

Diversity on Welsh housing association boards: 2021

1. Introduction

Housing Associations (RSL) Boards submit annual returns to the Welsh Government regulator, reporting on the diversity of board members. Since 2014, the Welsh Government has been collecting data on a range of protected characteristics of board members.

This report seeks to provide an overview of the 2021 board diversity position of RSL's. The report presents diversity across years, setting it against population and tenant diversity. The report uses RSL diversity data collected by the Welsh Government since 2014.¹



Diversity statistics are presented for the following groups:

- RSL boards –where housing associations are part of a group structure, this would be the board of the main RSL as part of the structure
- Boards including subsidiaries – presents data for all boards, including parent boards and subsidiary boards where RSL's are part of a group structure
- Chairs – data is presented for chairs of RSL boards.

Data: Most of the population and social tenant comparison data was sourced from Census 2011 (with several noted exceptions based on available Census 2021 data) and, as such, may not present a current picture of the diversity of population in Wales.²







No WG data was available for gender re-assignment/trans board members. Census 2021 data is due for publication towards the end of 2022.

2. Key figures

Group	Trend 2021	Findings
Women		Proportion of women on housing association boards has increased by 5% in the past 7 years which is a welcome trend, although this has stagnated since 2018. Despite the positive change, women remain underrepresented on RSL boards. Proportion of female chairs has decreased by 5% and stands at 39%.
Older people		Representation of over 65's has decreased rapidly in the past 5 years in favour of 45- 64-year-olds for whom representation is twice that of the general population composition. Greater representation of

¹ It should be noted that not all diversity data was collected since 2014, therefore some tables in the report only contain data from later years.

² It is acknowledged that, for comparisons to be meaningful at a local level, organisations should use local rather than national data.

		working age households can be seen as a positive trend. Although boards should remain cautious about the ability to reflect the perspectives of over 65's who comprise one third of tenant population, this group is significantly overrepresented amongst chairs.
Younger people		Under 30's are the most underrepresented group, this hasn't changed in the past 5 years. Although recruiting under 30's with sufficient level of experience can be a challenge, where this is the case boards could consider trainee roles and other arrangements to ensure the voices of younger people are heard which could also feed into talent development and succession planning.
Black, Asian, ethnic minority people	 board members  chairs	The proportion of black, Asian and ethnic minority RSL board members (6%) is slightly higher than within the general population (4.9%) and has steadily increased by 4% since 2014 which is a positive trend. Research shows that increases in racial diversity can be quickly reversed and there are differences between individual boards. It is important therefore to maintain the momentum gained in the past few years while focusing on inclusive board cultures. All housing association chairs were white, and greater diversity amongst chairs would be encouraged.
Disabled people		Disabled people are the most significantly underrepresented group on housing association boards. 2021 has seen a further decrease in disabled board members. Only 8% of board members were disabled - 10% lower than 5 years ago and significantly lower than Welsh population (22%) and social tenant population (33%). The proportion of disabled RSL board chairs is the lowest since 2018 with only 3% identifying as disabled.
Gay, bisexual, other		Although representation of Gay/Bisexual/Other sexual orientations has seen a small decrease of 1%, this group is well represented on RSL boards, boards including subsidiaries and amongst chairs. Numbers of those selecting the Prefer not to say option decreased significantly since 2018 which can be seen as a sign of more positive attitudes towards sharing data related to sexual orientation.
Welsh language		Welsh speaking and reading skills have increased amongst RSL chairs by 2 and 3 percentage points respectively. No change amongst board members. APS shows that younger populations have higher Welsh language skills therefore recruiting younger board members could help promote the Welsh language.

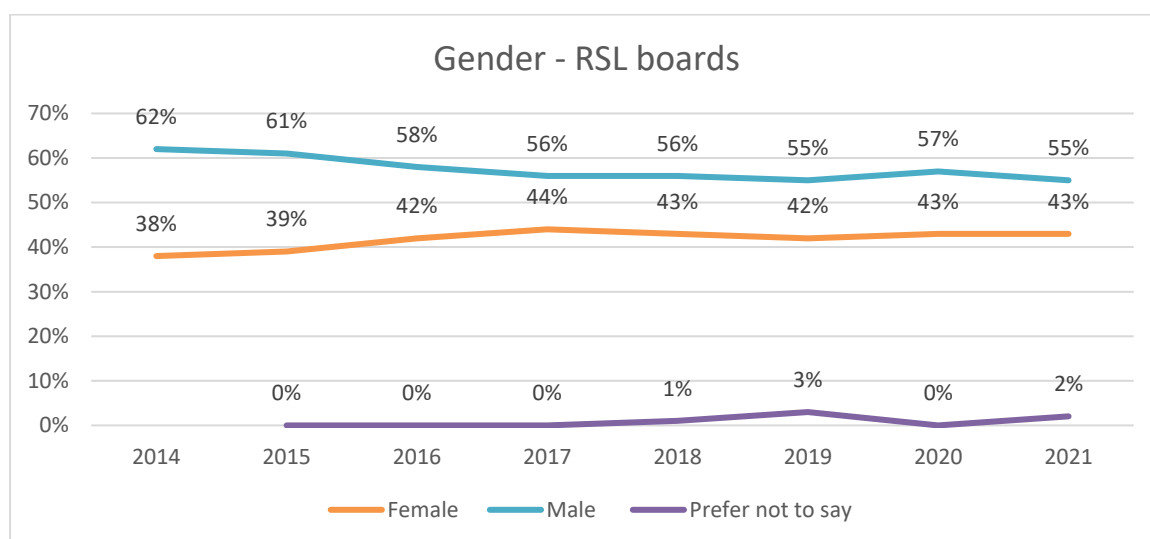
3. Gender

3.1. Snapshot

- **Proportion of women on housing association boards has increased by 5% in the past 7 years which is a welcome trend**, although this has stagnated since 2018. Despite the positive change, women remain underrepresented on RSL boards.
- **The picture for boards including subsidiary boards** looks less positive with only 39% female board members in 2021.

- **Representation of female chairs decreased by 5%** despite large increase last year. Representation amongst chairs is only 2% higher than in 2016 and women remain underrepresented amongst chairs compared to general population.
- Data submission combined Prefer not to say option with Other, thus analysis of those falling outside of binary genders was not possible.

3.2. Gender: RSL Boards



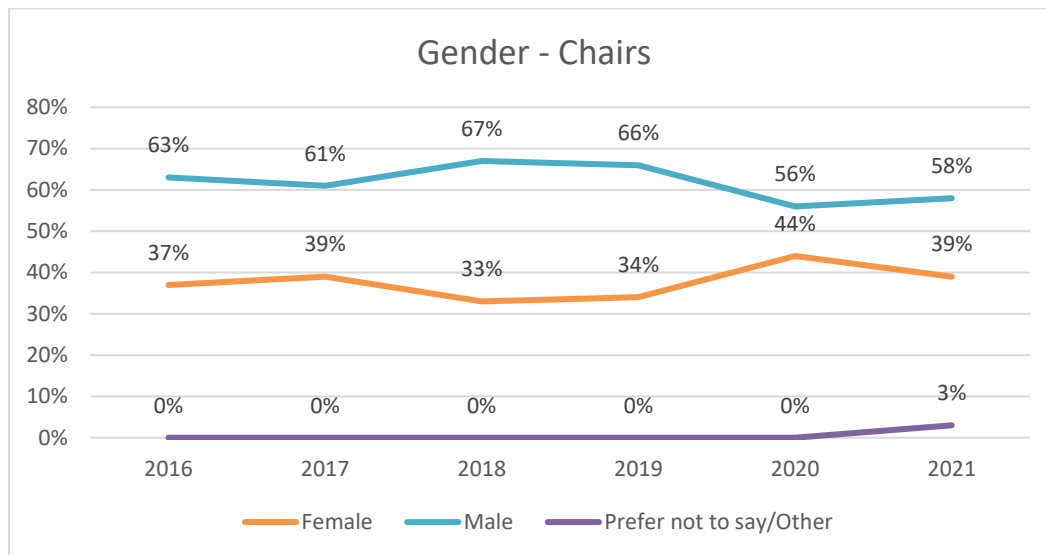
Gender	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population ³	Social Tenants
Female	38%	39%	42%	43%	43%	42%	43%	43%	51%	54%
Male	62%	61%	58%	55%	56%	55%	57%	55%	49%	46%
Prefer not to say/Other		Not stated	Not stated	0	1%	1%	0%	2%	Not stated	Not stated

3.3. Gender: Boards including subsidiary boards

Gender	2018	2019	2020	2021
Female	41%	39%	39%	39%
Male	58%	57%	61%	59%
Prefer not to say / Other	1%	4%	0%	2%

3.4. Gender: Chairs

³ Census 2021 data



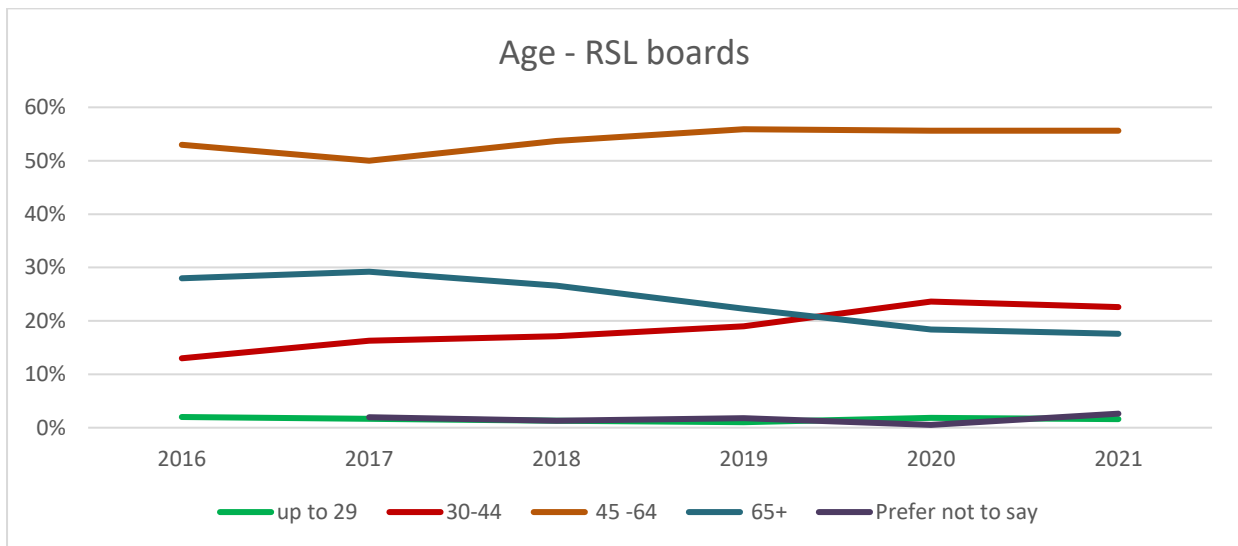
Gender	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Female	37%	39%	33%	34%	44%	39%
Male	63%	61%	67%	66%	56%	58%
Prefer not to say/Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%

4. Age

4.1. Snapshot

- Boards have experienced rapid changes in age representation.
- Representation of **over 65's has decreased** rapidly in the past 5 years in favour of **45- 64-year-olds for whom** representation is twice that of the general population composition. Greater representation of working age households can be seen as a positive trend. Although boards should remain cautious about the ability to reflect the perspectives of over 65's who comprise one third of tenant population, this group is **significantly overrepresented** amongst chairs.
- **Under 30's** are the most **underrepresented group**, this hasn't changed in the last 5 years. Although recruiting under 30's with sufficient level of experience can be a challenge, board could consider trainee roles and other arrangements to ensure the voices of younger people are heard which could also feed into talent development and succession planning.

4.2. Age: RSL Boards



Age	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population ⁴	Social tenants ⁵
20-29	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	12%	21% under 34
30-44	13%	16%	17%	19%	24%	23%	18%	27% 34-54
45-64	53%	50%	54%	56%	56%	56%	27%	24% 50-64
over 65	28%	29%	27%	22%	18%	18%	21%	28%
Prefer not to say	unavailable	2%	1%	2%	1%	3%	N/A	N/A

4.3. Age: boards including subsidiaries

Trends were similar to those in main RSL boards⁶. See snapshot above.

Age	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social tenants
Under 30	1%	1%	1%	1%	12%	21% under 34
30-44	15%	17%	22%	22%	18%	27% 34-54
45-64	56%	58%	58%	57%	27%	24% 50-64
Over 65	27%	21%	18%	18%	21%	28%
Prefer not to say	1%	3%	0%	3%	N/A	N/A

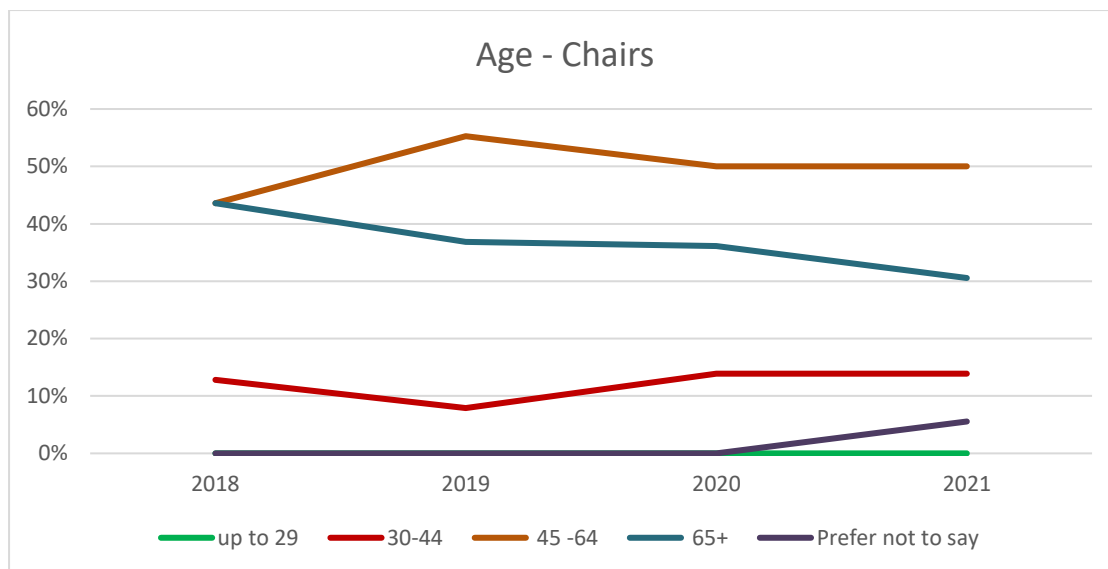
4.4. Age: chairs

⁴ Census 2021

⁵ Census 2011 categories and data

⁶ Data only available from 2018 onwards

As of 2020 there remains no chairs aged under 30 – this can be explained by the level of experience required by most boards. The proportion of chairs aged 45-64 has decreased by 5% in favour of a 6% increase in chairs aged 30-44. The proportion of over 65s remains substantially higher than the general population and social tenants but is at the lowest it has been since 2016.



Age	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population ⁷	Social tenants ⁸
Under 30	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12%	21% under 34
30-44	7%	14%	12%	8%	14%	13%	18%	27% 34-54
45-64	58%	46%	44%	55%	50%	50%	27%	24% 50-64
Over 65	35%	39%	44%	37%	36%	31%	21%	28%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	n/a	n/a

5. Race

5.1. Snapshot

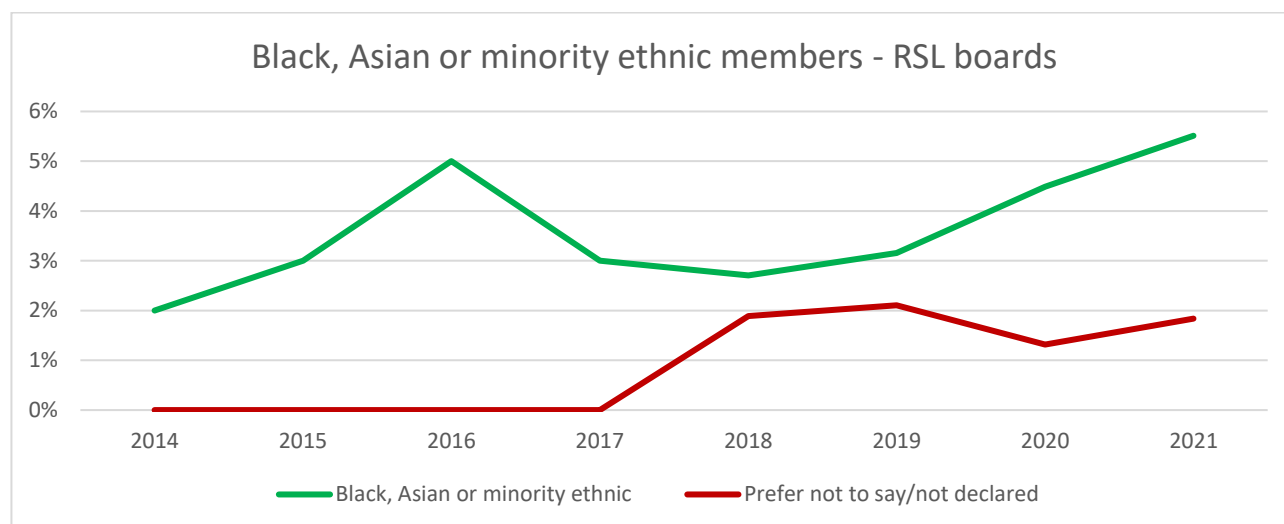
- **The proportion of black, Asian and ethnic minority RSL board members (6%) is slightly higher than within the general population (4.9%) and has steadily increased by 4% since 2014 which is a positive trend.** Research shows that increases in racial diversity can be quickly reversed and there are differences between individual boards. It is important to maintain the momentum gained in the past few years while focusing on inclusive board cultures.

⁷ Census 2021

⁸ Census 2011 categories and data

- Comparative population statistics are based on a sample of Welsh population, as Census 2021 data was not available at the time of writing, therefore caution needs to be exercised when comparing to Welsh population.
- All housing association **chairs were white**, and greater diversity amongst chairs would be encouraged.

5.2. Race: RSL Boards



Ethnic groupings	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population ⁹	Social Tenants ¹⁰
White	98%	97%	95%	97%	95%	95%	94%	93%	95%	96%
Black, Asian or minority ethnic¹¹	2%	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%	4%	6%	4.9%	4%
Prefer not to say/Not declared	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	0%	2%	2%	1%	2%	N/A	N/A

5.3. Race: Boards including subsidiaries

As of 2021, the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic board members has been representative of the overall population.

Ethnic Groupings	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
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⁹ Black, Asian and minority ethnic population statistics in these tables are based on [Welsh Government Annual Population Survey](#) based on a sample of 18,000. Census 2021 data not available at the point of publication.

¹⁰ Social tenants populations based on Census 2011 (likely outdated)

¹¹ Black, Asian and ethnic minority for the purposes of this report refers to Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups other than white

White	95%	93%	94%	93%	95%	96%
Black, Asian or minority ethnic	3%	3%	4%	5%	4.9%	4%
Prefer not to say/Not declared	1%	3%	1%	2%	N/A	N/A

5.4. Race: Chairs

In 2021 as in the previous years, all housing associations chairs were white – a decrease in representation since 2018.

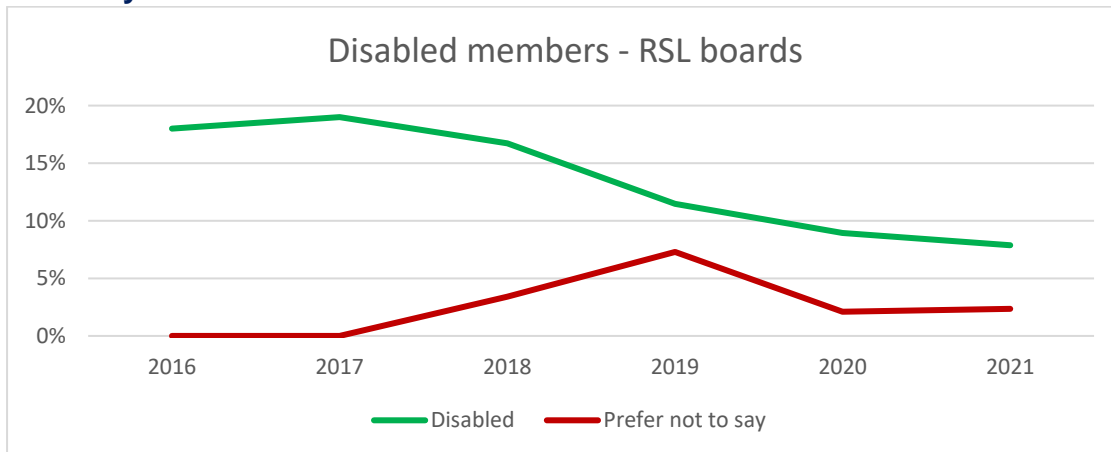
Ethnic Groupings	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
White	97%	100%	100%	100%	95%	96%
Black, Asian or minority ethnic	3%	0%	0%	0%	4.9%	4%
Prefer not to say/Not declared	0%	0%	0%	0%	n/a	n/a

6. Disability

6.1. Snapshot

- **Disabled people are the most significantly underrepresented group** on housing association boards. 2021 has seen a further decrease in disabled board members. Only 8% of board members were disabled - 10% lower than 5 years ago and significantly lower than Welsh population (22%) and social tenant population (33%).
- The proportion of disabled RSL board **chairs is the lowest since 2018** with only 3% identifying as disabled.

6.2. Disability: RSL Boards



Disability	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
Disabled	18%	19%	17%	11%	9%	8%	22%	33%

Not disabled	Unavailable	Unavailable	80%	81%	89%	90%	78%	67%
Prefer not to say	Unavailable	Unavailable	3%	7%	2%	2%	N/A	N/A

6.3. Disability: Boards including subsidiaries

The trend of decreasing representation amongst disabled people was largely reflective of that on RSL boards.

Disability	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
Disabled	16%	11%	9%	9%	22%	33%
Not disabled	82%	82%	89%	88%	78%	67%
Prefer not to say	2%	7%	2%	3%	N/A	N/A

6.4. Disability: Chairs

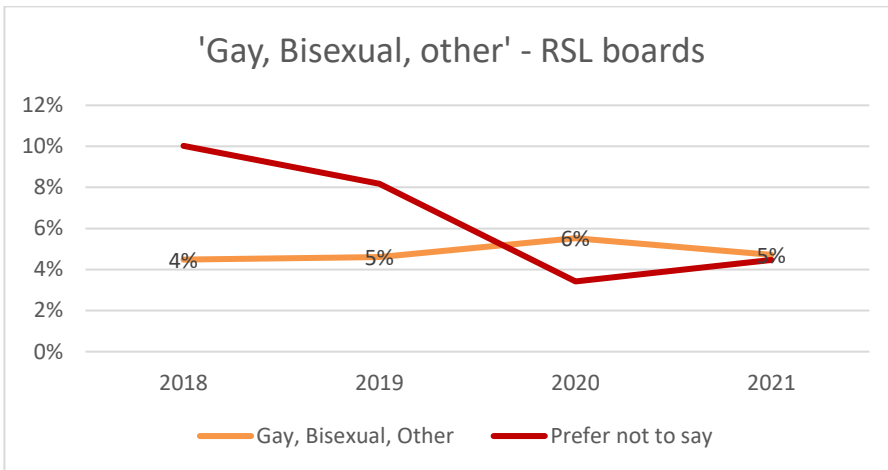
Disability	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
Disabled	10%	6%	9%	3%	22%	33%
Not disabled	87%	91%	91%	94%	78%	67%
Prefer not to say	3%	3%	0%	3%	N/A	N/A

7. Sexual orientation

7.1. Snapshot

- Although representation of Gay/Bisexual/Other sexual orientations has seen a small decrease, **this group is well represented** on RSL boards, boards including subsidiaries and amongst chairs.
- **Numbers of those selecting the Prefer not to say** option decreased significantly since 2018 which can be seen as a sign of more positive attitudes towards sharing data related to sexual orientation.

7.2. Sexual orientation: RSL Boards



Sexual Orientation	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population ¹²	Social Tenants
Gay/Bisexual/Other	4%	5%	6%	5%	3.2%	unknown
Heterosexual/Straight	85%	87%	91%	91%	95.2%	unknown
Prefer not to say	10%	8%	3%	4%	1.6%	unknown

7.3. Sexual orientation: Boards including subsidiary boards

Diversity trends for boards including subsidiaries are broadly similar to the representation on RSL boards only.

Sexual Orientation	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
Gay/Bisexual/Other	4%	5%	5%	5%	3.2%	unknown
Heterosexual/Straight	87%	86%	90%	90%	95.2%	unknown
Prefer not to say	9%	9%	5%	5%	1.6%	unknown

7.4. Sexual orientation: Chairs

Gay/Bisexual/Other sexual orientation is well represented amongst chairs.

Sexual Orientation	2018	2019	2020	2021	Population	Social Tenants
Gay/Bisexual/Other	3%	3%	6%	6%	3.2%	unknown
Heterosexual/Straight	97%	92%	94%	92%	95.2%	unknown
Prefer not to say	0%	5%	0%	3%	1.6%	unknown

8. Welsh Language

8.1. Introduction

¹² Based on [Welsh Government Annual Population Survey data \(over 16 years of age\)](#). Likely out of date. Census 2021 data not available at the time of writing.

2021 data from Welsh Annual Population Survey (APS)¹³ is presented below. Readers will see however that this is not broken down by level of language skill. Board data submitted to the regulator, breaks skills down into levels. For the purposes of this report, we have grouped any ability to speak or read Welsh under one category: “have skill” although it is to be recognised that some skills can be minimal. We have compared this against the available APS data for over 25’s.

Annual Population Survey Data

Speaking

- 25–64-year-olds – 29.5% can speak Welsh (with no major differences between age groups)
- 16 – 24-year-olds – 42.3% can speak Welsh

Reading

- 25–64-year-olds – 25.9% can read Welsh (with slight differences between age groups – the older you are, the lower ability to read Welsh)
- 16 – 24-year-olds – 39.3% can read Welsh

8.2. Welsh language skill: Findings

- Welsh speaking and reading skills have increased amongst RSL chairs by 2 and 3 percentage points respectively. No change amongst board members.
- More board members and chairs have Welsh language speaking skills as compared to population
- Much board members and chairs have Welsh language reading skills as compared to population
- Slightly more chairs than board members have Welsh language skills
- Annual Population Survey shows that the younger the population group, the higher the ability to read or speak Welsh. Recruitment of younger board members could increase boards Welsh language skills.

RSL Boards

2020	Have skills	Population	No skills	Population
Speaking	34%	29.5%	66%	70.5%
Reading	41%	25.9%	59%	74.1%

2021	Have skills	Population	No skills	Population
Speaking	34%	29.5%	66%	70.5%
Reading	40%	25.9%	59%	74.1%

RSL Chairs

2020	Have skills	Population	No skills	Population
Speaking	36%	29.5%	64%	70.5%
Reading	44%	25.9%	56%	74.1%

¹³ [Annual Population Survey: Welsh language \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

2021	Have skills	Population	No skills	Population
Speaking	38%	29.5%	62%	70.5%
Reading	47%	25.9%	53%	74.1%

More detailed results in terms of skill levels for boards and chairs are available in Appendix 1.

9. Further Consideration

Diversity returns for board members show positive developments for some diverse groups while others are still underrepresented on the boards of housing associations. Positive developments include:

- Increase in racial representation amongst board members
- Increase in Welsh language skills amongst chairs
- Increase in representation of people of working age at board and in chair positions

Most significant underrepresentation has been identified amongst the following groups:

- Disability: this is the most significantly underrepresented group with proportion three times lower than proportion amongst tenants
- Female chairs: Proportion of female chairs has decreased by 5% and stands at 39%.
- Race: There are no Black, Asian or ethnic minority chairs.

Regulatory Standard (RS)1c) requires RSLs to set and deliver measurable, evidence based commitments across all areas of its business in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion (including anti-racism and tackling hate crime), reflecting the diversity of the communities it works in and with. RS1d) requires RSLs to have a diverse Board, reflecting the communities the RSL works in and with, and has the skills and knowledge required to be effective.

[The Race Equality Action Plan for Wales \(REAP\)](#) has a goal “to significantly increase representation of ethnic minority people in senior leadership and at all levels of the workforce within the Housing sector so that they reflect the diversity of the population in which they operate”.

The following recommendations could help boards address underrepresentation on their boards and provide useful evidence in demonstrating compliance with the regulatory standards and progress to meeting the REAP goal.

1. Boards should review and publish their diversity data annually, including comparison to local population and tenant population data and actions they are taking to address underrepresentation.
2. Boards should maintain the momentum gained in relation to increasing racial diversity, in particular through focus on inclusive board cultures to ensure sustainability of positive outcomes.
3. Boards should take appropriate action aimed at increasing board diversity in the most underrepresented groups according to their data. Individual boards will determine the actions they should take but these might include, setting evidenced,

measurable targets, increasing the pool of diverse candidates via [Pathway to Board Academy](#) or [Step to Non Exec](#), training all board members, senior leaders and recruitment panels in unconscious bias developing positive action initiatives aimed at increasing the pipeline of diverse board members, providing training and shadowing opportunities for younger or other diverse board members.

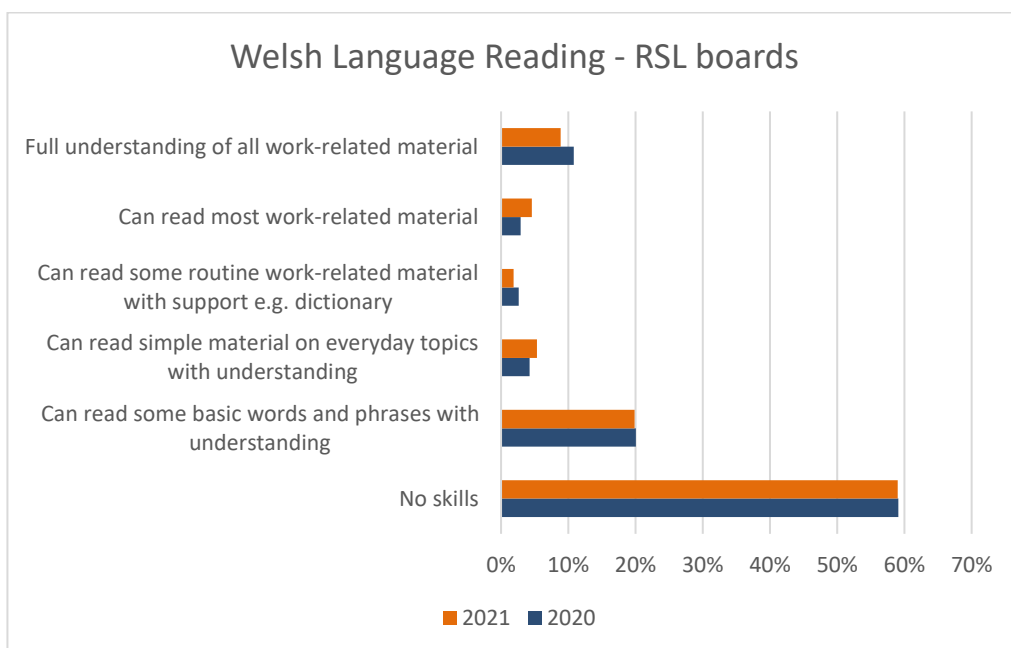
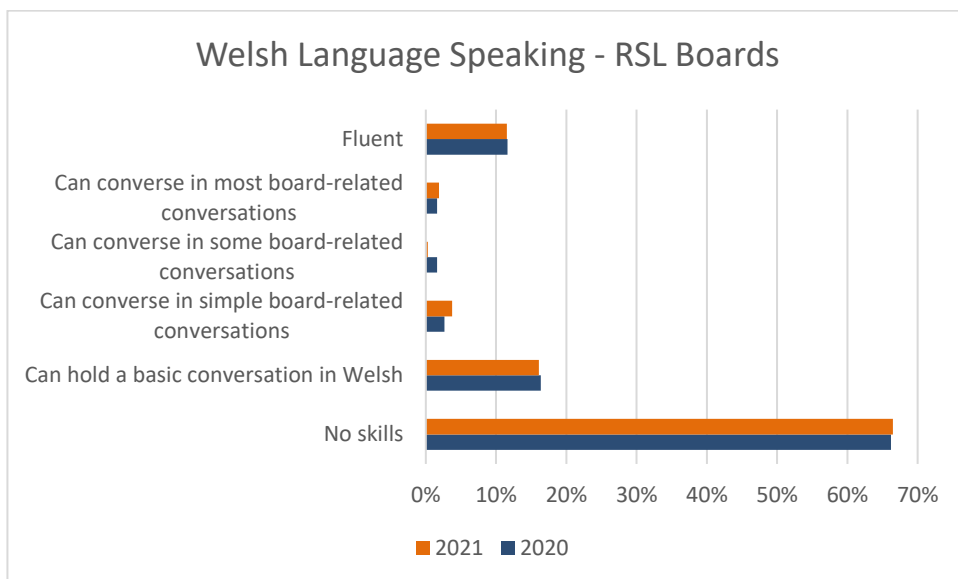
4. Boards may also want to consider adopting or using resources available to improve equality and diversity including, for example, Tai Pawb EDI [Healthcheck for Boards](#), [Deeds not Words pledge](#) or [QED Award](#), [Zero Racism Wales](#), [the Race Code](#), [Equal Power Equal Voice](#), and other initiatives aimed at increasing diversity.

Analysis and report prepared for the Welsh Government by Tai Pawb, July 2022. Updated September 2022 by Welsh Government based on data provided to the Welsh Government regulation team.

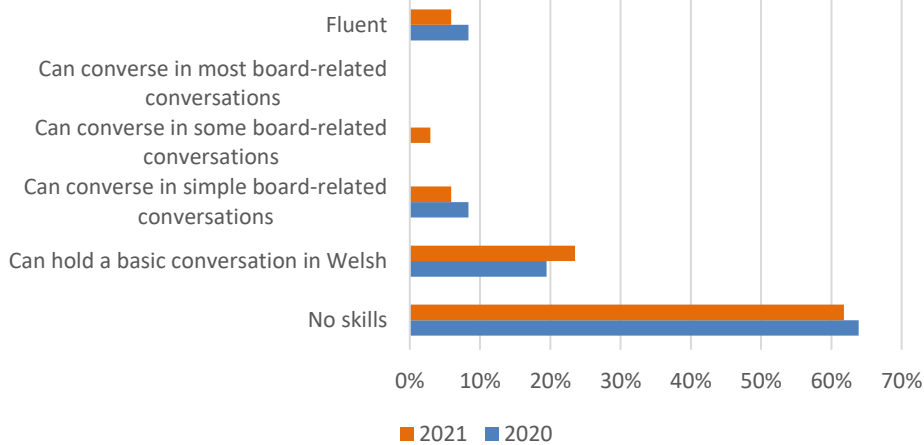
The Welsh Government and Tai Pawb would wish to thank the Tai Pawb interns, Isobel Crocker and Rebecca Hubbard, who were instrumental in carrying out this work.

Appendix 1

Welsh language skills levels on boards, broken down by level of skill.



Welsh Language Speaking - RSL Chairs



Welsh Language Reading - RSL Chairs

