



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

Welsh language use in Wales (initial findings): July 2019 to March 2020

Provides information about Welsh speakers' use of the Welsh language for July 2019 to March 2020.

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The analysis reports how often Welsh speakers speak the language, how fluent they are and when they started learning to speak the language. It also includes data for the national indicator regarding use of the Welsh language.

This report presents the initial findings of the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20. The survey ended earlier than planned due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). More information on the implications of this, and the consequent limitations of the data (including a lack of estimates at local authority level) can be found in the [quality and methodology information](#) section.

We intend to publish the survey's remaining results in separate statistical

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bulletins, according to theme, combining data from the National Survey for Wales 2019-20 where relevant.

Main points

Of the population aged three or older in Wales:

- 10% spoke Welsh daily and could speak more than a few words, the same percentage as in 2013-15 (**National Indicator**)
- 11% could speak Welsh fluently, showing no change since 2013-15

Of the Welsh speakers aged three or older in Wales:

- over half (56%) spoke the language daily (regardless of their levels of fluency) compared with 53% in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15, and almost one in every five spoke the language weekly (19%, the same percentage as in 2013-15); these percentages varied by age, and were at their highest for those aged 3 to 15 and at their lowest for those aged 16 to 29
- a little under half (48%) considered themselves fluent in Welsh, compared with 47% in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15, with the percentage increasing by age, being highest for those aged 65 or older and lowest for those aged 3 to 15
- 43% of Welsh speakers started to learn the language at home as young children, the same percentage as in 2013-15
- over two thirds of Welsh speakers agree (strongly agree or tend to agree) that speaking Welsh is an important part of who they are

The National Indicators for the Well-being of Future Generations Act

The strategy for the Welsh language, **Cymraeg 2050**, sets out the Welsh Government's vision for achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050, and to

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double the daily use of the Welsh language during the same period.

The **Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015** relates to improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. One of the seven aims for the well-being of future generations involves seeing the Welsh language thrive. Our progress towards this aim as a nation is measured by two national indicators:

- The percentage of people who speak Welsh daily and can speak more than just a few words of Welsh
- The percentage of people who can speak Welsh

According to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20, 10% of people aged three or older spoke Welsh daily and could speak more than just a few words (it should be noted that Welsh speakers who can only speak a few words are not included here, no matter how often they speak the language). This is the same percentage as in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15.

Cymraeg 2050 sets out clearly that the census is the authoritative source for the number of Welsh speakers in Wales, and this is how we will measure progress towards the ambition of having a million Welsh speakers by 2050. The 2011 Census noted that 19.0% of the population aged three or older could speak Welsh, or about 562,000 people. The 2021 Census was held in Wales in March 2021 and the Office for National Statistics is expected to publish all census findings, including on the ability of the population in Welsh, between spring 2022 and spring 2023.

Although the purpose of the Welsh Language Use Survey is to know more about how Welsh speakers use the language, it also offers another estimate of the percentage of Welsh speakers. According to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20, 22% of the population aged three or older could speak Welsh, compared with 24% in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. The latest estimates from the **Annual Population Survey** for the year ending March 2021 noted that 29.1% of the population aged three or older could speak Welsh.

There are a number of possible reasons why there are differences between the census estimate and household survey estimates, including the Welsh

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Language Use Survey. More information about the differences between the census and the Annual Population Survey is available in a bulletin giving [more detailed results regarding the Welsh language in the Annual Population Survey from 2001 to 2018](#).

We will be looking at these differences, and the complete results of the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 in more detail in upcoming statistical bulletins.

How often did people speak Welsh?

Adults and children and young people aged three or older were asked how often they spoke Welsh. Alongside information regarding people's ability to speak Welsh, information about how often they speak it contributes to providing a picture of the language's vitality.

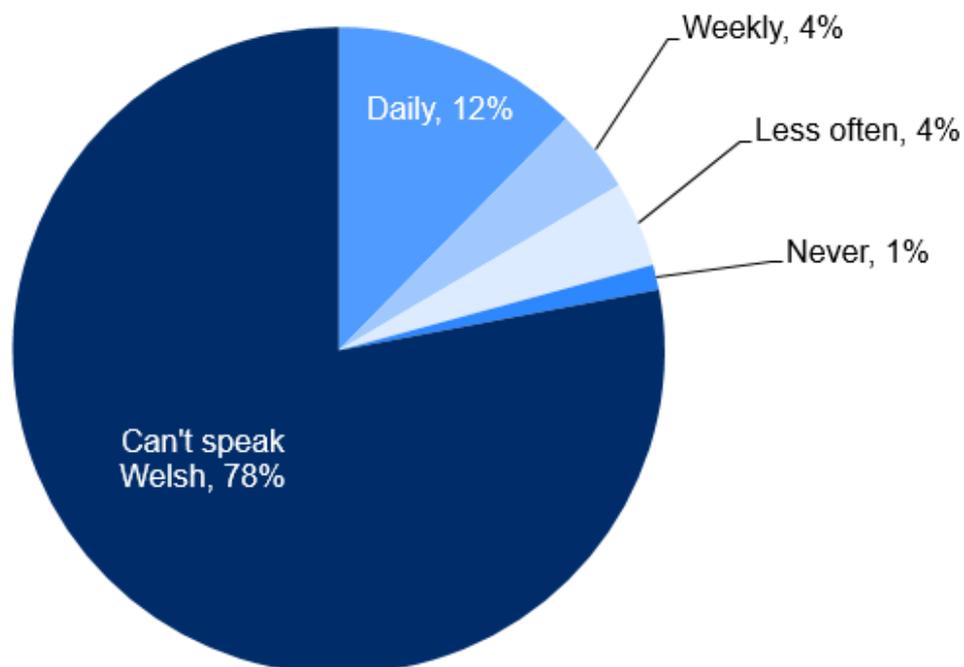
The chart below shows how often the entire population speaks Welsh, regardless of their level of fluency. Please note that this is a little different to the national indicator above, which only includes those Welsh speakers who are fluent, who can speak a fair amount of Welsh and those who can speak a little Welsh.

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Chart 1: Frequency of speaking Welsh amongst the population aged three or older, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

12% of the population aged three and over in Wales spoke Welsh daily. This represents about 361,600 people. This is a decrease of 1 percentage point in comparison to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. Despite the percentage decrease, the numbers have remained fairly consistent between 2013-15 and 2019-20.

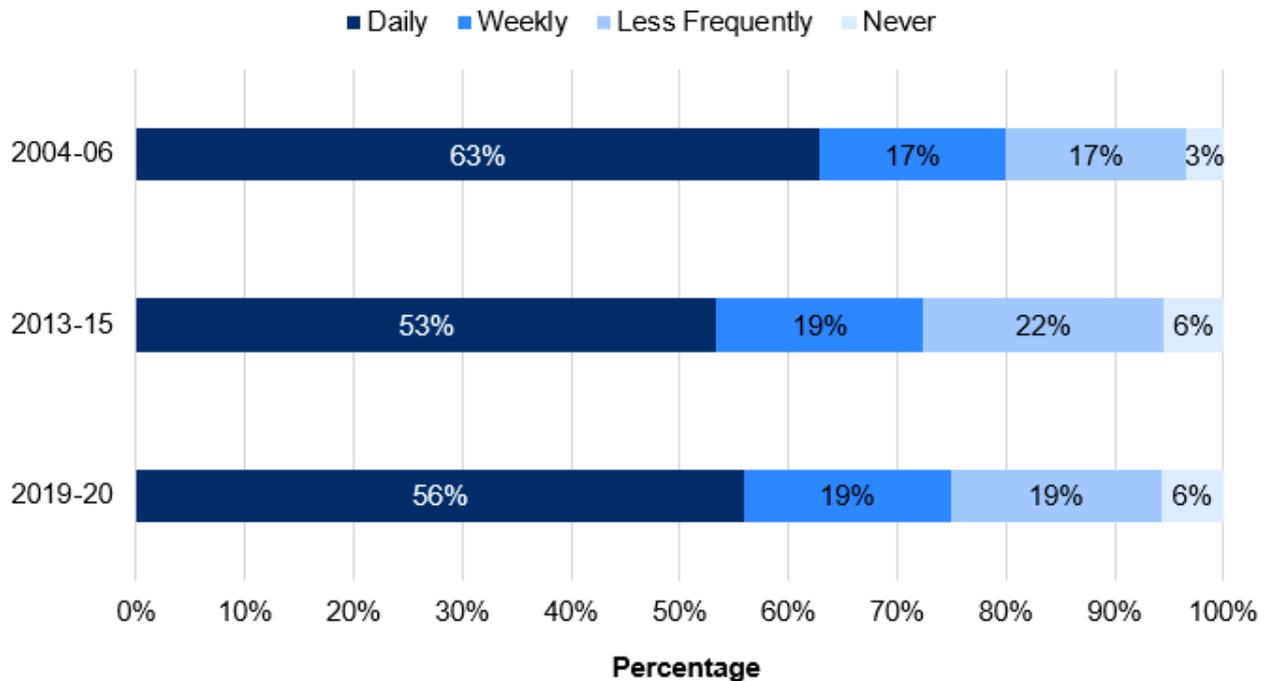
The percentage of the population speaking Welsh weekly and those who never speak Welsh remained consistent between 2013-15 and 2019-20, at 4% and 1% respectively. There was a decrease of 1 percentage point to 4% in the percentage of the population speaking Welsh less often than weekly between 2013-15 and 2019-20.

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Chart 2: Frequency of speaking Welsh amongst the Welsh speakers aged three or older, 2004-06, 2013-15 and 2019-20



Source: Welsh language use surveys

Over half of Welsh speakers spoke the language daily, and almost one in five spoke the language weekly according to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20, very similar to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. Just over one in twenty Welsh speakers never spoke the language, the same as in 2013-15. These numbers include all respondents who say that they can speak Welsh regardless of ability, from the fluent speakers to those who can say only a few words.

The percentage of Welsh speakers who speak Welsh daily has varied between the Welsh language use surveys, falling from 63% in 2004-06 to 53% in 2013-15, but increasing to 56% in 2019-20.

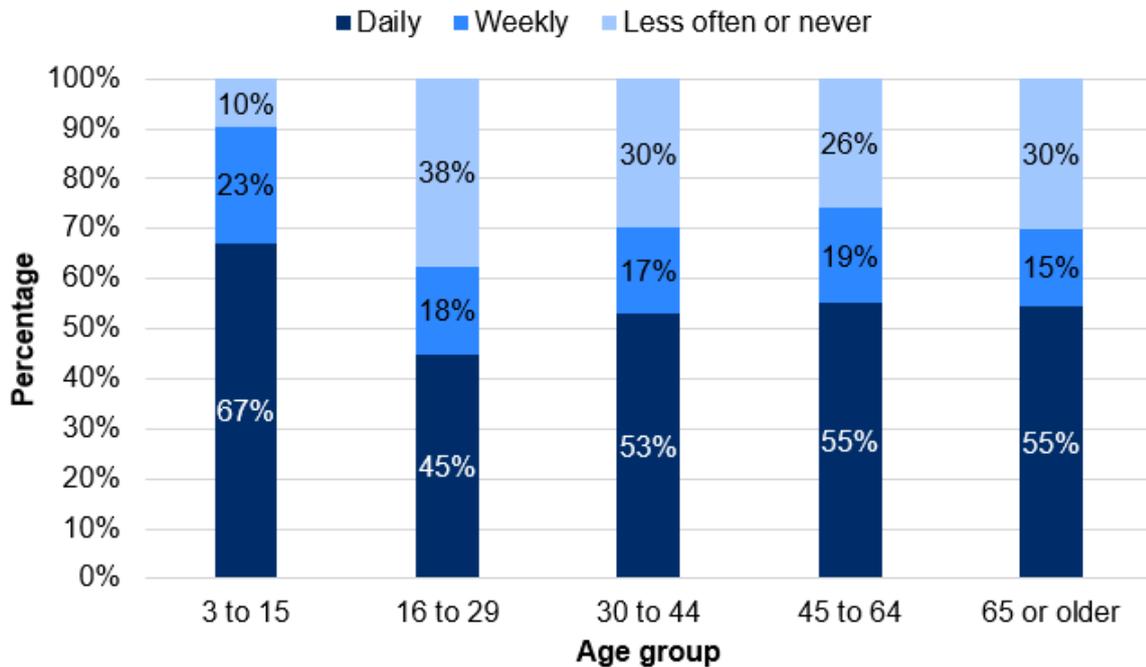
The Annual Population Survey also collects information on how often Welsh speakers speak the language. The survey for the year ending 31 March 2021 indicated that 54% of Welsh speakers aged three or older speak Welsh daily, 17% speak Welsh weekly, 24% speak Welsh less often and 5% never speak Welsh. These percentages are similar to the Welsh Language Use Surveys.

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Chart 3: Frequency of speaking Welsh amongst the Welsh speakers by age, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

Note: A small number of Welsh speakers noted that they never speak the language. These have been combined with those Welsh speakers who speak the language less often than weekly.

The percentage of Welsh speakers who spoke Welsh daily was fairly consistent between the older age groups, ranging between 53% and 55%.

The percentage of Welsh speakers aged 3 to 15 who spoke Welsh daily was considerably higher than any other age group, with a little over two thirds (67%) speaking Welsh daily. This probably reflects the fact that they use the language regularly in school.

45% of 16 to 29-year-olds spoke Welsh daily, an increase of 5 percentage points since 2013-15. It is not known why the frequency of speaking Welsh is lower among the 16 to 29 age group compared to the use of other age groups. One possible reason is that this is an age when major changes occur in the lives of individuals, where young people may move away from home and enter the world of work, and therefore move in different and perhaps more diverse social circles, such as at university or in the workplace.

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How fluent are those who can speak Welsh?

Adults and children and young people aged three or older were asked to describe their ability to speak Welsh. The knowledge of fluency adds to our understanding of the ability of the population to speak Welsh, distinguishing between the levels of ability of those individuals to speak Welsh.

Respondents may have interpreted their fluency in Welsh in a variety of ways in answering this question. It is likely that their answers have been affected by a number of factors, including confidence and a tendency to compare personal linguistic ability with the linguistic ability of other Welsh speakers around them. Two people with the same ability to speak Welsh may have answered this question differently. This is a general issue in research studies of this type which require individuals to interpret fluency for themselves.

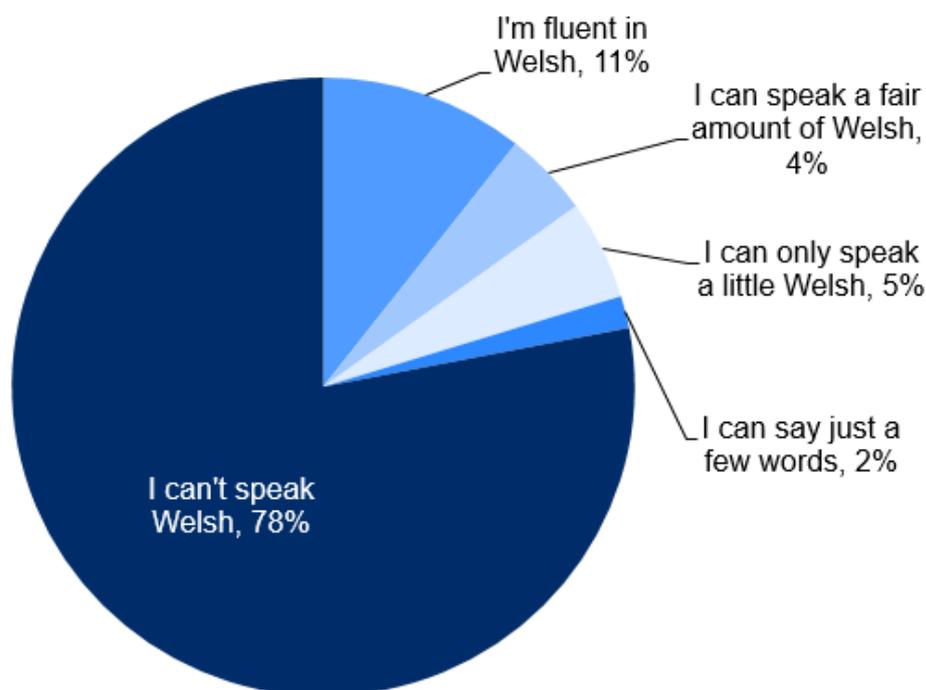
The chart below shows the fluency of the whole population in Welsh.

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Chart 4: Percentage of the population aged three or older who speak Welsh by fluency level, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

11% of those aged three or older in Wales could speak Welsh fluently. This represented about 311,700 people. Another 11% of the population said they could speak Welsh but not fluently.

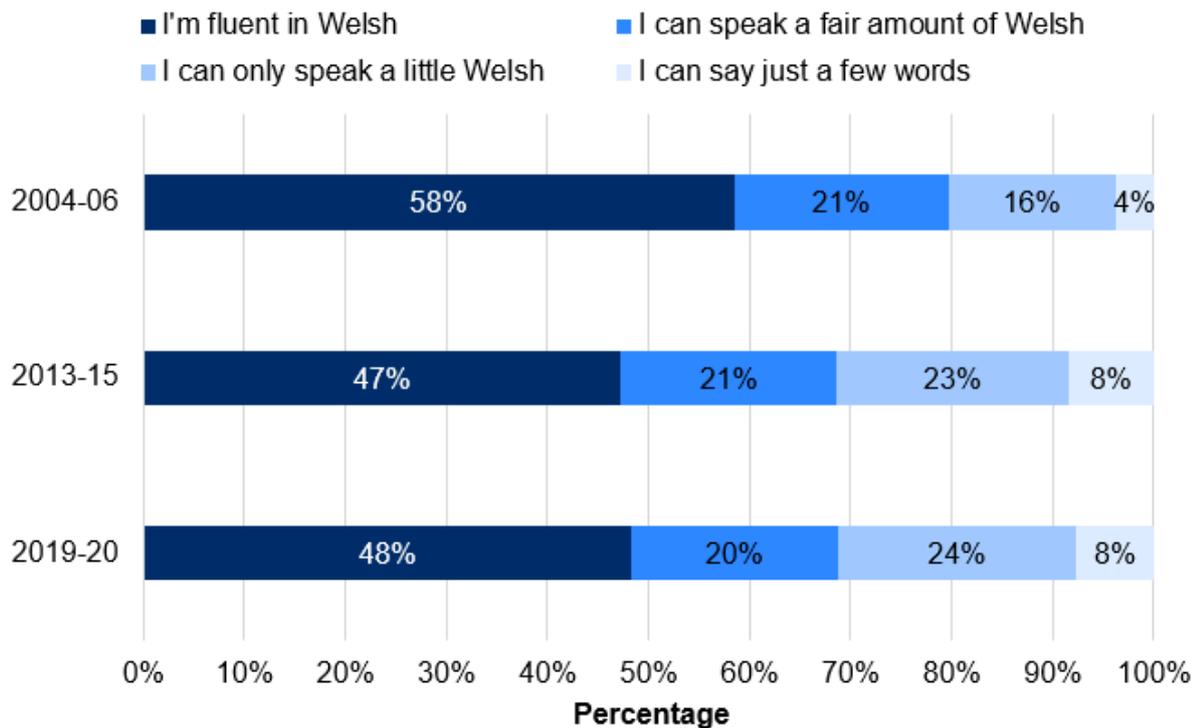
The percentage of people stating they are fluent has remained fairly consistent since the last Welsh language use surveys. 12% were fluent in 2004-06 and 11% in 2013-15.

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Chart 5: Percentage of Welsh speakers aged three or older by fluency level, 2004-06, 2013-15 and 2019-20



Source: Welsh language use surveys

48% of Welsh speakers considered themselves to be fluent in Welsh according to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20, while 20% could speak a fair amount of Welsh.

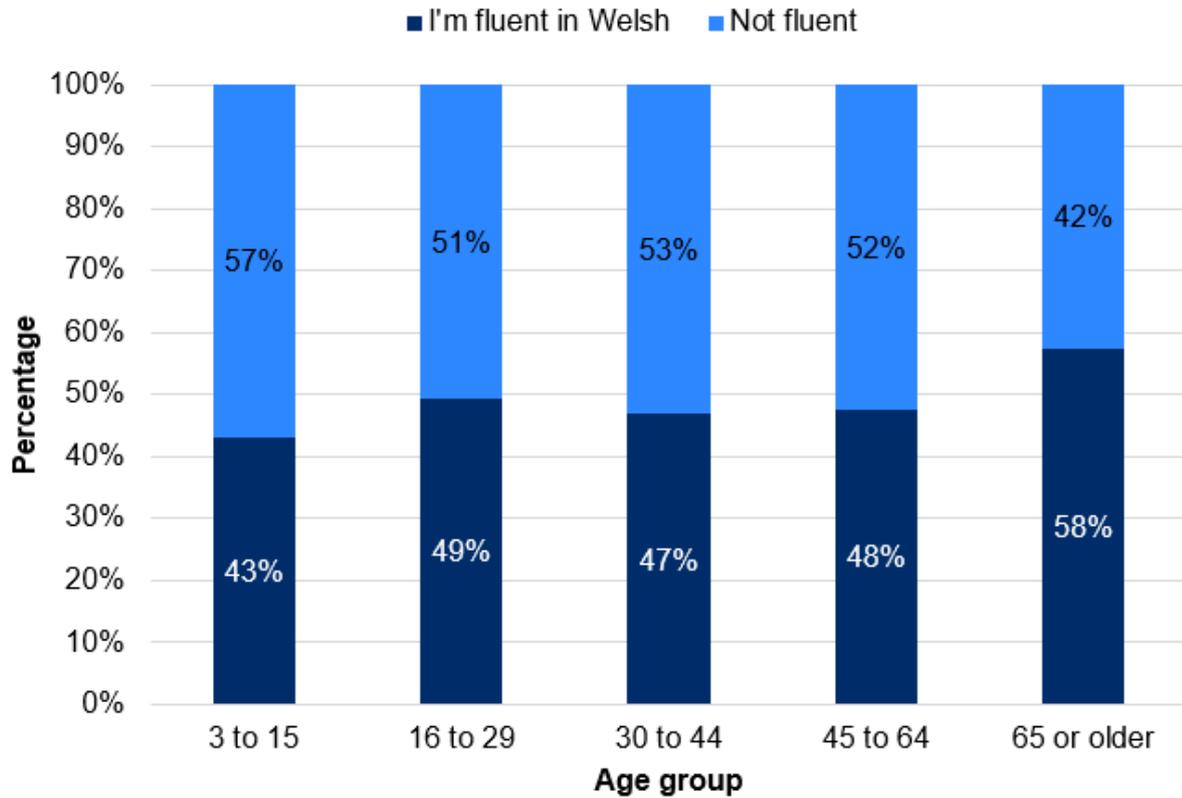
The percentage of fluent Welsh speakers has fallen by 10 percentage points between 2004-06 and 2019-20, from 58% to 48%. The percentage able to speak a fair amount of Welsh has remained fairly consistent in all Welsh language use surveys, accounting for around one in five Welsh speakers each time. There has been an increase in the percentage of Welsh speakers who note that they can only speak a little Welsh since 2004-06, rising from 16% to 24% in 2019-20. There was an increase from 4% to 8% in the percentage of Welsh speakers who can say just a few words.

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Chart 6: Percentage of Welsh speakers by fluency and age, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

The percentage of Welsh speakers who consider themselves fluent in Welsh increased by age group. The percentage of Welsh speakers who are fluent was lowest among the 3 to 15 age group, with 43% indicating that they were fluent. This is an increase of 7 percentage points since 2013-15. The percentage of Welsh speakers who are fluent was highest among those aged 65 or older, with almost three in five of them being fluent.

There is a clear link between the frequency of speaking Welsh and fluency. Fluent Welsh speakers speak the language more often than those who are not fluent. 85% of fluent Welsh speakers spoke Welsh daily in 2019-20, compared with 84% seen in 2013-15. 30% of non-fluent Welsh speakers spoke Welsh daily in 2019-20, compared with 26% seen in 2013-15.

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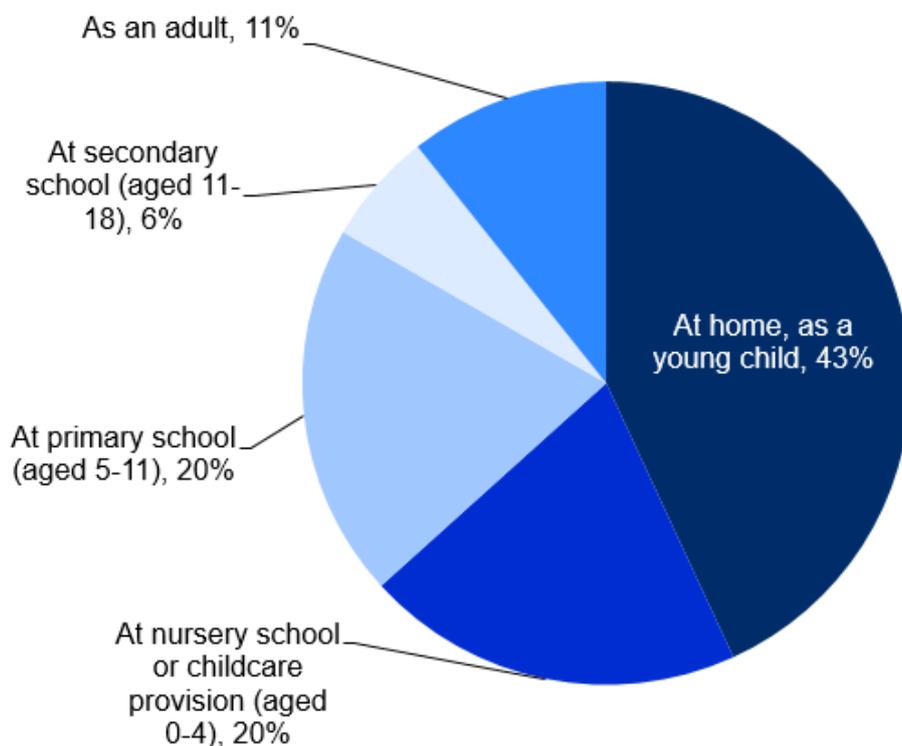
When did Welsh speakers start to learn the language?

Adults and children and young people aged three or older were asked when they started learning to speak Welsh.

One of the Welsh Government's strategic objectives is to encourage and support transmission of the Welsh language and its use within families. One of the Government's aims in trying to achieve that is to encourage Welsh-speaking parents and carers to use their Welsh with their children (see the Policy, [Welsh Language transmission and use in families](#)). As part of the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013, local authorities are also required to prepare a [Welsh in Education Strategic Plan](#) (WESP), a means of planning and delivering Welsh-medium education provision at all stages of education and training.

The chart below shows when Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language.

Chart 7: When Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

Note: A small percentage of Welsh speakers had started learning to speak the language elsewhere, for example, at university. These people are included with those who started learning to speak the language as adults.

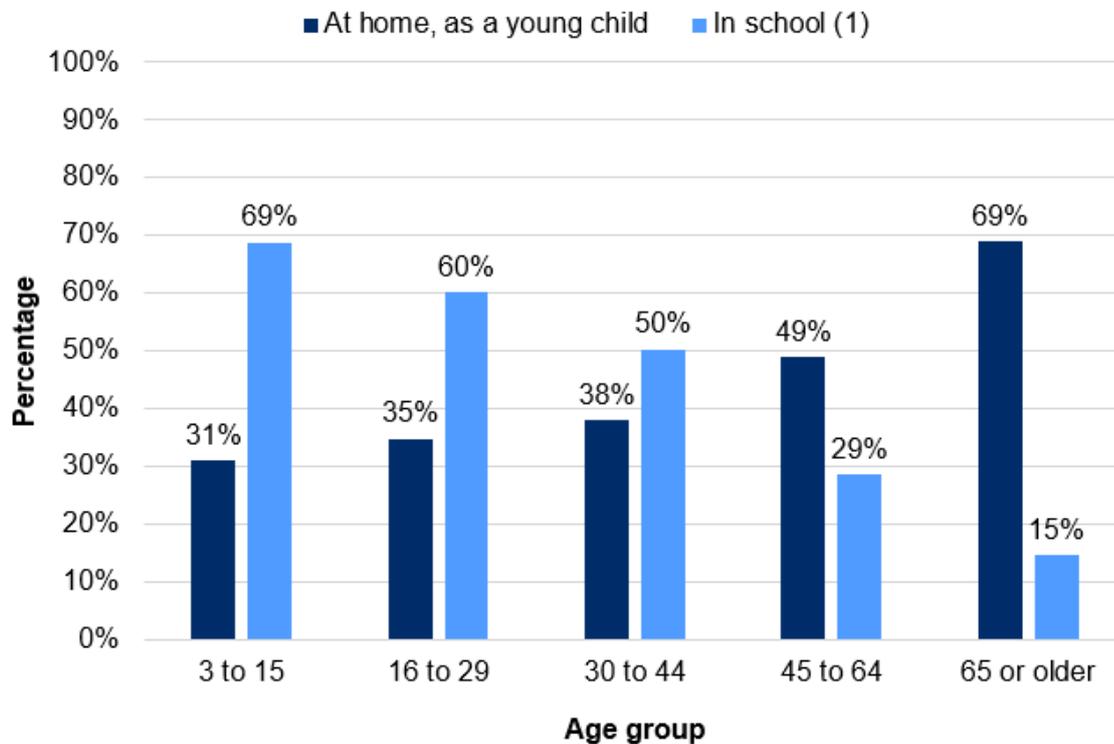
The chart above shows data for Welsh speakers who started learning to speak the language at home as a young child, in school and as an adult. 43% of Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language at home as a young child, 20% in nursery school or childcare provision, 20% in primary school and 6% in secondary school. 11% of Welsh speakers had started learning to speak the language as an adult or elsewhere, for example, on a Welsh learner's course they had organised themselves or through work.

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Chart 8: When Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language by age, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

1. Total of Welsh speakers who started learning to speak Welsh in nursery school or childcare provision, primary or secondary school.

Note: Due to the small numbers of Welsh speakers who had started learning to speak Welsh as an adult or elsewhere, it is not possible to report on them by age so they are not included.

There was considerable variation in respect of when Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language by age, with those aged 3 to 15 much less likely than those aged 65 or older to have started learning to speak the language at home when they were young children. 31% of Welsh speakers aged 3 to 15 started learning to speak the language at home as young children, compared with 69% of Welsh speakers aged 65 or older.

Those aged 3 to 15 were much more likely to have started learning to speak the language at school than those aged 65 or older (69% for those aged 3 to 15, and 15% for those aged 65 or older). This is probably due to the significant change in the Welsh-medium education sector over the last fifty years, with a general increase in the number of pupils learning through the medium of Welsh

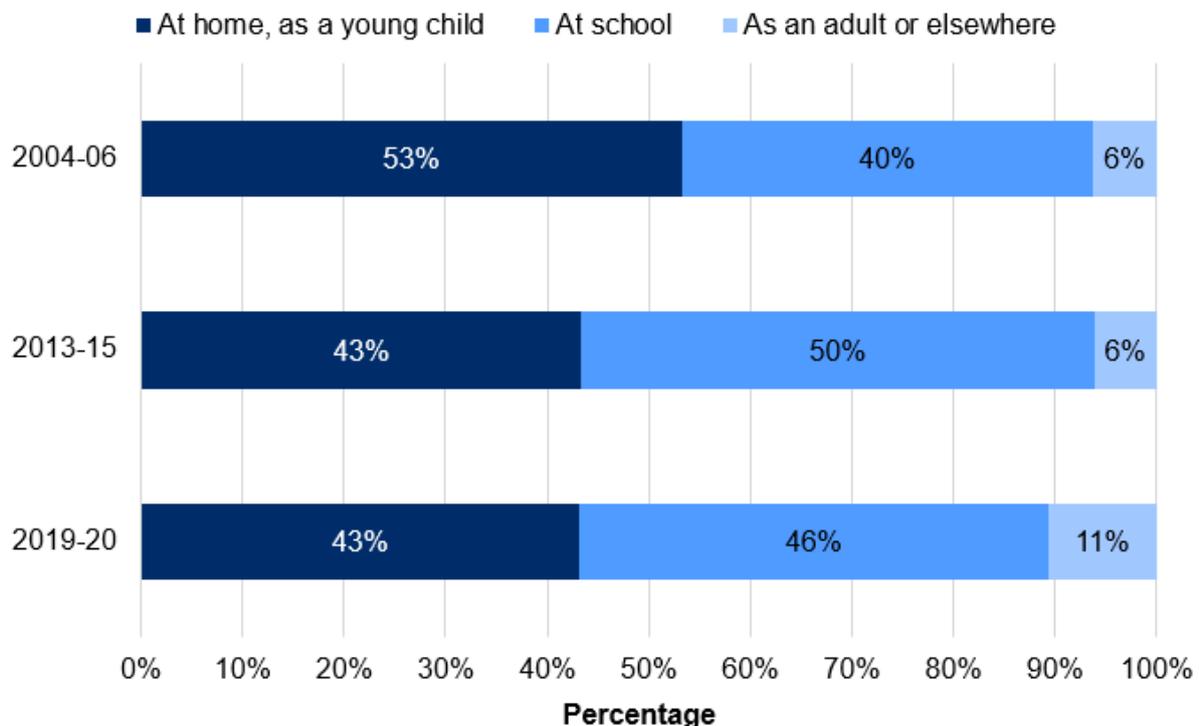
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and in the number of Welsh-medium schools that have been opened across Wales.

Chart 9: When Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language, 2004-06, 2013-15 and 2019-20



Source: Welsh language use surveys

Note: There has been a change to the question about learning to speak Welsh in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20. The change in the question may have affected how Welsh speakers responded to the question, so it is important to consider this when comparing the findings of the 2019-20 survey with the previous surveys.

The Welsh Language Use Surveys in 2004-06 and 2013-15 asked where Welsh speakers mainly learned to speak the language, whereas the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 asked when Welsh speakers started learning to speak the language. The change in question may have affected how Welsh speakers responded to the question, so it is important to take this into consideration when comparing the findings of the 2019-20 survey with those of the previous surveys. It is important to note, therefore, that it is not possible to tell from the data how many people have continued to learn Welsh from nursery to primary and secondary school, for example.

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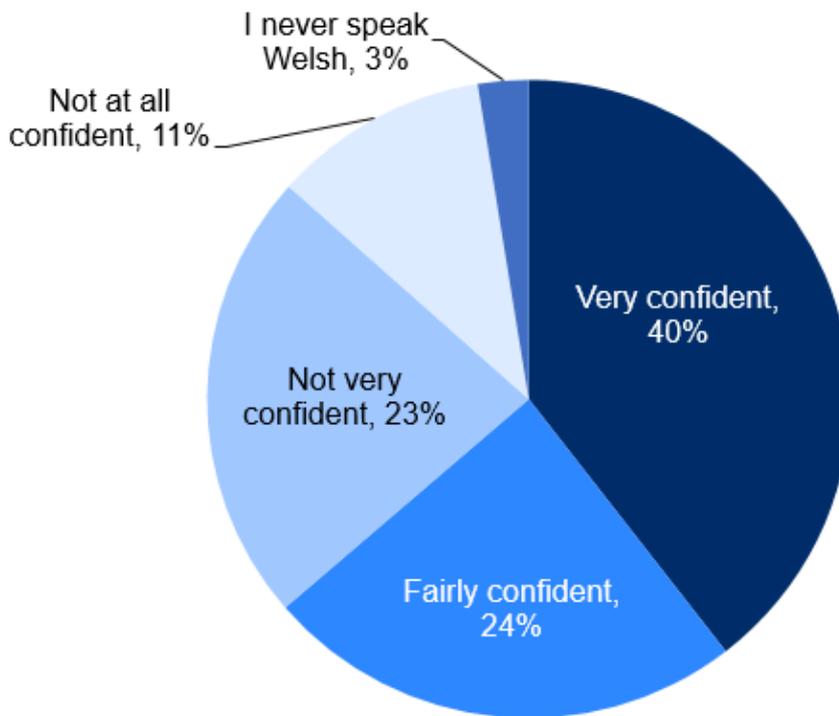
We see in the chart above that the percentage of Welsh speakers who started learning to speak the language at home as young children has fallen since 2004-06, from 53% in 2004-06 to 43% in 2013-15, but has generally increased for those who started learning to speak in school or as an adult.

The Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 shows that Welsh speakers who started learning to speak the language at home as young children are much more likely to speak the language daily or be fluent in Welsh compared with those who started learning to speak Welsh at school or as an adult or elsewhere.

Welsh speakers' confidence in speaking the language

Welsh speakers aged 16 or older were asked how confident they usually felt when speaking the language.

Chart 10: Confidence of Welsh speakers aged 16 or older when speaking the language, July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

Almost two in three Welsh speakers aged 16 or over usually felt confident when speaking the language (40% very confident, and 24% fairly confident).

Among Welsh speakers aged 16 or older who speak the language daily, 87% indicated that they usually felt confident when speaking Welsh (68% very confident, and 20% fairly confident). This compares with 38% for those Welsh speakers who speak the language less often than daily (8% very confident, and 29% fairly confident). Please note that the sum of the individual percentages does not always match the total in each case, due to rounding to the nearest integer.

Almost every fluent Welsh speaker usually felt confident when speaking the language, with 77% very confident, and 21% fairly confident. This compares with 29% of those Welsh speakers who are not fluent (1% very confident, 28% fairly confident).

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Of those who usually feel confident when speaking Welsh, the vast majority (67%) have started learning to speak Welsh at home, as a young child.

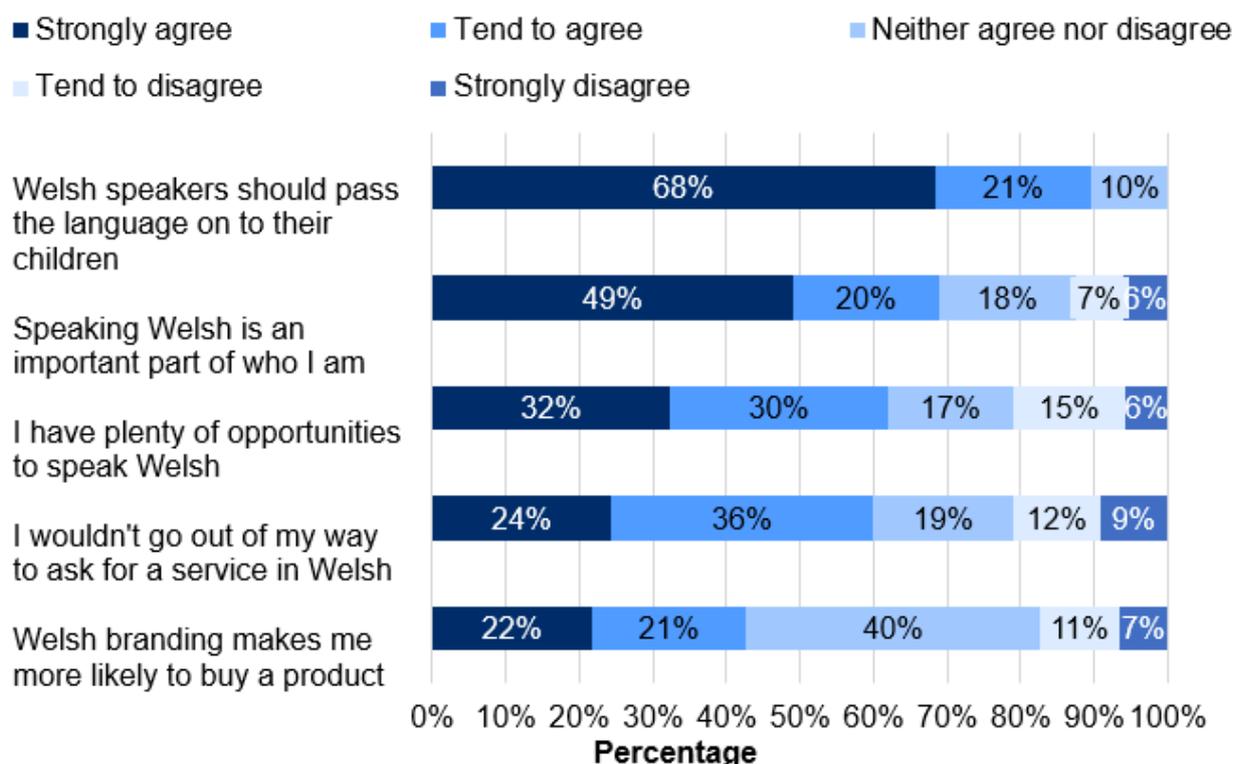
Views on the Welsh language

One of the themes of Cymraeg 2050 concerns creating suitable conditions and an environment in which the Welsh language and its speakers can thrive. Questions about Welsh speakers' views of the language were added to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 to find out more about their attitudes towards the Welsh language.

The National Survey for Wales 2017-18 included some questions about people's views regarding the Welsh language, including the views of Welsh speakers about the language. This is the first time that the Welsh language use survey, however, has included questions regarding the views of Welsh speakers about the language.

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements that some may say about the Welsh language.

Chart 11: The views of Welsh speakers aged 16 or older about the Welsh language. July 2019 to March 2020



Source: Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20

Note: A very small number of respondents noted that they tended to disagree or strongly disagree that Welsh speakers should pass on the language to their children. These people are combined with the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed.

90% of Welsh speakers aged 16 or older agreed that Welsh speakers should pass on the language to their children (68% strongly agreed, and 21% tended to agree). Please note that the sum of the individual percentages does not always match the total in each case, due to rounding to the nearest integer.

69% of Welsh speakers also agreed with the statement that speaking Welsh is an important part of who they are (49% strongly agreed, and 20% tended to agree).

21% of Welsh speakers indicated that they disagreed with the statement that they wouldn't go out of their way to ask for a service in Welsh (9% strongly disagreed, and 12% tended to disagree).

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62% of Welsh speakers agreed that they had enough opportunities to speak Welsh (32% strongly agreed, and 30% tended to agree).

More Welsh speakers did not agree or disagree with the statement about whether they were more likely to buy goods with Welsh names or branding than in relation to any of the other statements. 40% stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Children and young people who spoke Welsh were asked different questions about their views on the language. The findings are not included here because the sample size for children and young people is too small to report in full.

Quality and methodology information

The purpose of the Welsh Language Use Survey is to know how often, where, when and with whom Welsh speakers use Welsh, and to know more about their abilities in the language. We consider that the census remains the main source of information about the Welsh Language ability of the population aged three or older in Wales, but this survey provides us with information about the use of the language by Welsh speakers.

The Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 is a continuation of research that was undertaken jointly by the [Welsh Language Commissioner and the Welsh Government in 2013-15](#). There were also [Welsh Language Use Surveys in 2004 to 2006](#), carried out by the Welsh Language Board.

The Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 was carried out as part of the [National Survey for Wales](#), in similar fashion to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. The fieldwork was carried out between 1 July 2019 and 14 March 2020.

The questionnaires used for the 2019-20 survey were developed by the Welsh Government following consultation with users of statistics about the Welsh language. Most of the questions had not changed since the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. However, some new questions were introduced, for

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example, about the views of Welsh speakers about the language, and the confidence of Welsh speakers when speaking the language.

There were two types of questionnaire, one for adults (aged 16 or over) and one for children and young people (aged 3 to 15). The questionnaire for children and young people was completed by the parent or guardian, or by the young person if they wished to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaires could be completed in English or Welsh. Copies of both questionnaires can be found on the [survey materials](#) webpage.

The survey response rate was 47%, i.e. of all Welsh speakers identified in the National Survey for Wales, 47% of those completed and returned the questionnaire. This is slightly higher than the response rate of 44% in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15.

Further [technical information and information about the quality of the National Survey for Wales](#) can be found on our website. Technical information and quality information on the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 (including further information on acceptance, return and response rates for the survey) will be included in the National Survey for Wales 2019-20 reports once available.

The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Following the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15, the original intention was to conduct the follow-up Welsh language use survey between July 2019 and March 2021, namely the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-21. However, due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the survey ended earlier than planned, during March 2020. What is presented here, therefore, is the results of the first nine months of the survey, the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20.

The results of the survey are based on a sample of just over 2,200 Welsh speakers. The sample size of the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15 was almost 7,200 people. As the 2019-20 sample size is smaller than planned, it is not possible to analyse the survey results by local authority as was done in the previous surveys. We will explore the possibility of publishing data below the Wales level in future statistical bulletins.

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The Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20 was a supplementary element of the National Survey for Wales, in similar fashion to the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. Adults randomly selected to participate in the National Survey for Wales were asked to identify all members of their household who could speak Welsh. All Welsh speakers were then given a copy of the Welsh Language Use Survey questionnaire to be completed and returned by post. As a result of the pandemic, the National Survey for Wales had to switch from interviewing people face-to-face to gathering data over the phone due to COVID-19 restrictions. In addition to the change in the method of collecting data for the National Survey for Wales, it was not possible to obtain telephone numbers for new samples, so it was decided to re-contact previous respondents of the National Survey for Wales so that the survey could continue. It was not possible, therefore, to identify more Welsh speakers, so the Welsh Language Use Survey had to end in March 2020.

However, as this survey was carried out in the period before the imposition of restrictions across the UK due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic at the end of March 2020, the survey provides a timely baseline on the use of Welsh in the period before the pandemic. We will consider when we should carry out a further Welsh language use survey in due course, following the publication of the results of the 2021 Census.

The Welsh Government has published [a report on the findings of a survey about the effects of COVID-19 on Welsh language community groups](#) since the start of the pandemic. Known groups were asked to complete the survey, which gathered evidence on how the groups had operated before the pandemic, whether they had been able to operate since the start of the first lockdown in March 2020 and what their expectations were for the future.

Future plans

Following the publication of the initial findings of the Welsh Language Use Survey 2019-20, it is our intention to publish the findings of the remainder of the survey in separate statistical bulletins, by theme, combining data from the National Survey for Wales 2019-20 where relevant. We will also explore the

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possibility of publishing data below the Wales level, if the sample size allows.

National Statistics Status

The **UK Statistics Authority** has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 which means that they comply with the **Code of Practice for Statistics**.

The status of National Statistics means that the official statistics meet the highest standards of reliability, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They may be designated National Statistics status following an assessment by the management arm of the UK Statistics Authority. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of compliance with the Code, including the value they add in decision-making and to public debate.

It is the responsibility of the Welsh Government to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we are concerned whether these statistics still meet the appropriate standards, we will discuss this promptly with the Authority. National Statistics status can be abolished at any time when the highest standards have not been maintained, and re-awarded when the standards are reinstated.

A **full assessment** of these statistics was carried out against the Code of Practice in 2016.

Since the last review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to conform to the Code of Practice for Statistics, and we have made improvements, such as consulting further with our users on their needs concerning the use of the Welsh language.

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