

## The Welsh language in the 2021 Census: Stakeholder Event

Office for National Statistics and Welsh Government

Thursday 9 November (09:00-12:00), Cathays Park, Cardiff

### Attendees

Name	Organisation
[REDACTED]	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
[REDACTED]	Data Unit ~ Wales
[REDACTED]	Mudiad Meithrin
[REDACTED]	RHD Consultancy
[REDACTED]	Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg
[REDACTED]	Cardiff Council
[REDACTED]	Mentrau Iaith Cymru
[REDACTED]	Welsh Language Commissioner
[REDACTED]	Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
[REDACTED]	S4C
[REDACTED]	Statiaith
[REDACTED]	Torfaen County Borough Council
Office for National Statistics	
[REDACTED]	Office for National Statistics
[REDACTED]	Office for National Statistics
[REDACTED]	Office for National Statistics
Welsh Government	
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[REDACTED]	Welsh Government

### Note of event

#### Office for National Statistics presentation

1. Following the presentation by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), a question was asked regarding what the purpose of the Census was. ONS explained that the Census is a population count and that it provides information that the government needs to develop policies, plan and run public services and allocate funding.

2. A question was asked about whether or not the Census questionnaires in Scotland and Northern Ireland were identical to the questionnaire in England and Wales. ONS responded to say that the questionnaires are broadly similar but are different in order to meet different user needs in the separate countries, e.g. there are different questions about religion in each country. ONS added that the only difference in the questionnaire between England and Wales was the inclusion of a question on Welsh language ability in Wales, which isn't asked in England.
3. An attendee asked more about the sexual identity question and whether or not its inclusion affected response rates. ONS explained that in their testing, the inclusion of such a question didn't seem to affect response rates. However, they added that there was some variability across areas, with lower response rates generally in rural areas with higher proportions of older people. Another attendee asked if the Welsh version of the questionnaire has been tested and the ONS confirmed that that was the case.
4. A question was asked about the criteria for selecting the areas for testing the changes proposed to the main language question. ONS explained that the areas were chosen to reflect different types of Welsh speakers, of different ages and abilities. Welsh Government (WG) colleagues added that the ONS had consulted with them regarding the selection of areas for testing the main language question and had advised accordingly.
5. One of the attendees asked whether or not those that were conducting the focus groups were appropriately qualified, as he had been prompted by a research paper that he had recently read regarding language issues in the 2011 Census (<https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tandfonline.com%2Fdoi%2Ffull%2F10.1080%2F01434632.2017.1342651&data=02%7C01%7Cglyn.jones%40gov.wales%7C2f10d0d2527c4709f4e208d527b746a6%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C636458590882910093&sdata=2xOwDwSLZ%2F%2FK9vwlVktA9ECUVQccHQ8vTZcsNW5CSrc%3D&reserved=0>). ONS explained that those conducting the focus groups had Welsh language qualifications and were able to speak and read Welsh. They added that those taking part in the focus groups had been screened on their self-assessment of being able to speak and read Welsh.
6. Another attendee asked whether or not the sample size for testing the main language question was sufficient. ONS explained that they had followed their usual process of conducting a small-scale qualitative test, to be followed potentially by a larger-scale quantitative test.

## Welsh Government presentation

7. Following the Welsh Government (WG) presentation, one attendee asked for further details about the data linking work looking at measuring the outflow of Welsh speakers from Wales to England. WG noted that this work would likely be taken forward in the New Year, following the

completion of the other data linking project looking at the difference in the estimates of the number of Welsh speakers between the Census and the National Survey for Wales.

8. Another attendee asked for further details about the possibility of conducting a follow-up survey after the 2021 Census using the census as a sampling frame. ONS explained that this would need to be included in the Census White Paper (currently scheduled for 2018) and the Census Order and Regulations (currently scheduled for 2019). There would also need to be a discussion around funding the cost of such a survey.

## Round table discussion on language questions

9. To set the context, the Chief Statistician highlighted that his top priority, while accepting that further information on the Welsh language from the Census would be of interest and value, was to ensure that there was complete consistency in counting the numbers of Welsh speakers in 2021 to ensure we understand progress (or otherwise) towards the target of a million. He noted that if we weren't able to assess change in 2021 this would be a significant risk to our understanding of the language.

### Main language

10. WG led on the discussion regarding the proposal to make amendments to the main language question that would allow respondents in Wales to note whether English was their main language, or Welsh (or any other language). One attendee started the discussion saying that for the purposes of mapping Census data at a low geographical level on his website, knowing how many people consider their main language to be Welsh only (rather than 'English or Welsh' as was the case in the 2011 Census) would be interesting. However he added that both practically and politically, the data would be of very little use. For the data to be useful for the purposes of service provision, he added that multiple questions would be needed about language preferences for specific services. He also noted issues in interpreting 'main language' data due to definitional issues and its subjective nature. The attendee finished by saying that English and Welsh currently have equal status in the question – changing the question so that respondents would have to choose between English and Welsh could potentially segment Welsh speakers, e.g. Welsh main language speakers might be interpreted as Welsh first language speakers in the press.
11. Another attendee agreed with the comments regarding the difficulties with the concept of 'main language'. She added that bilingual households might have difficulty in choosing between English and Welsh, such as households where children attend a Welsh-medium school but the language spoken at home is English. The responses to this question might not even be consistent within the same household let alone between households.
12. Conversely, one attendee thought that it would be a good idea to split the single response category to separate 'English' or 'Welsh' categories, but allow respondents to multi-tick if they

felt that their main language was both English and Welsh equally. He said that this information would be useful from a service provision point of view, to know more about people's language preferences with the aim of increasing Welsh language use. He did note his concerns however about the relationship between the question about Welsh language ability and main language, noting that the question regarding Welsh language ability should be asked before main language.

13. One attendee didn't see a use for main language data from the perspective of planning Welsh-medium education, as they try to encourage all to participate in Welsh-medium education, irrespective of their main language. He also expressed some concern about what the data might say regarding how many people in Wales consider Welsh to be their main language while also acknowledging the need to improve the evidence base regarding the Welsh language. He added that he thought that the main language question reflected the user need for this information in England rather than from a Welsh user perspective. WG responded by providing some background to the user need for the main language question in Wales in terms of understanding the need for non-English or non-Welsh service provision, which was similar to the need in England.
14. WG asked the attendees from a local government background if they would find the information useful. Some attendees said that some departments within local government would find the information useful, particularly if there's a link between main language and use of the language. However, they did also acknowledge the limitations of the data and that if main language was inaccurately considered to be a proxy for language use, then it might downplay the demand for services through the medium of Welsh.
15. There was a discussion then that the proposed amended question wouldn't be fit for purpose as it wouldn't allow respondents to note that they were bilingual. One attendee also noted that the question in its current form (as it appeared on the 2011 Census questionnaire) is flawed for those in England who consider their main language to be Welsh – they would then be routed to the English proficiency question.
16. WG explained that they had responded to the ONS 2021 Census topic consultation initially suggesting that the response categories for the main language question should be split to 'English' and 'Welsh' for parity with England – in the 2011 Census in England, respondents were able to note that Welsh was their main language, whereas in Wales this was not possible. However, WG also acknowledged that other factors need to be considered such as the use for the data, as well as proportionality of respondent burden.
17. An attendee noted that they thought that knowing how many and which languages respondents are able to speak would be of more use to them rather than knowing what an individual's main language was. He also noted that the English proficiency question should be asked of the whole population. ONS explained that this question is not currently asked of the whole population due to respondent burden – around 92 per cent of the population in England and Wales consider their main language to be English or Welsh. The current assumption is that those who consider their main language to be English or Welsh are proficient in their English-speaking ability.

18. One attendee summarised saying that the question was not problematic in the 2011 Census, and suggested that splitting the response category could be problematic in the 2021 Census. This appeared to be the general consensus in the room, and one attendee added that the data would be too blunt a tool in measuring Welsh language use so the data would be meaningless.

#### Frequency of speaking Welsh

19. WG explained that ONS currently has no intention to collect information on the frequency of speaking Welsh from the 2021 Census, but that Northern Ireland is currently considering including a similar question on the frequency of speaking Irish and Ulster-Scots. It was also reiterated that there are currently other sources of information about frequency of speaking Welsh therefore it was questioned whether or not there was a user need for this information from the Census in Wales. This had not come out as a strong requirement in ONS consultations.
20. There was acknowledgement among the attendees that including a question on the frequency of speaking Welsh, especially one that would be combined with the question on Welsh language ability, could impact on the time series of the Welsh language ability data.
21. One attendee thought that asking about the frequency of speaking was problematic as there could be many Welsh speakers who might be daily users or consumers of the language, but didn't have the opportunity to speak the language on a daily basis. This could reflect opportunity rather than desire to speak Welsh. Another attendee agreed, adding that the question developed for inclusion in Northern Ireland was based on similar questions asked in the Census in the Republic of Ireland. However it was noted that the question in the Republic of Ireland differentiated between daily use within the education system and daily use outside the education system, which he thought would be preferable.
22. Another attendee noted that the combination of the question on Welsh language ability, main language and frequency of speaking Welsh could lead to confusing results, such as a Welsh speaker who considered Welsh to be their main language but didn't speak the language daily.
23. When asked, the attendees thought that it could be problematic if a question on frequency of speaking Irish and Ulster-Scots was included in the Census for Northern Ireland but a similar question about speaking Welsh wasn't included in Wales. One attendee said that he could foresee an ill-informed political campaign in such an event but that it would be important to note to stakeholders that this data already existed in other surveys. He added that he couldn't see the user need for this information at a very low geographical level.
24. There was also broad agreement among attendees that a separate question about frequency of speaking Welsh would be preferable to a question combining Welsh language skills and frequency of speaking Welsh, such as that being tested in Northern Ireland. There was also a discussion about the scale of change that would be needed to the current question on Welsh language ability to fit a combined question about ability and frequency of speaking. One

attendee noted the difficulties in interpreting what 'Understanding Welsh' would be rather than 'Understanding spoken Welsh'.

25. A discussion followed about the possibility of asking such a question on the online version of the Census only. ONS explained that they were still in the process of seeking legal advice on the matter of any potential differences between an online and paper questionnaire, given that completing the Census is a statutory requirement in England and Wales.
26. One of the attendees then asked about the possibility of asking online about ability in any language in general. ONS explained that when changing/adding questions they would need to balance user need against other considerations. Previous testing of an ethnic group question where respondents were expected to write-in their ethnic group without any categories proved difficult for respondents to answer – for questions such as these, respondents need instructions and guidance. Another attendee however questioned the user need for this information, and asked who needed to know how many people were able to speak French at a local level for example.

## **Round table discussion on Census design, delivery and outputs**

27. ONS asked the attendees if they had had any involvement in the operational side of running the Census in the past. One attendee said that he had been involved in the dual development of the Welsh language questionnaire for the 2011 Census and another attendee said that she had commissioned focus groups in the past looking at language choice for the Census questionnaire, and had been a Census enumerator.
28. A discussion followed about the need to have plenty of Welsh speakers as Census enumerators. While there was acknowledgement of the need to maximise response rates, it was also noted that enumerators should facilitate responding to the Census in Welsh even when under time pressures, ensuring that guidance, supplementary material, questionnaires etc. were always available in Welsh. The attendees agreed that training would be vital, to raise awareness of the Welsh language and legal obligations among Census operational staff.
29. An attendee asked if it would be possible to complete the Census questionnaire online and print a copy. At the meeting it was believed that this was not going to be possible. Subsequent discussions have indicated that this functionality could be possible but at this stage ONS does not know if it will be included or not.
30. ONS asked attendees if they would expect to receive correspondence in both languages. A number of attendees said that they would expect bilingual correspondence regarding the Census, and that they would also expect to receive both an English and Welsh copy of the questionnaire to aid their understanding in both languages. One attendee noted that this would be useful for cross-referencing purposes, ensuring that respondents understood the questions correctly, for example if a respondent was unfamiliar with some of the Welsh terminology used.

31. One attendee stressed the need to be able to switch between languages at any point while completing the questionnaire online. It was also mentioned that collecting analytics on this would be both useful and interesting, for example how many people switch languages, how often and at what point.
32. There was also a discussion about the Online Access Codes to be used for the Census, and how there were separate codes to choose between the English and Welsh online questionnaire in 2011. One attendee said that he wouldn't expect two separate codes in the 2021 Census – a single code could be used to bring respondents to a 'splash page' at which point they could choose between the English and Welsh questionnaire.
33. ONS asked attendees if they had any experience of Assisted Digital support. A few attendees mentioned that Universal Credit was in the process of being rolled out online in Wales and Assisted Digital support was available in public libraries for example. Attendees also mentioned that access to broadband might be an issue in certain parts of Wales.
34. ONS also asked about the attendees' experience of Welsh apps. WG said that they would put the WG leads on Welsh language technology in touch with ONS. ONS also asked the attendees' opinions about the translation process for the Welsh language Census questionnaire. Attendees agreed that the Welsh version of the questionnaire shouldn't be perceived as just a translation job at the end of the process and that making improvements to the Welsh version can lead to improvements to the English version.
35. To close, there was a brief discussion about a Welsh language 'search-as-you-type'. WG agreed that their leads on Welsh language technology would work with ONS on this. One attendee mentioned that a list of bilingual job titles already appears on the Careers Wales website so this might be useful to ONS in developing a Welsh language 'search-as-you-type' functionality.
36. Both ONS and WG brought the event to a close, thanking attendees for their input and summarising the main points of discussion. The group agreed that they were content to be contacted again in future for matters relating to the Welsh language in the Census.