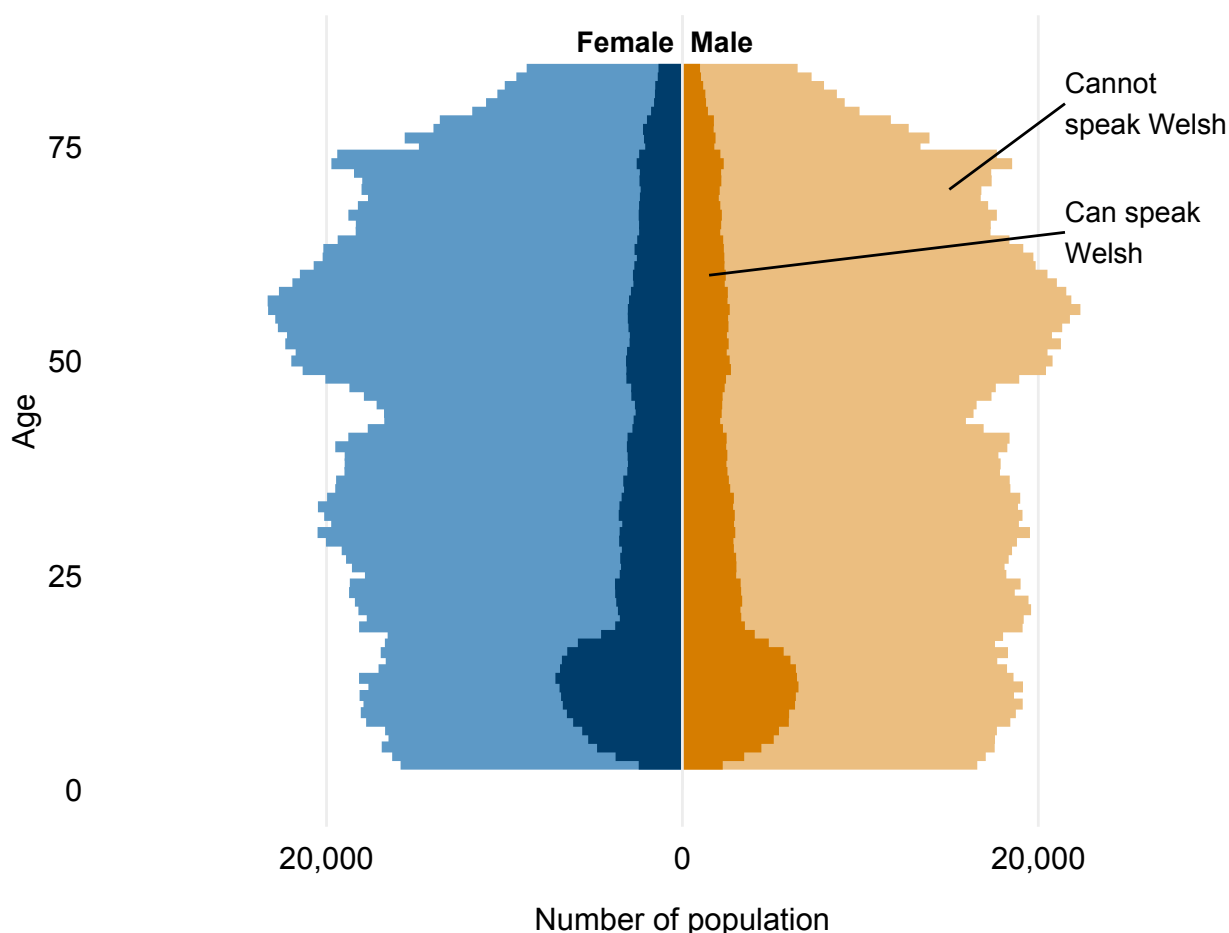
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57 years old.

**Figure 1: Number of people aged 3 to 84 years old who are able to speak Welsh by sex and age, 2021**



Description of Figure 1: Population pyramid showing the age distribution of the population who can speak Welsh and the population who cannot speak Welsh. Excluding the early years, the numbers of Welsh speakers vary less with age than they do in the general population.

The numbers of females aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh

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fell from 300,300 in 2011 to 288,540 in 2021.

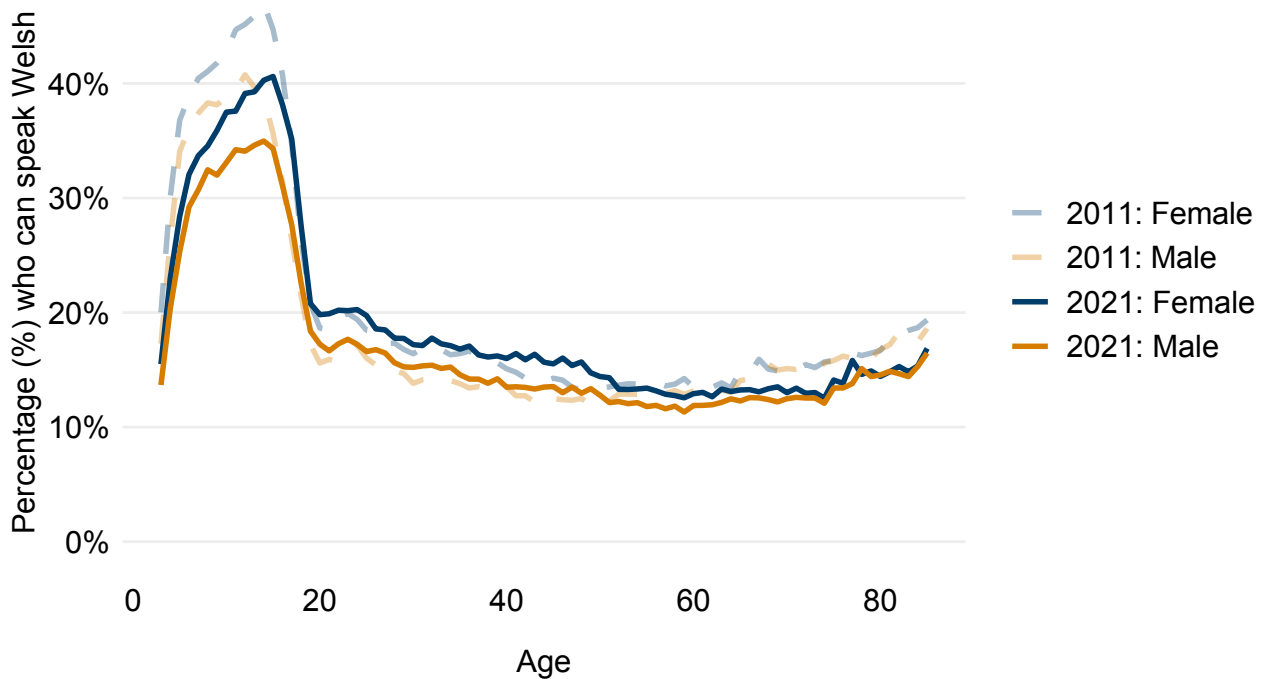
The numbers of males aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh also fell from 261,720 in the 2011 Census to 249,750 in the 2021 Census.

The percentage of females aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh (18.7%) remains higher than the equivalent percentage for males (16.9%). The size of this gap hasn't changed since 2011.

The gap between the proportion of the female and male populations who are able to speak Welsh is at its widest for the 16- to 18-year-old population and at its narrowest for the older population.



**Figure 2: Percentage of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh by sex and age, 2011 and 2021**



Description of Figure 2: Line chart showing the percentage of males and females who noted they were able to speak Welsh in the 2011 and 2021 Census by year of age. The share of children and young people who can speak Welsh is higher than the share of adults, but it has fallen since 2011.

The largest drop in numbers and percentage of Welsh speakers happened in the 3- to 15-year-old age group. According to the 2021 Census, 33.9% of females aged 3 to 15 years old were able to speak Welsh (a decrease of 6.1 percentage points from 2011). In 2021, 30.1% of males aged 3 to 15 years old were able to speak Welsh (a decrease of 5.2 percentage points from 2011).

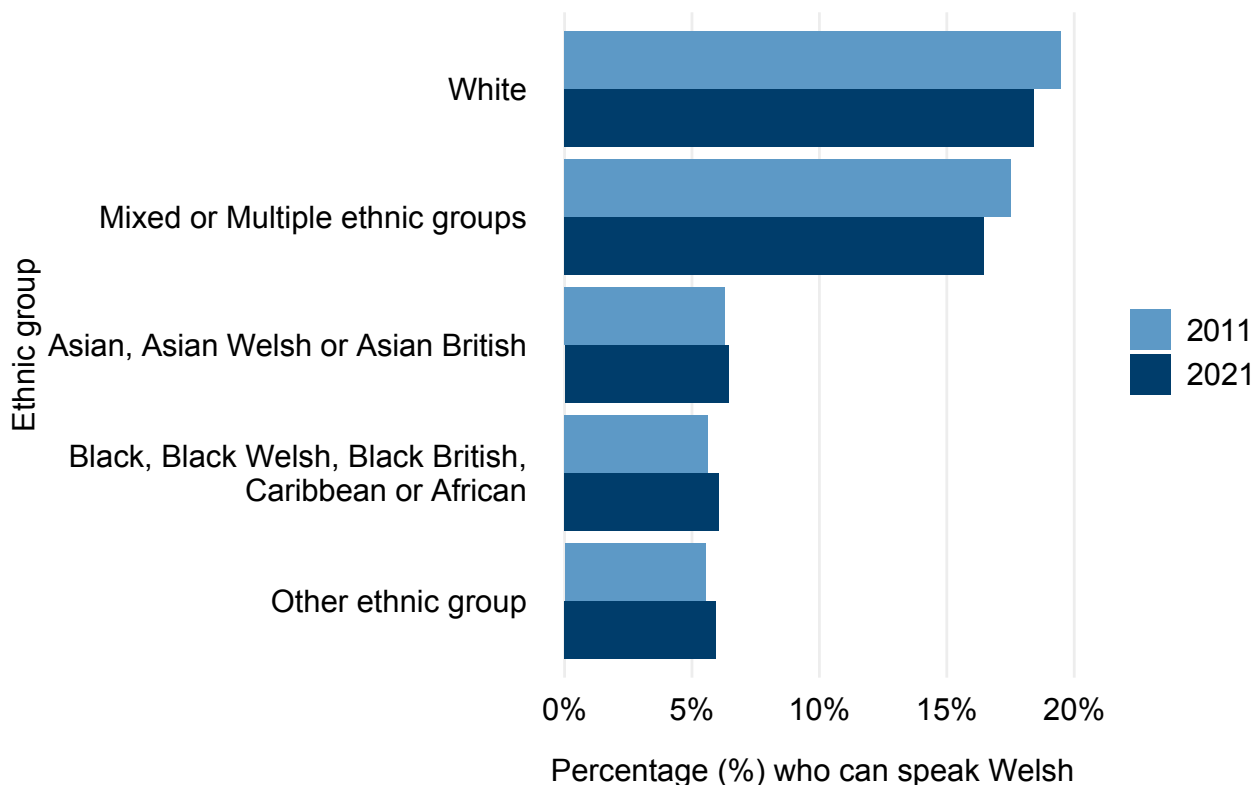
There has been a slight increase in the percentage of the population aged 16 to 64 years old who are able to speak Welsh between the 2011 Census and the 2021 Census – for females (0.3 percentage points), and males (0.2 percentage points).

## Welsh language by ethnic group

There has been an increase in the number of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh and identifying with the high-level ethnic groups "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups", "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British", "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" and the "Other ethnic group", from nearly 11,000 in 2011 to just over 16,000 in 2021.

As noted in the [first release summarising the main outcomes by ethnic group](#), there has been an increase in the numbers identifying with all of these ethnic groups in the general population. However, as well as an increase in numbers, there has also been an increase in the percentage of people who are able to speak Welsh in the population identifying with the ethnic groups "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British", "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" and the "Other ethnic group".

**Figure 3: Percentage of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh by ethnic group, 2011 and 2021**



Description of Figure 3: Bar chart showing the percentage of the population who are able to speak Welsh by ethnic group in 2011 and 2021. The "White" ethnic group and "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups" have the highest percentages, though these groups saw a reduction in the percentage of speakers since 2011.

According to the 2021 Census:

- 6.4% of the population identifying with the "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British" ethnic group were able to speak Welsh (compared to 6.3% in 2011)

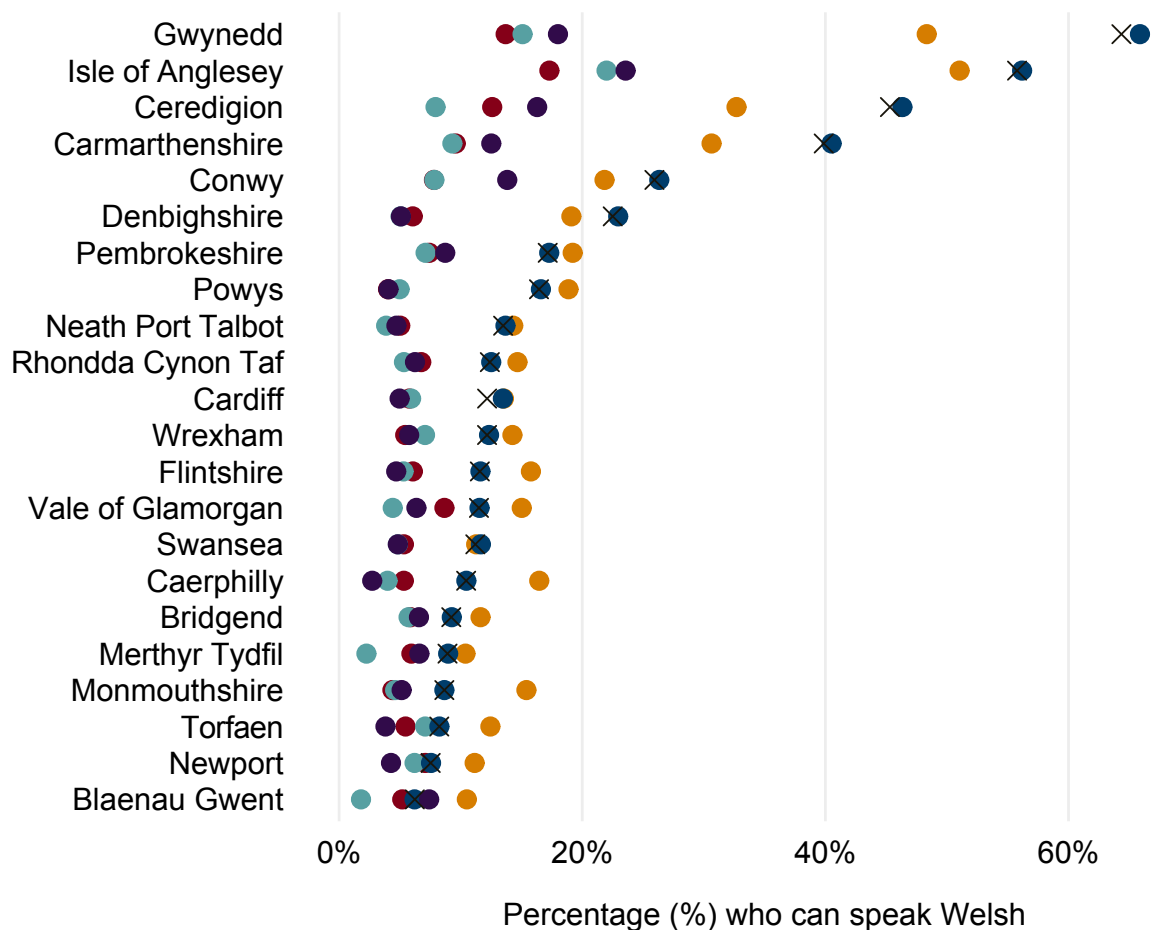
- 6.1% of the population identifying with the "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" ethnic group were able to speak Welsh (compared to 5.6% in 2011)
- 5.9% of the population identifying with the "Other ethnic group" were able to speak Welsh (compared to 5.5% in 2011)

The percentage who are able to speak Welsh among the population identifying with the "White" ethnic group fell from 19.5% in 2011 to 18.4% in 2021. Although there has been a significant increase in the *number* of Welsh speakers who reported as identifying with the "Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups", the *proportion* of this group who are able to speak Welsh has also decreased since 2011.

Welsh speakers identifying with the four high-level minority ethnic groups were much younger than Welsh speakers that reported "White" as their high-level ethnic group – even after accounting for differences in the age profile of the population as a whole. Of all Welsh speakers identifying with the "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" and "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British" ethnic groups, two thirds were aged between 3 and 15 years old. Just over a quarter of Welsh speakers identifying with the "White" ethnic group fell into this age range.

There are also differences in the percentage of the population identifying with minority ethnic groups who are able to speak Welsh across Wales.

**Figure 4: Percentage of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh by local authority and ethnic group, 2021**



**Ethnic group**

- White
- Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
- Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British
- Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Other ethnic group
- × All

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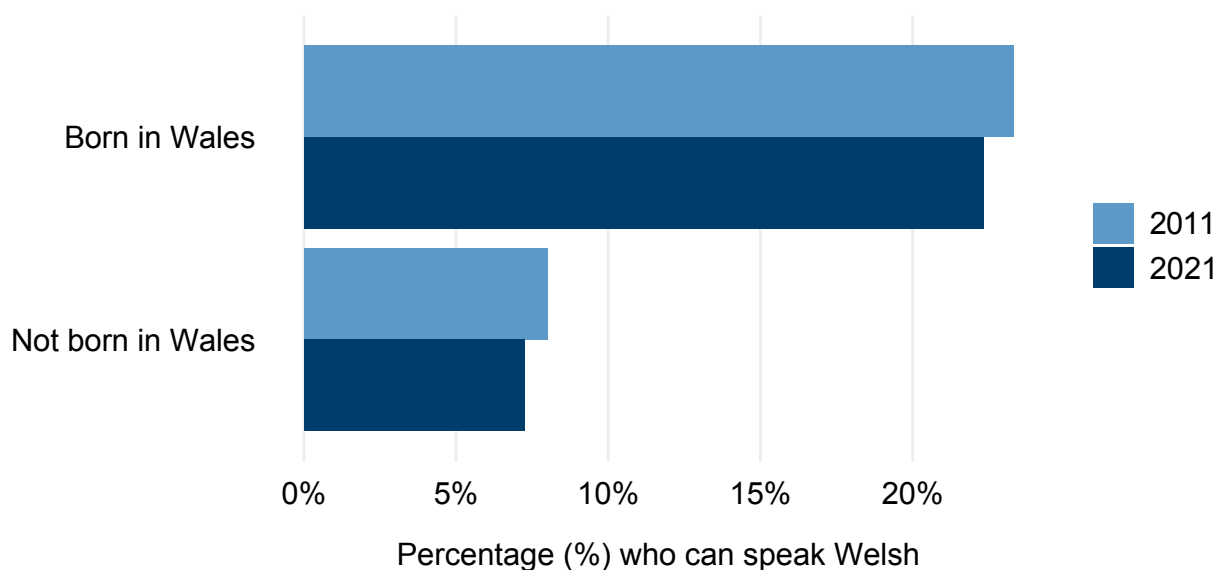
Description of Figure 4: Dot plot showing the percentage of the population who are able to speak Welsh by local authority and ethnic group. The gaps between the ethnic groups are larger in those local authorities where the proportion of the general population that is able to speak Welsh is highest.

In 2021, the proportion of Welsh speakers from the population identifying with "Mixed or multiple ethnic groups" was higher than the proportion of the overall population who are able to speak Welsh in 16 of the 22 local authorities. On the other hand, the proportion of Welsh speakers identifying with the "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African" and "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British" population was lower than the proportion of the overall population who are able to speak Welsh in every local authority.

It should be noted that numbers are small in some of these groups. Further details on how the ONS has protected individual confidentiality can be found in the [quality and methodology information section](#).

## Welsh language by country of birth

**Figure 5: Percentage of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh by country of birth, 2011 and 2021**



Description of Figure 5: Bar chart showing the percentage of the population who were able to speak Welsh in 2011 and 2021 according to whether they were born in Wales or not. The proportion of the population born in Wales who are able to speak Welsh is approximately three times larger than the proportion of the population born outside of Wales who are able to speak Welsh.

In 2021, 473,060 (22.3%) of the population aged three years or older born in Wales were able to speak Welsh, a decrease of 1 percentage point from 2011. By contrast, 65,240 (7.3%) of the population aged three years or older born outside Wales were able to speak Welsh, which is a decrease of 0.7 percentage points from 2011.

Of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh, there has been a slight increase in the percentage born outside Wales, from 11.8% in 2011 to 12.1% in 2021. This statistic should be interpreted in the context of the more general trends in Welsh demography. During the same period, there was also an increase in the overall proportion of the population aged three years or older born outside Wales, from 28.1% in 2011 to 29.8% in 2021, with the majority of them born in England.

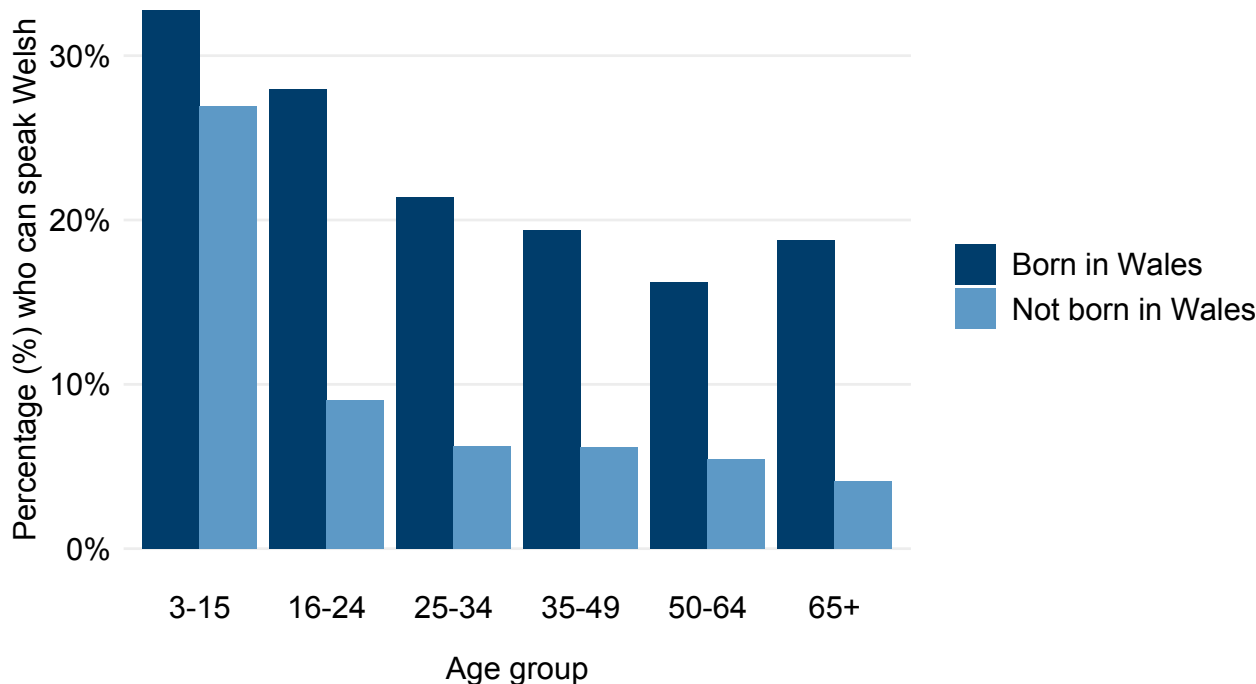
Of those born in Wales, the proportion who are able to speak Welsh varied significantly by local authority. Between 2011 and 2021, there was an increase in the proportion of Welsh speakers among the population of those born in Wales in five local authorities: Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea. With the exception of Swansea, these were also the only local authorities to see an increase in the proportion of Welsh speakers among the general population.

The proportion of the population born in Wales who were able to speak Welsh declined in the remaining 17 local authorities, with the largest decline in Carmarthenshire. In 2021, of the population aged three years or older:

- 50.4% of Carmarthenshire's usual residents who were born in Wales were able to speak Welsh (a decrease of 3.6 percentage points from 2011)
- 41.0% of Conwy's usual residents who were born in Wales were able to speak Welsh (a decrease of 3.6 percentage points from 2011)
- 33.8% of Denbighshire's usual residents who were born in Wales were able to speak Welsh (a decrease of 3.3 percentage points from 2011)



**Figure 6: Percentage of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh by country of birth and age, 2021**



Description of Figure 6: Bar chart showing how the gap between the proportion of the population born in Wales and the population born outside of Wales who can speak Welsh varies by age. The smallest differences can be seen amongst children.

In 2021, the gap was at its narrowest (six percentage points) for 3- to 15-year-olds, and at its widest (19 percentage points) for the 16- to 24-year-old age group. The flow of students is likely to contribute to the difference between these two consecutive age cohorts.

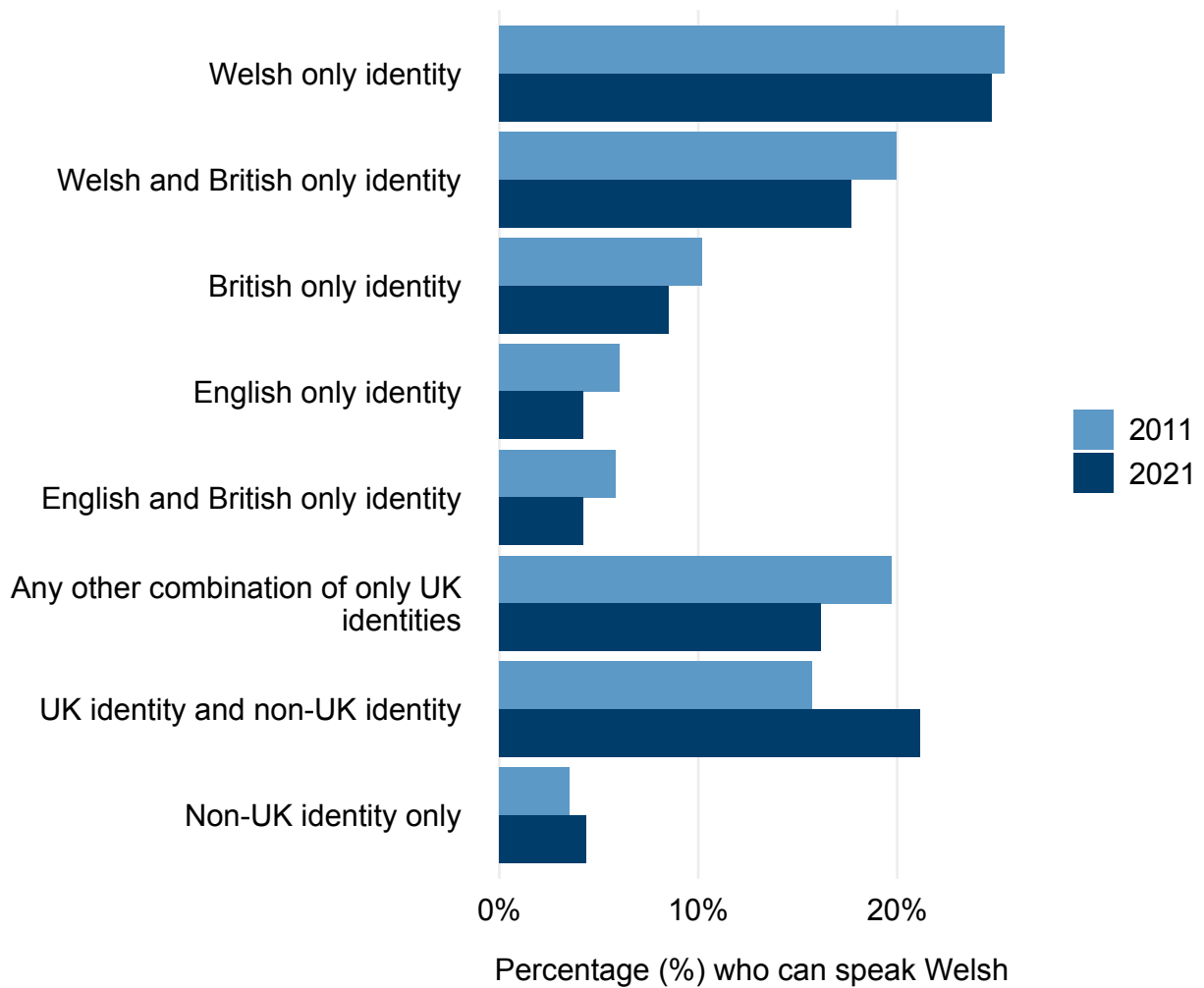
As in previous censuses, students were counted at their term-time address in

the 2021 Census, unless they didn't intend to return to that address at all during the 2020/21 academic year. Due to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, it's likely that a higher than usual number of students were studying remotely on Census Day. **The Office for National Statistics implemented plans to increase student awareness of the guidance on how to complete the census.**

## Welsh language by national identity

In 2011, a question about national identity was included in the census for the first time. This question was once again included in the 2021 Census. Individuals could choose one or several identities from the list or they could note a different identity. It is possible that individuals responded differently in both censuses.

**Figure 7: Percentage of the population aged three years or older who are able to speak Welsh by national identity, 2011 and 2021**



Description of Figure 7: Bar chart showing how the percentage of the population who can speak Welsh varies by national identity in 2011 and 2021. In 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers was at its highest among those who identified with a Welsh only identity (24.8%) and at its lowest among those who identified with an English only identity (4.2%) and with both an English and British only

identity (4.2%).

In 2021, of all Welsh speakers aged three years or older:

- 411,190 (76.4%) identified with a Welsh only identity
- 47,710 (8.9%) identified with a British only identity
- 42,960 (8.0%) identified with a Welsh and British identity

Between 2011 and 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers in all national identity groups decreased, except for the people with a "UK identity and non-UK identity", and those with a "non-UK identity only".

In 2011, the population with a "non-UK identity only" was least likely to be able to speak Welsh (3.5%). By 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers in this group had increased to 4.4%. The percentage of Welsh speakers was lowest among the population who identified as having "English only" and "English and British" identities (4.2% for both).

## Welsh language and the labour market

In Census 2021, everyone completing the census aged 16 years and older was asked to answer the questions on their economic activity status. The questions asked whether a person was working or looking for work in the week before Census 2021.

There are three main types of economic activity status:

1. Economically active (in employment): people in employment (employed or self-employed)
2. Economically active (unemployed): unemployed people (those who are looking for work and could start within two weeks, or waiting to start a job that has been offered and accepted)

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3. Economically inactive (those who did not have a job between 15 March to 21 March 2021 and had not looked for work during the month before Census Day or could not start work within two weeks).

The presence of furlough through the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to people changing the ways they classified their economic activity. Further information on the quality of data can be found in our statistical bulletin on the [Labour market and travel to work in Wales](#).

## Economic activity status

The number and percentage of the population aged 16 years or older in employment who were able to speak Welsh increased from 227,760 (16.6%) in the 2011 Census to 231,400 (16.9%) in the 2021 Census.

Of those aged 16 years or older at the time of the 2021 Census:

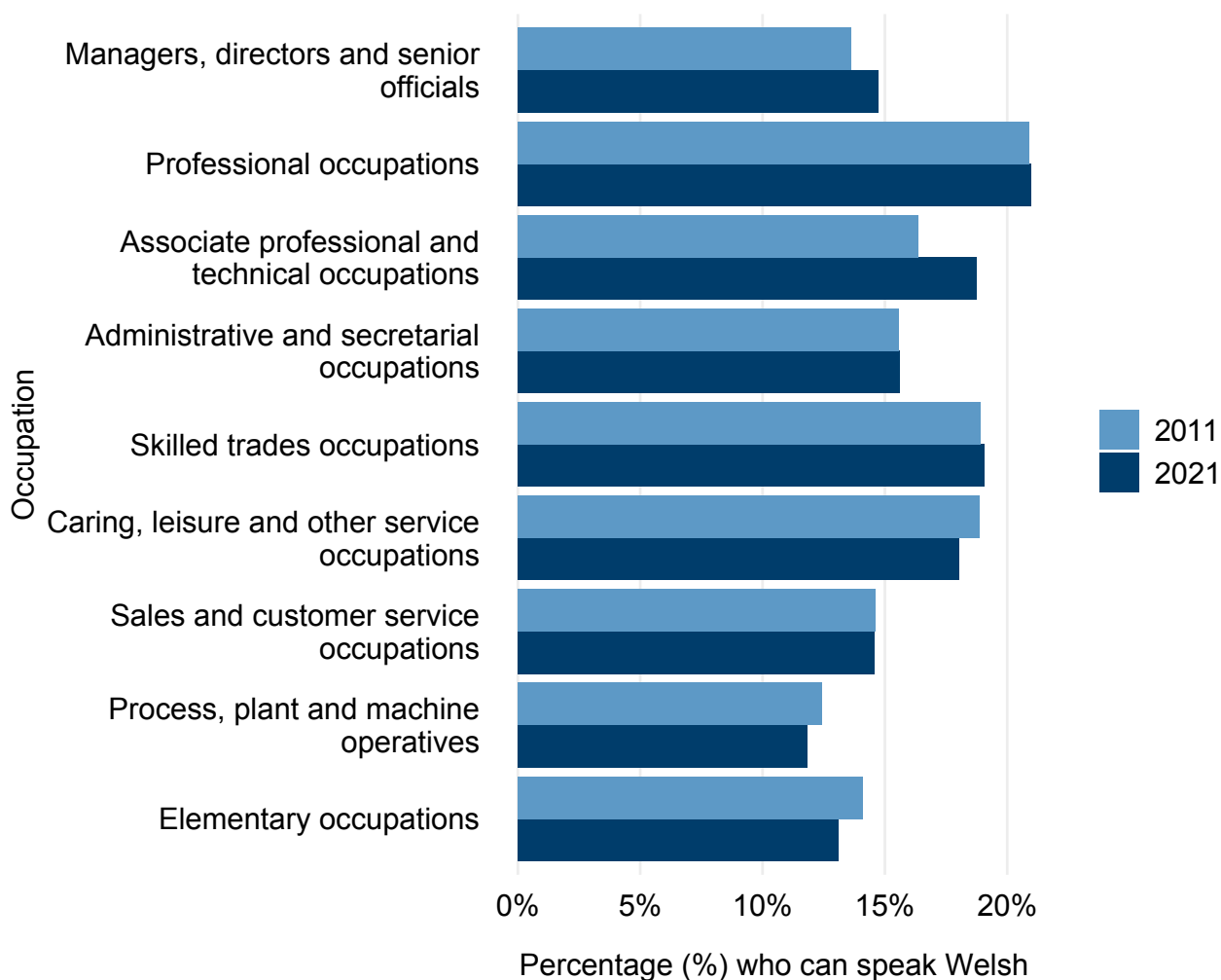
- 231,400 (16.9%) of the economically active population in employment were able to speak Welsh
- 11,170 (14.2%) of the economically active unemployed population were able to speak Welsh
- 149,110 (13.4%) of the economically inactive population were able to speak Welsh

Full-time students are included in any of the above three categories depending on whether they have a job, are looking for a job, or don't have a job. Of all full-time students aged 16 years or older who were usual residents of Wales at the time of the 2021 Census, 45,200 (22.5%) reported being able to speak Welsh (down from 22.9% in 2011).

## Industry and occupation

Small revisions were made to the Standard Occupational Classification used to map jobs to occupations and industries between 2011 and 2021. [Detail of these revisions can be found on the ONS website.](#)

**Figure 8: Percentage of the population in employment (aged 16 years or older) who are able to speak Welsh by profession, 2011 and 2021**



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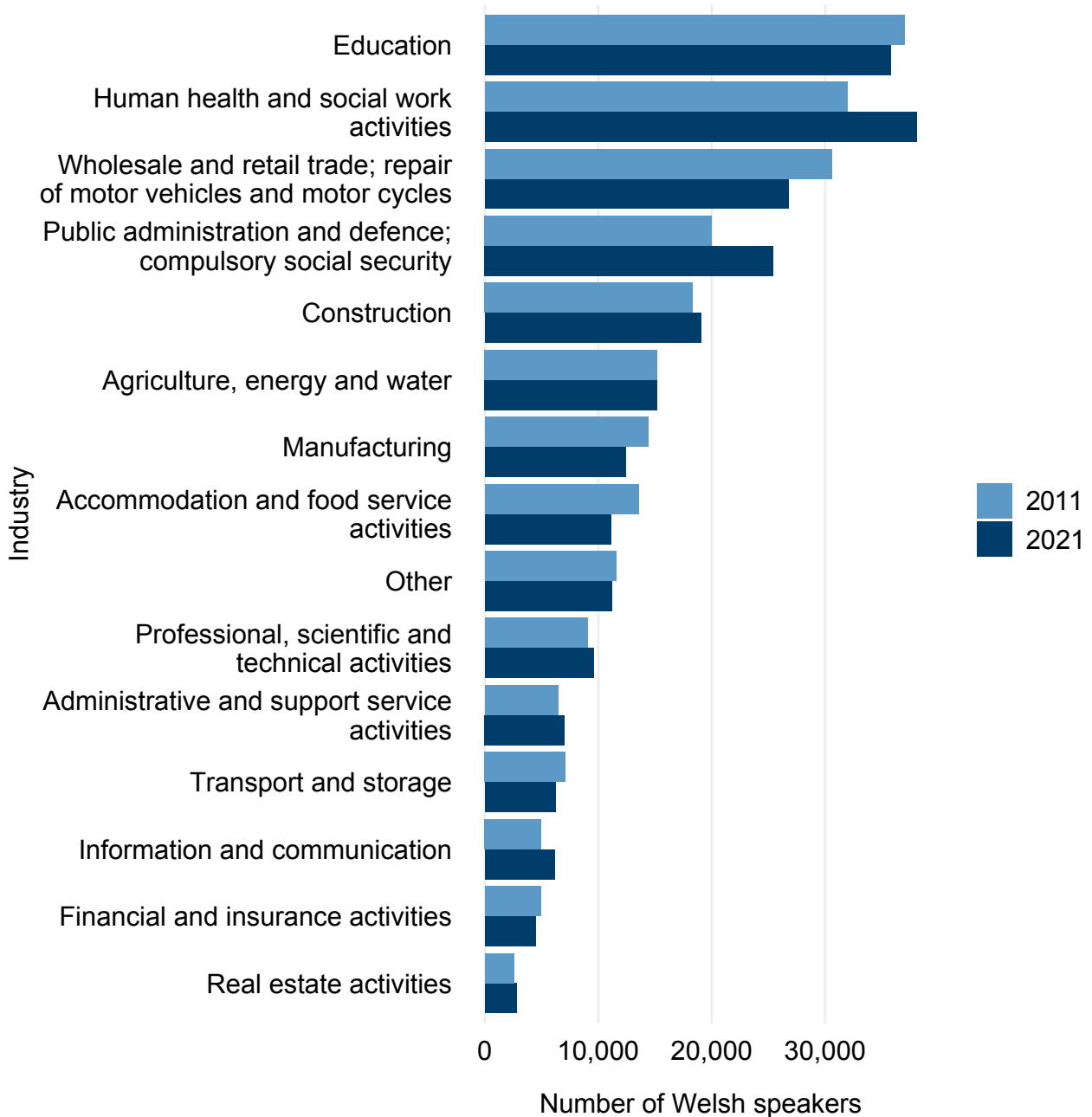
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Description of Figure 8: Bar chart showing how the percentage of the population who can speak Welsh varies by occupation. In 2021, the percentage of Welsh speakers among the population aged 16 years or older in employment was at its highest in the Professional Occupations (21.0%) and at its lowest for Process, Plant, and Machine Operatives (11.8%).

Looking at specific industries, the percentage who are able to speak Welsh is at its highest in the Agriculture, Energy and Water industry (30.0%), and at its lowest in the Manufacturing industry (10.4%).

The largest increase in the percentage of those who are able to speak Welsh has been in the Public Administration and Defence industry (from 18.4% in 2011 to 20.3% in 2021). There has been a growth of 15.5% in the overall workforce size in this industry since 2011. On the other hand, the Transport and Storage industry saw the largest decline in the percentage of the in-work workforce who are able to speak Welsh (from 13.3% in 2011 to 11.9% in 2021).

**Figure 9: Number of Welsh speakers (aged 16 years or older) in employment by industry, 2011 a 2021**



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Description of Figure 9: Bar chart showing the number of Welsh speakers who worked in each industry in 2011 and 2021. Education was the industry with the highest number of Welsh speakers in 2011, but more worked in the Human Health and Social Work Activities industry by 2021.

There were 6,110 more Welsh speakers working in the Human Health and Social Work Activities industry in 2021 compared to 2011. However, this should be viewed in the context of the 17.4% growth in the size of the health workforce over the same period, partly to meet the demand for additional health workers during the pandemic.

More than half of the population in employment who are able to speak Welsh worked in one of four industries:

- 38,080 (16.5%) worked in Human Health and Social Work Activities
- 35,780 (15.5%) worked in Education
- 26,740 (11.6%) worked in the Wholesale, Retail Trade and Motor industry
- 25,430 (11.0%) worked in Public Administration and Defence

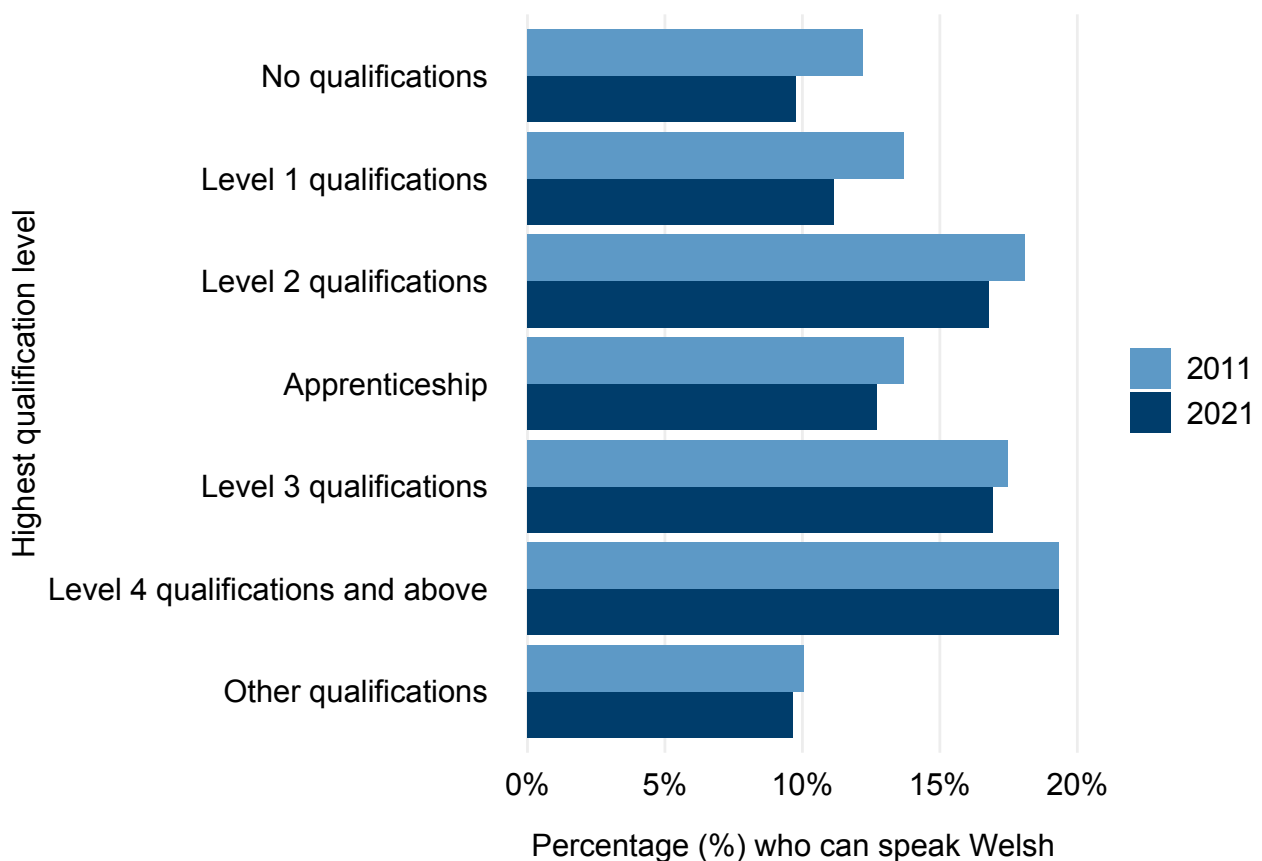
## Highest level of qualification

Individuals aged 16 years or older were asked to answer a question about their qualifications. Further details on how qualifications are classified can be found in our statistical bulletin on [Education in Wales](#).

Although highest level of qualification is broadly comparable between 2011 and 2021, there are caveats. The categories remain the same as they were in 2011 and are derived in the same way, however, the way the questions were structured changed substantially from 2011. For more information, see information [published by the ONS on the qualifications question development for Census 2021](#). Changes in the size of each group should be interpreted with caution. Data from 2011 have been included in Figure 10 only

insofar as they show the proportion of each qualification group who were able to speak Welsh.

**Figure 10: Percentage of the population (aged 16 years or older) who are able to speak Welsh by highest level of qualification, 2011 and 2021**



Description of Figure 10: Bar chart showing the percentage of the population who were able to speak Welsh in 2011 and 2021 by their highest qualification level. The percentage is highest for Level 4 qualifications and above.

There was no change in the percentage of the population with qualifications at

level 4 and above who were able to speak Welsh (19.3% in 2011 and 2021). However, the number of Welsh speakers in this group in 2021 was 37,110 higher than it was in 2011. This reflects the growth in the size of this group among the general population – and possibly reflects methodological changes.

There has been a decline in the percentage of Welsh speakers in all other categories. The largest decrease in the percentage of Welsh speakers was seen among the groups of people with lower qualification levels, where the percentage who speak Welsh was already lower than that of the general population. In 2021, 9.8% of the population who reported as having no qualifications were able to speak Welsh, down from 12.2% in 2011.

## **Welsh language by health, disability and the provision of unpaid care**

Note that the proportions reported in this section are not age-standardized proportions. As previously noted, the age profile of Welsh speakers is younger than that for the general population. The statistics in this section should be interpreted with care due to the correlation between age and health, disability and provision of care.

For example, the proportion of Welsh speakers reporting bad or very bad health is lower than that for the general population. It is likely that differences in the age profile, geographic distribution and other characteristics of the two groups contribute to this difference. It should not be concluded that a direct relationship exists between the ability to speak Welsh and good health.

### **General health**

Respondents to Census 2021 were asked to answer a question about their

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general health. They could respond by choosing one of five options: very good, good, fair, bad or very bad. It should be noted that this was a self-assessment of their general health, and therefore individuals may have interpreted the question and the possible answers in different ways from each other.

In 2021, of the population aged three years or older able to speak Welsh:

- 462,760 (86.0%) noted that their health was very good or good – an increase of 1.6 percentage points since 2011
- 55,660 (10.3%) noted that their health was fair – a reduction of 0.8 percentage points since 2011
- 19,880 (3.7%) noted that their health was bad or very bad – a reduction of 0.8 percentage points since 2011

The improvement in the health status of the population who can speak Welsh since 2011 mirrors the pattern for the general population.

## Disability

The wording of the disability question was changed between the 2011 Census and 2021 Census to be more closely aligned with the definition of disability in the Equality Act (2010). This act defines a disabled person as someone who has long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses which limits their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. The 2021 question also included a reference to physical or mental health conditions and removed a visible prompt to include problems related to old age.

In 2021, 86,750 (13.0%) of disabled people aged three years or older were able to speak Welsh. The percentage of disabled people who are able to speak Welsh has fallen by 1 percentage point since 2011.

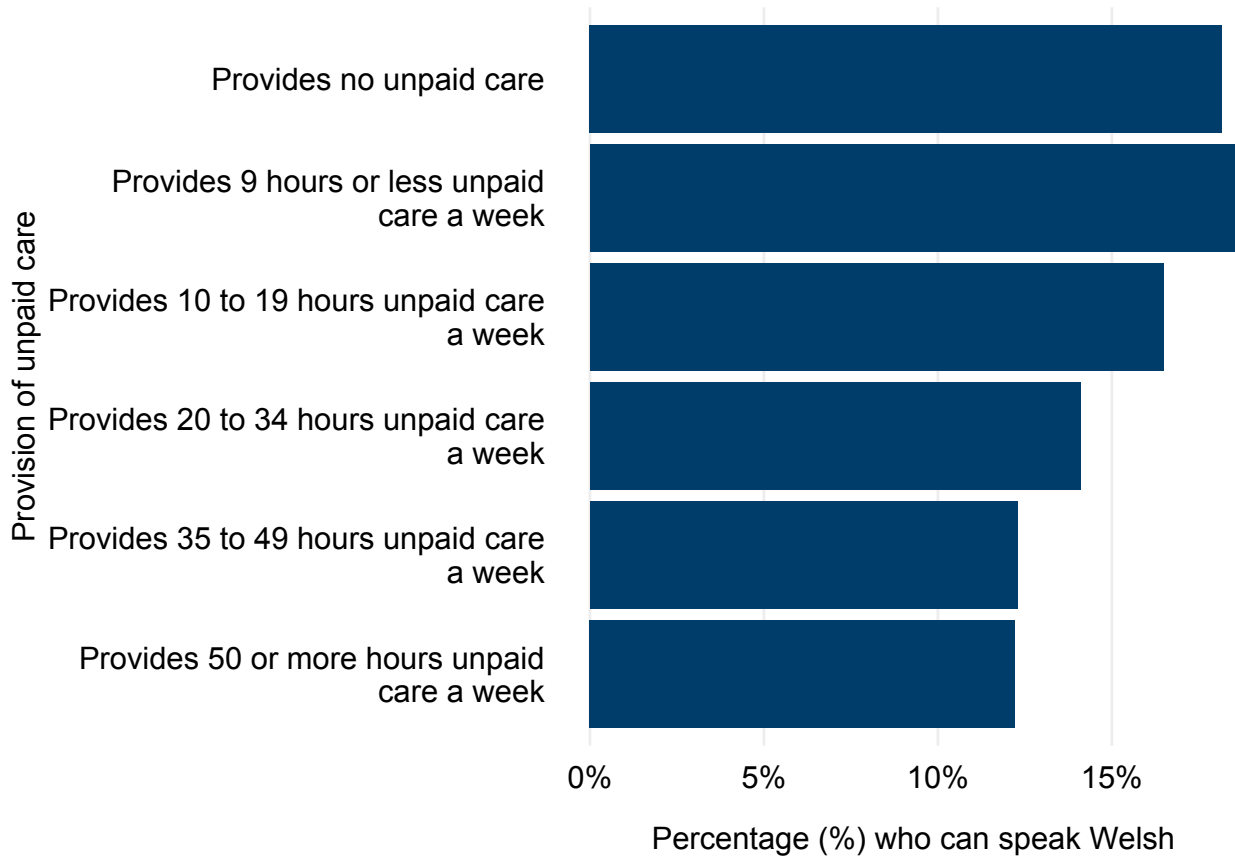
## Unpaid care

Census 2021 asked people aged five years or older whether they look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age. Those answering "yes" were required to indicate the number of hours of unpaid care a week they were providing. Again, the wording of the question differs from the 2011 Census question. Further information on these changes can be found in the statistical bulletin on [Health, disability and the provision of unpaid care in Wales](#) and the [Census 2021 dictionary \(ONS\)](#).

There were 46,500 Welsh speakers aged five years or older providing any amount of unpaid care according to the 2021 Census. Of these Welsh speakers:

- 11,780 provided less than 9 hours of unpaid care a week
- 7,050 provided between 10 and 19 hours of unpaid care a week
- 4,370 provided between 20 and 34 hours of unpaid care a week
- 4,250 provided between 35 and 49 hours of unpaid care a week
- 13,050 provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week

**Figure 11: Percentage of the population aged five years or older who are able to speak Welsh by their provision of unpaid care, 2021**



Description of Figure 11: Bar chart showing the percentage of the population who were able to speak Welsh in 2021 according to their provision of unpaid care. The percentage was lower for those groups that provided more hours of unpaid care.

In total, 15.0% of the population aged 5 years or older providing any amount of unpaid care were able to speak Welsh. This percentage falls to 12.2% among the population who provide care for 50 or more hours a week.

# Quality and methodology information

For full information on quality and methodology, including a glossary of terms, visit [Office for National Statistics quality and methodology information report](#). Quality information specific to the census data for this topic can be found on the [Welsh language quality information \(ONS\)](#) page for Census 2021.

## Statistical disclosure control

For Census 2021 the ONS made changes to the data (called statistical disclosure control) so that it is not possible to identify individuals. These changes included:

- Swapping records (targeted record swapping), for example, if a household was likely to be identified in datasets because it has unusual characteristics, they swapped the record with a similar one from a nearby small area. Very unusual households could be swapped with one in a nearby local authority.
- Adding small changes to some counts (cell key perturbation), for example, change a count of four to a three or a five. This might make small differences between tables depending on how the data are broken down when perturbation is applied.

This causes small changes to cells but does not fundamentally impact the meaning of the data. Where tables are made using the [Create a Custom Dataset tool \(ONS\)](#), the changes applied will be different, leading to differences between totals and tables not 'adding-up' to their totals. To reduce the impact of the perturbation method, tables were used with as little detail as was needed to complete this statistical bulletin.

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# Measuring the data

## Welsh language

Census 2021 in Wales included a question about people's ability to understand spoken Welsh, speak Welsh, read Welsh, and write Welsh. This question was included in Wales only. The census does not include questions about how often people speak Welsh, or how well they speak the language.

Information about Welsh language skills in the census is based on a person's self-assessment of their ability. Guidance for completion of the census stated, if you live in Wales it's up to you to decide whether you're able to speak Welsh, read Welsh, write Welsh and/or understand spoken Welsh. People were asked to select all the options they believed to be right for them, however not everyone will have read this instruction and they may have selected only one option.

The way in which people perceive and report on their skills can be influenced by a number of factors and can vary from person to person. In some cases, especially for children, Welsh language ability was reported by another person, for example, a parent or guardian. Their assessment of the person's Welsh language ability may not be the same as that of the person themselves.

Census 2021 was held during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, on 21 March 2021. This followed periods of lockdown, remote learning for children and many people were working from home. It is not known how the pandemic may have impacted people's reported Welsh language ability (or perception of the Welsh language ability of others).

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## Data sources

The census is considered to be the authoritative source of information on the number of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh in Wales. This is how the Welsh Government measures progress towards its ambition of having **a million Welsh speakers by 2050**.

The National Survey for Wales also includes questions about Welsh language ability, how often they speak Welsh, and about their fluency levels. The questions are asked annually of people aged 16 years or older. Results can be found via our interactive **results viewer**.

The Welsh Language Use Survey is carried out as part of the National Survey for Wales. Although the purpose of the Welsh Language Use Survey is to understand more about how Welsh speakers use the language, it also offers another estimate of the percentage of Welsh speakers. **Initial results** and subsequent topical bulletins from the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 are available on the Welsh Government website.

The Annual Population Survey (APS) also collects information on Welsh language skills. The APS estimates (published on **StatsWales**) of Welsh language ability are historically considerably higher than census estimates. A **blog post published by the Chief Statistician** in 2019 discussed briefly how to interpret the Welsh language data from the APS. More information about the differences between the APS and the census can be found in a bulletin presenting more **detailed results on the Welsh language from the APS from 2001 to 2018** and in a **research paper by the ONS**.

The Pupil Level Annual School Census is an electronic collection of pupil-level and school-level data provided by all maintained schools in January each year. There are a number of Welsh language indicators available including information about the language of education provision in the school, the Welsh-speaking

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ability of pupils and teachers, and whether pupils are taught in Welsh. The most recent data in this report relates to the situation as at February 2022, which were published on 31 August and are available on [StatsWales](#).

Following the publication of Census 2021, we are prioritising work to explore the differences between these data sources in more detail, including exploring innovative approaches such as data linking, to ensure we have a coherent evidence base that can be used to make decisions.

We have published a [work plan outlining the work that the Office for National Statistics and the Welsh Government intend to undertake during 2023-24 and beyond](#) to improve our understanding of the main sources of survey and administrative data used to produce statistics about the Welsh language. To accompany this work plan a [blog by the Chief Statistician](#) was published.

## Students

As in previous censuses, students were enumerated at both their usual term-time address and their usual out-of-term address if these were different.

In light of the pandemic, lockdown restrictions, and the fact that many students may not have been at their term-time address, the ONS reviewed and enhanced the guidance for students on how they should complete the census. The ONS also established methods for estimation of, and adjustment for, non-response or overcount of students. In addition, they designed an extensive quality assurance process which is flexible and adaptable.

Read more about [how ONS ensured an accurate estimate of students in the 2021 Census](#).

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## Response rate

The person response rate is the number of usual residents for whom individual details were provided on a returned questionnaire, divided by the estimated usual resident population.

The person response rate for Census 2021 in Wales was 96.4% of the usual resident population of Wales, and over 94% in all local authorities.

The proportion of returns submitted online was lower in Wales (68%) than in England (90%). This is likely because Wales had a higher percentage than England of households in which initial contact was with a paper questionnaire rather than an online access code (**50% in Wales compared with 9% in England (ONS)**), as they were in areas where the take-up of the online option was expected to be low.

## National Statistics status for Census 2021

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 official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality, and public value.

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 value they add to public decisions and debate.

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It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. 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.

The designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed to the ONS in June 2022 following a [full assessment against the Code of Practice by the Office for Statistics Regulation](#).

## Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

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. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016:

- (37) Number of people who can speak Welsh

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

## Wales report.

The Act states national milestones must be set that "...the Welsh Ministers consider would assist in measuring whether progress is being made towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals." In doing so Welsh Ministers must specify how we know that a national milestone has been achieved and the time by which it is to be achieved.

National milestones are not performance targets for any individual organisation, but are collective measures of success for Wales.

In this release indicator 37: Number of people who can speak Welsh corresponds to one milestone:

- A million Welsh speakers by 2050

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 wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

## Contact details

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