

Diversity on Welsh housing association boards: 2023

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 2023 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 2021 data and, as such, may not present a current picture of the diversity of population in Wales.²









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.

2. Key findings

- Proportion of female chairs (35%) decreased by 9% since 2020 when it stood at 44%.
- Age profile of board members remains largely static after rapid reduction in the proportion of over 65's in the past few years. Further 7% reduction in the proportion of 65+ chairs this year in favour of 45-64 year olds.
- The proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic board members continues to grow and stands at 9%. No representation amongst chairs.
- Disabled people continued to be the most underrepresented board member group at 9% in 2023. Positively the proportion of disabled chairs grew by 6% this year.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual people as a group continue to be well represented.
- There were no trans board members in 2023.
- Welsh language abilities continue to be slightly better for RSL board members than general population.

3. Change since last year

Group	Change 2023	Findings
Women		Proportion of women on RSL boards remains static (43%), with a 3% reduction in proportion of female chairs (35%) and 2% increase in subsidiary boards.
Over 65's		Proportion of board members over 65 has remained largely static since 2020 (16-18%), after rapid reduction in the preceding years. In 2023, we saw another big reduction of 7% in 65+ chairs, in favour of increase by 9% in 45-64 year olds.
Younger		After initial increases in proportions of 30-44 years old across boards & chairs, this has largely remained static, although chairs got slightly younger (as above).
Black, Asian, ethnic minority	 board members	The proportion of black, Asian and ethnic minority RSL and subsidiary board members once again increased by 2% for both groups which is a positive trend. All chairs remained white
Disabled		The, the proportion of disabled chairs increased from 3% in 2021 to 9% in 2023 although it remains low. Disabled people remain the most significantly underrepresented group on housing association boards although in 2023 we saw no further decline in board members.
Gay, bisexual, other		This group is well represented on housing association boards with a 6% increase amongst chairs in 2023.
Welsh language		Welsh speaking and reading of board members and chairs remain slightly higher than that of general population
Gender identity		In 2023, as in a year ago, there were no board members or chairs whose gender identity was different to that registered at birth.

4. Gender

- Proportion of women on housing association boards (43%) has remained largely the same since 2017.
- The picture of women on boards including subsidiary boards increased by 2% to 41% in 2023.
- Representation of female chairs (35%) decreased by 9% since 2020 and women remain most 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.

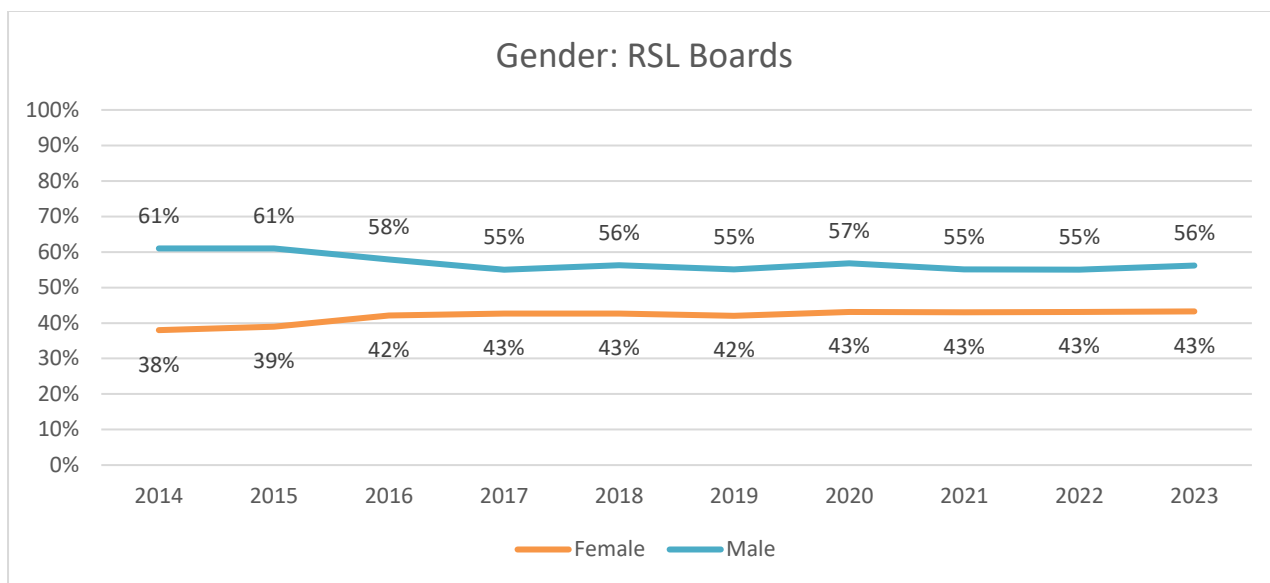


Fig 1. Gender data for RSL boards 2023 and previous years.

According to Census 2021 Welsh population consists of 51% women and 49% men while social tenants population consists of 54% women and 46% men.

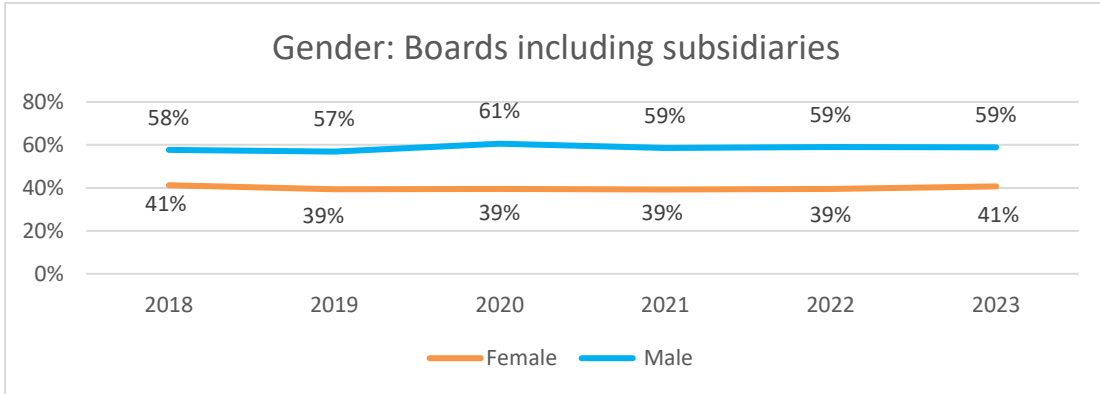


Fig 2. Gender data for RSL boards including subsidiaries 2023 and previous years.

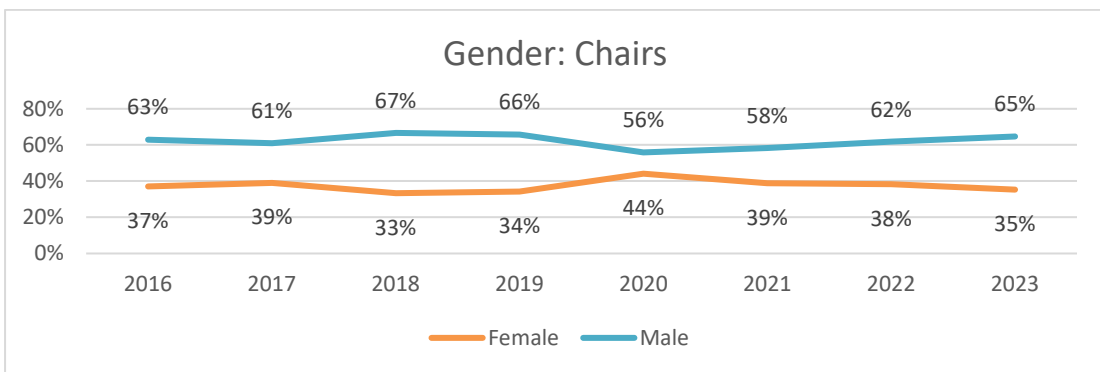


Fig 3. Gender data for RSL chairs 2022 and previous years.

5. Age

- Proportion of board members over 65 years old has remained largely static since 2020 (16-18%), after rapid reduction in the preceding years. In 2023, we saw another big reduction of 7% in 65+ chairs, in favour of increase by 9% in 45-64 year olds.
- After initial increases in proportions of 30-44 years old across boards & chairs, this has largely remained static, although chairs got slightly younger (as above).

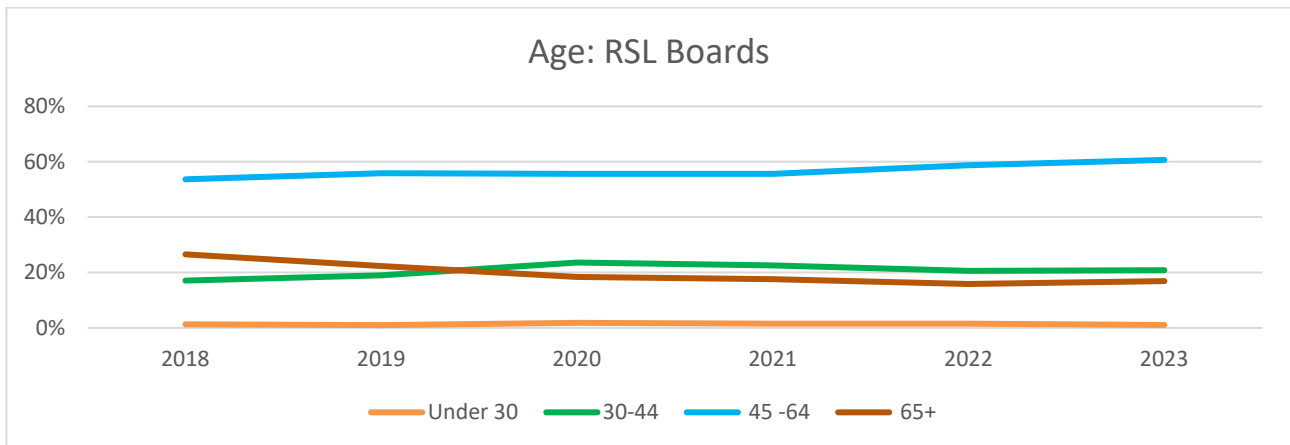


Fig 4. Age data for RSL boards 2023 and previous years.

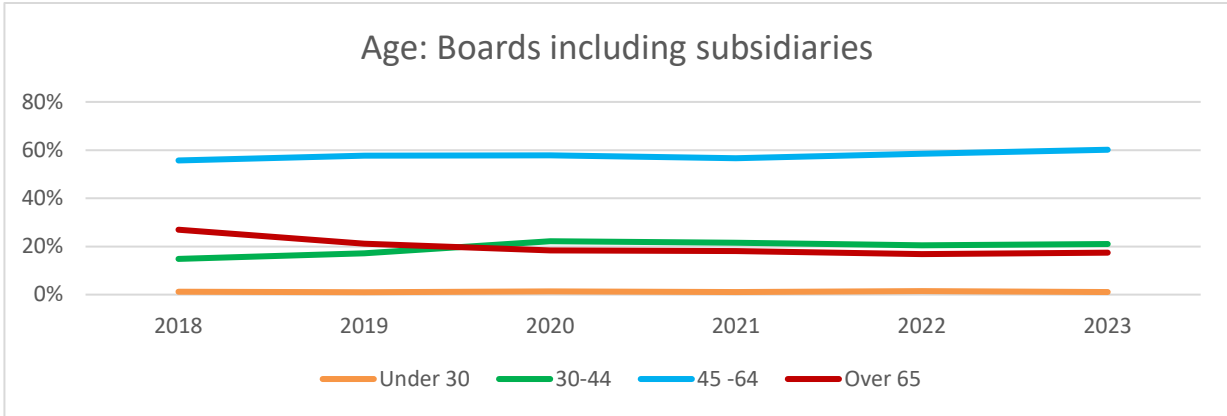


Fig 5. Age data for RSL boards including subsidiaries: 2023 and previous years.

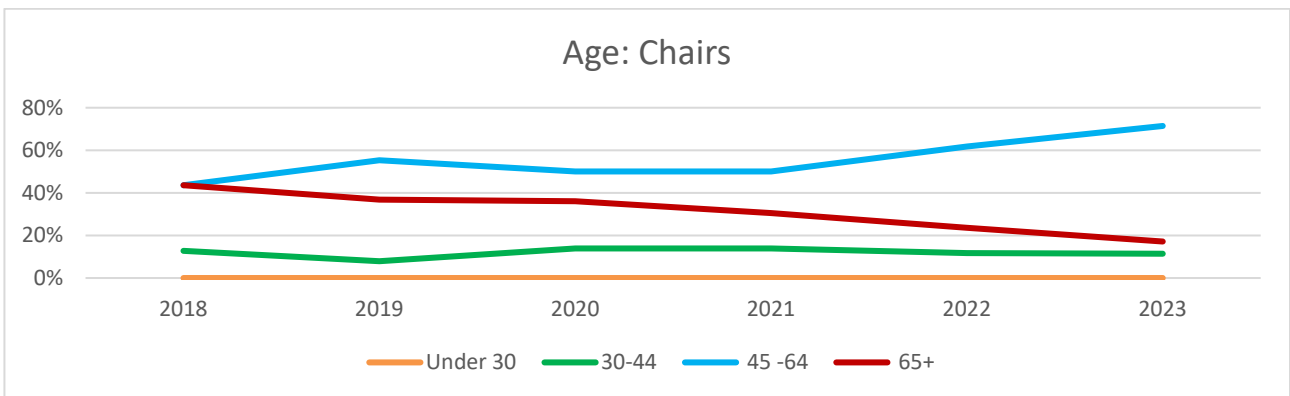


Fig 6. Age data for RSL chairs: 2023 and previous years.

6. Race

- According to Census 2021, 6.3% of Welsh population and 5.2% of social tenants are from various Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds (other than white).
- The proportion of black, Asian and ethnic minority RSL (9%) and subsidiary board members (8%) once again increased by 2% for both groups which is a positive trend.
- In 2022, as in previous years, all housing association chairs were white, and greater diversity amongst chairs would be encouraged.

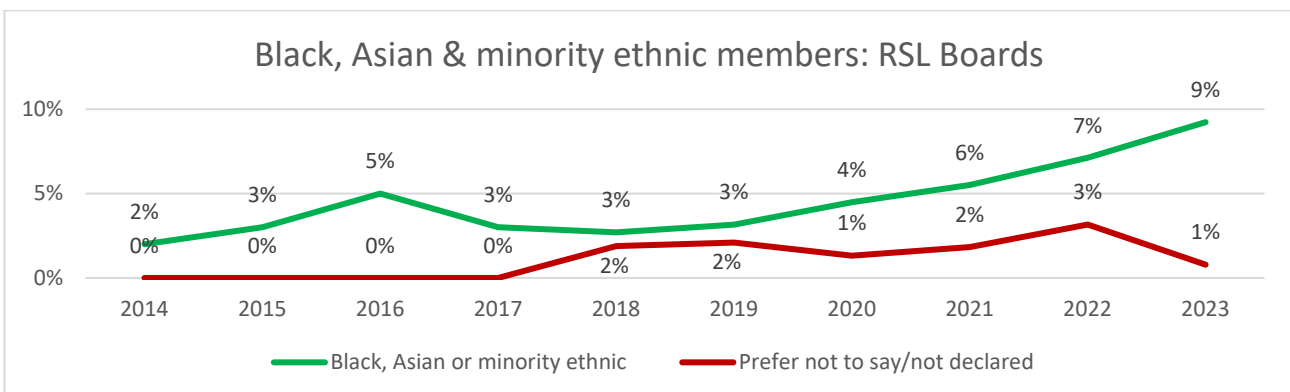


Fig 7. Ethnic minority RSL board members: 2023 and previous years.

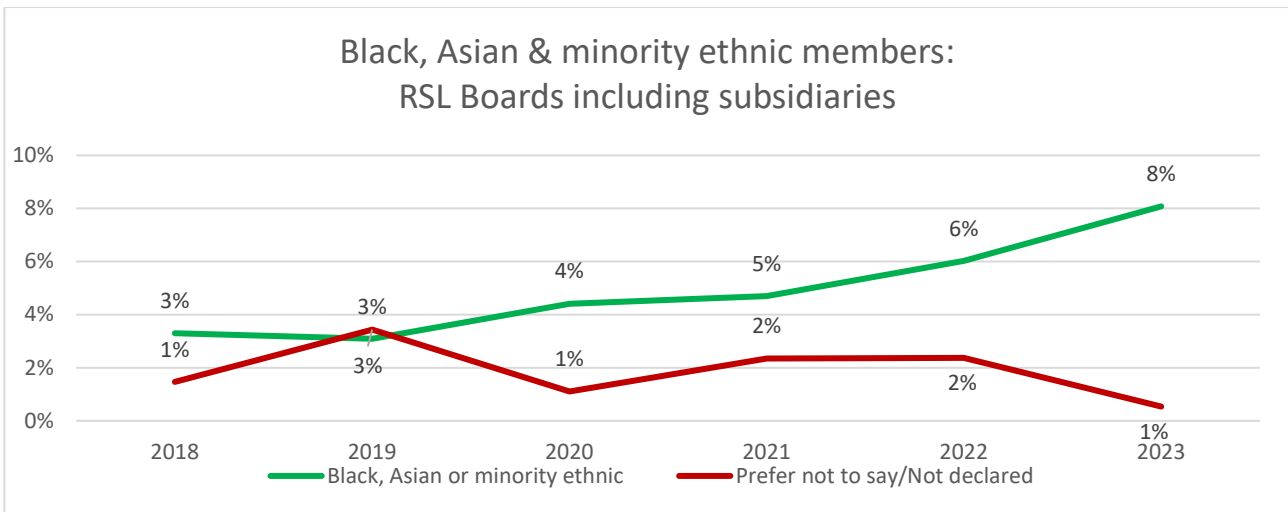


Fig 8. Ethnic minority board members (RSL and subsidiary boards): 2023 and previous years.

7. Disability

- Census 2021 shows that 22% of Welsh population is classed as disabled under the Equality Act 2010. Census 2021 shows that 34% of social tenants were disabled.
- Disabled people remain the most significantly underrepresented group on housing association boards although the proportion (9%) remained mostly static since 2020 after a rapid reduction.
- The proportion of disabled chairs increased from 3% in 2021 to 9% in 2023 although it remains low.

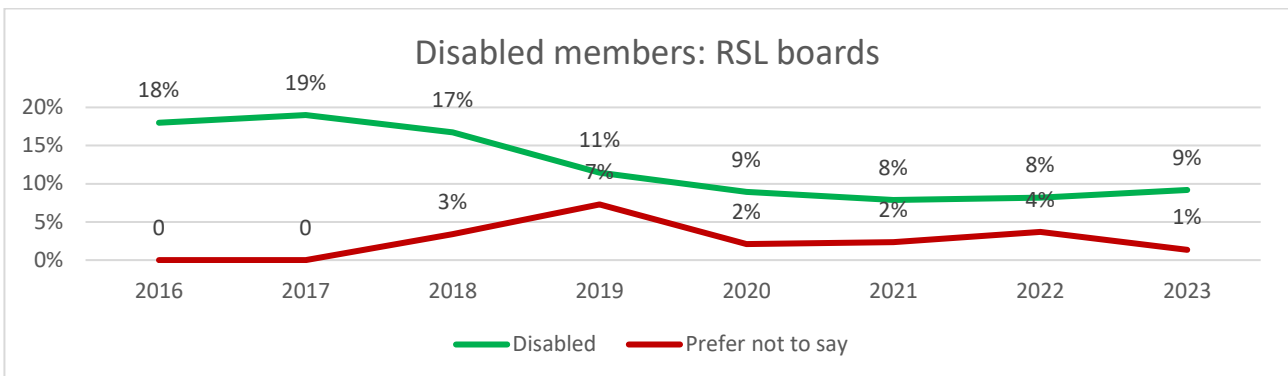


Fig 8. Disabled RSL board members: 2023 and previous years.

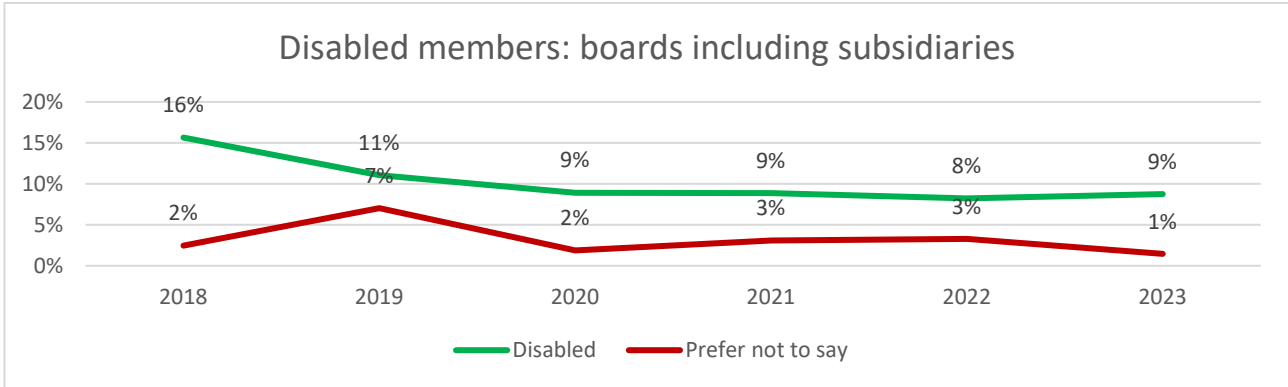


Fig 9. Disabled members of RSL boards including subsidiaries: 2023 and previous years.

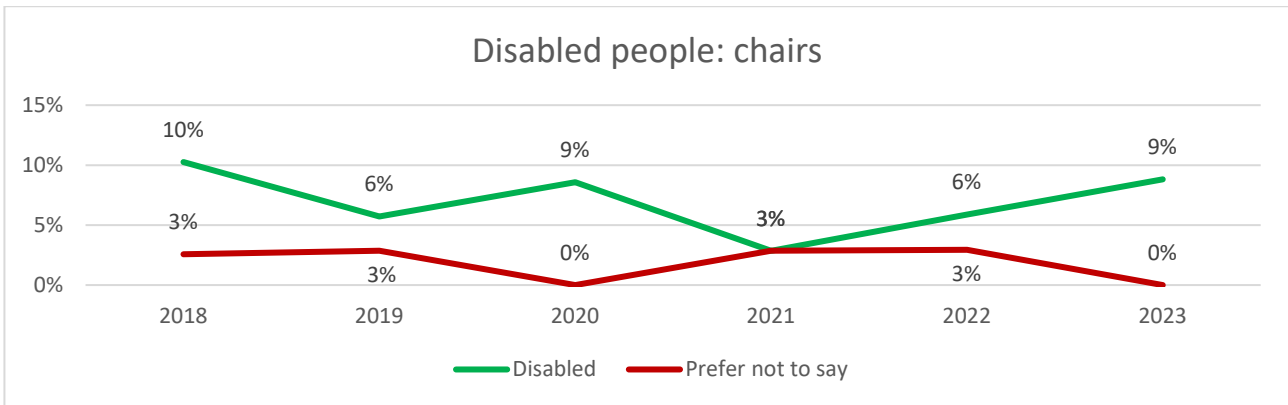


Fig 10. Disabled RSL chairs: 2023 and previous years.

8. Sexual orientation

- Census 2021 shows that 3% of people over 16 years of age in Wales are Gay, Bisexual or have a sexual orientation other than straight with 3.3% of social tenants belonging to these groups.
- This group is well represented on RSL boards, boards including subsidiaries and amongst chairs, with a 6% increase amongst chairs in 2023.

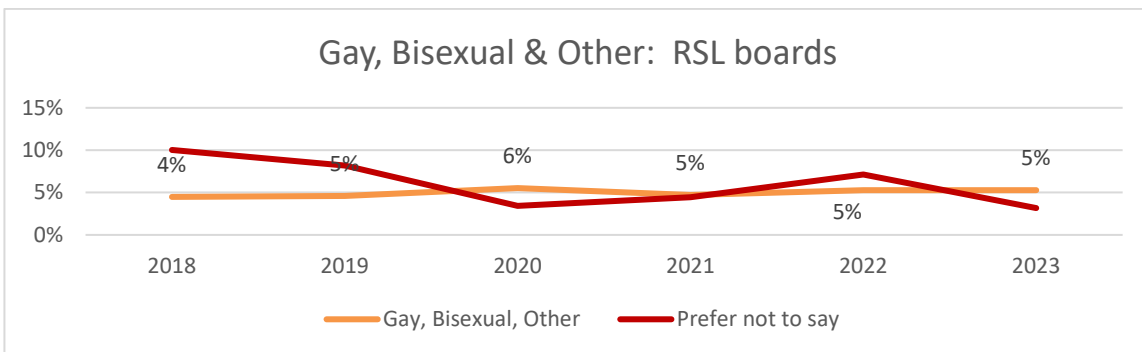


Fig 11. Gay, bisexual & other (than straight) RSL board members: 2023 and previous years.

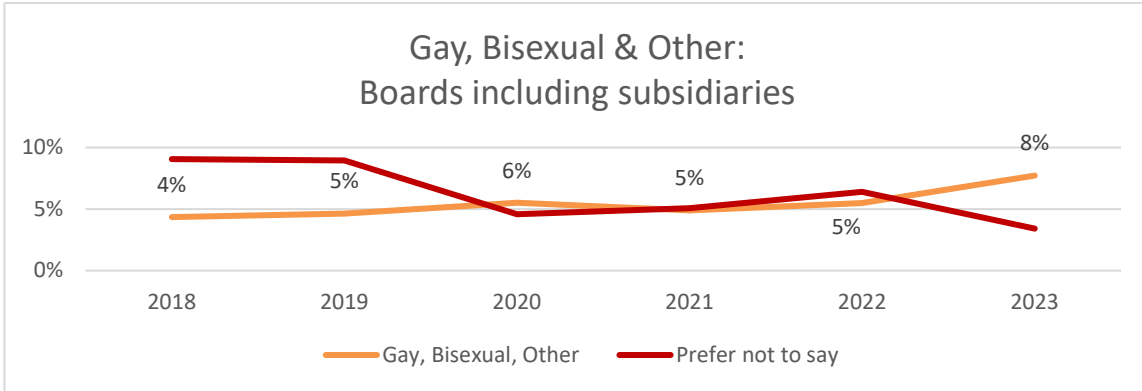


Fig 12. Gay, bisexual & other (than straight) RSL board members (including subsidiaries): 2023 and previous years.

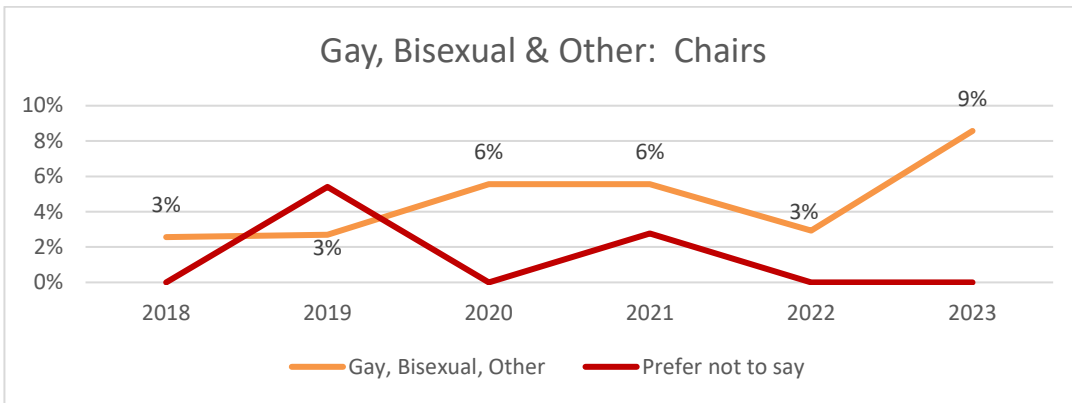


Fig 13. Gay, bisexual & other (than straight) Chairs: 2023 and previous years.

9. Gender Identity

2023 was the second year where gender identity data was collected. As in previous year there were no board members or chairs whose gender identity differed from that registered at birth.

10. Welsh Language

10.1. Introduction

2021 data from Welsh Annual Population Survey (APS)³ 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

³ [Annual Population Survey: Welsh language \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

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

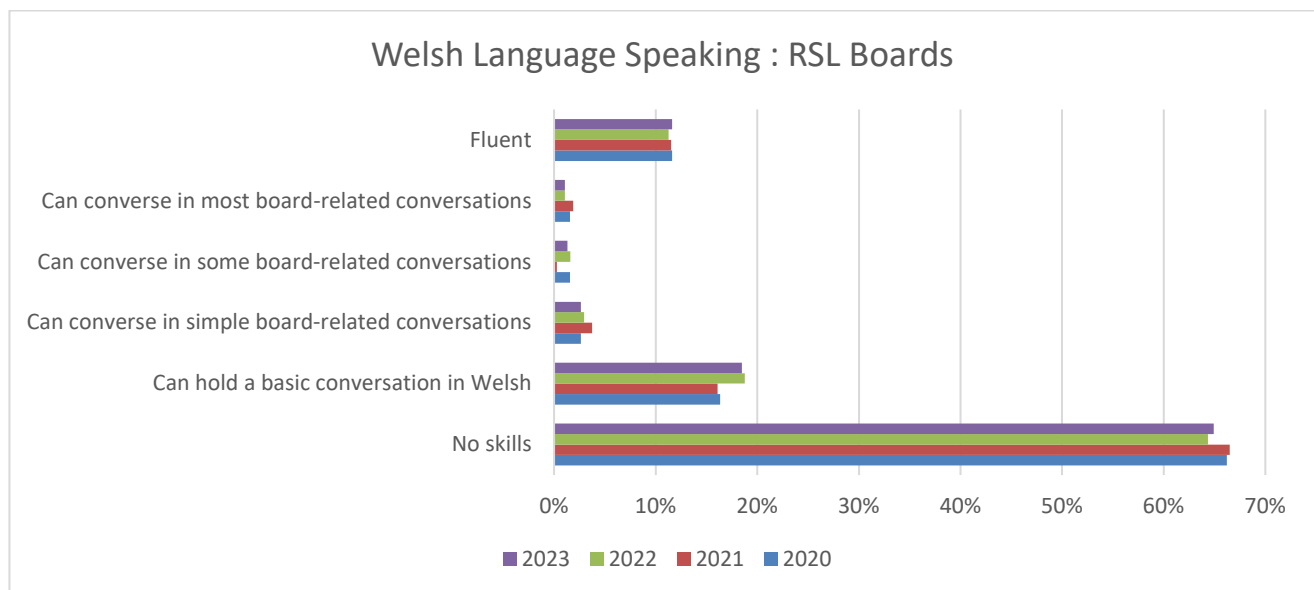
Reading

- 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

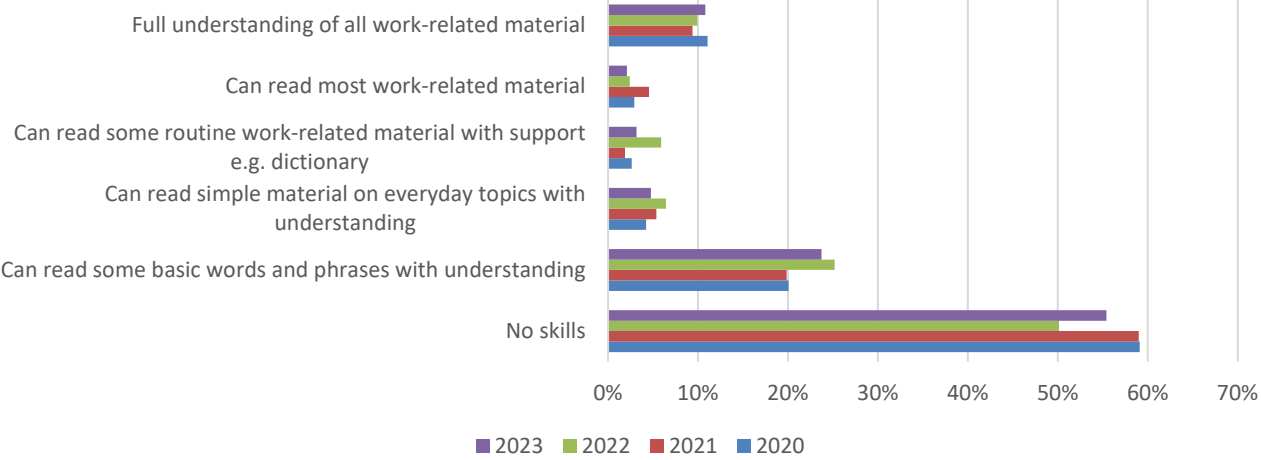
10.2. Welsh language skill: Findings

- More board members and chairs on RSL boards have Welsh language speaking and reading skills as compared to Welsh population
- 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

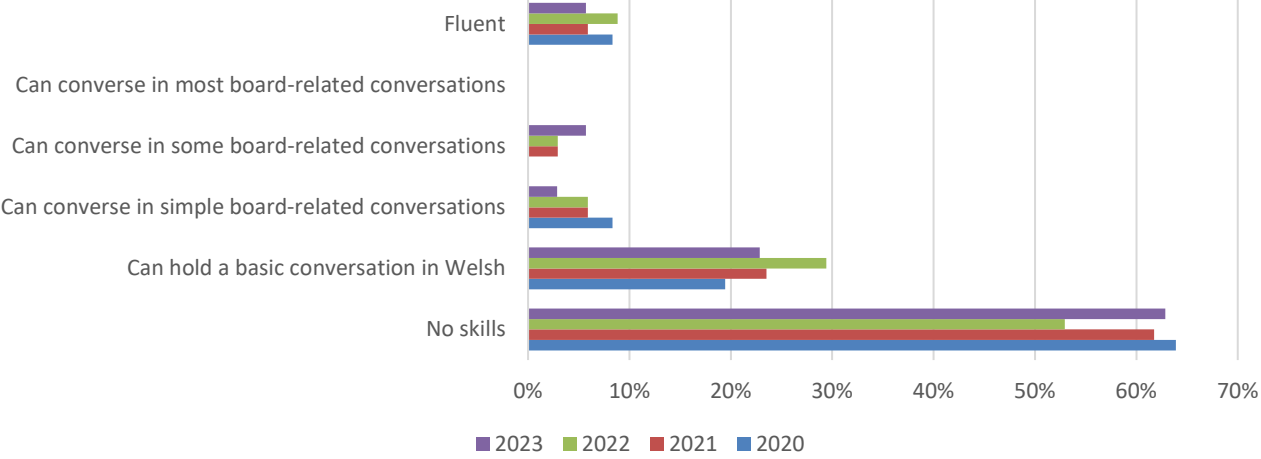


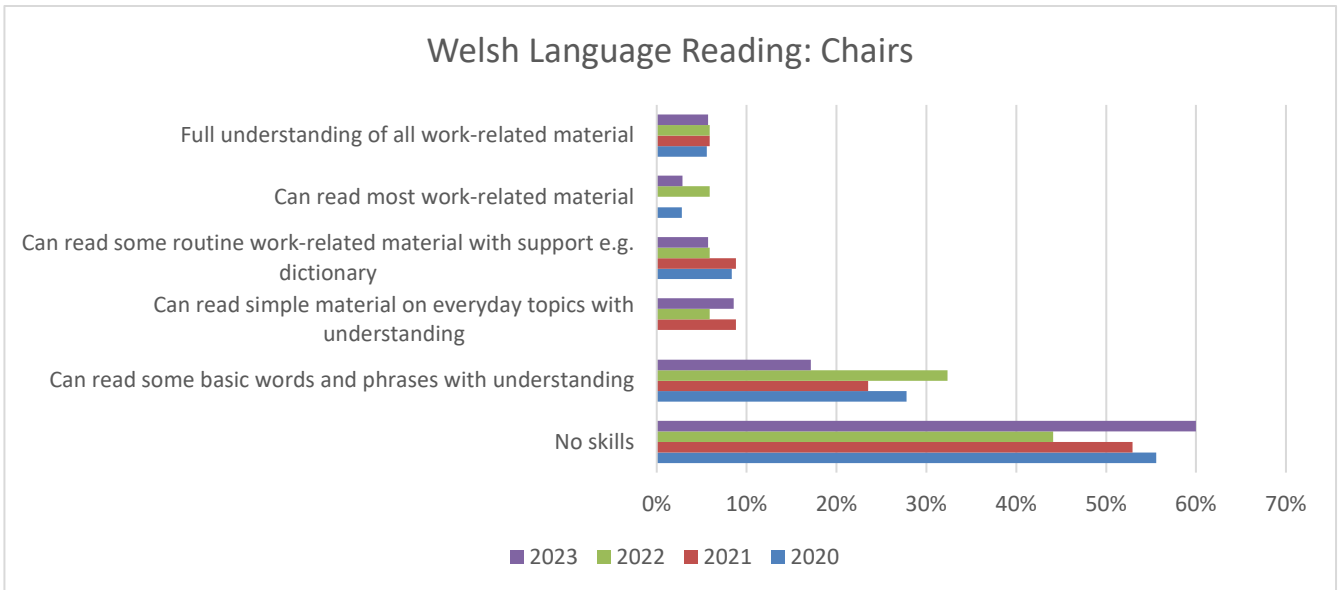
Welsh Language Reading : RSL Boards



RSL Chairs

Welsh Language Speaking : Chairs





11. 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:

- Continued increase in racial representation amongst board members
- Good Welsh language skills compared to general population
- Increase in representation of disabled people and people of working age amongst chairs (although still underrepresented)

Most significant underrepresentation has been identified amongst the following groups:

- Disabled board members/chairs: this is the most significantly underrepresented group with proportion on average three times lower than proportion amongst tenants
- Female chairs: Proportion of female chairs has decreased by 9% since 2020 and stands at 35%.
- Ethnic minority chairs: There are no Black, Asian or ethnic minority chairs.
- Trans – there are no board members identifying as trans

The following recommendations could help boards address underrepresentation on their boards

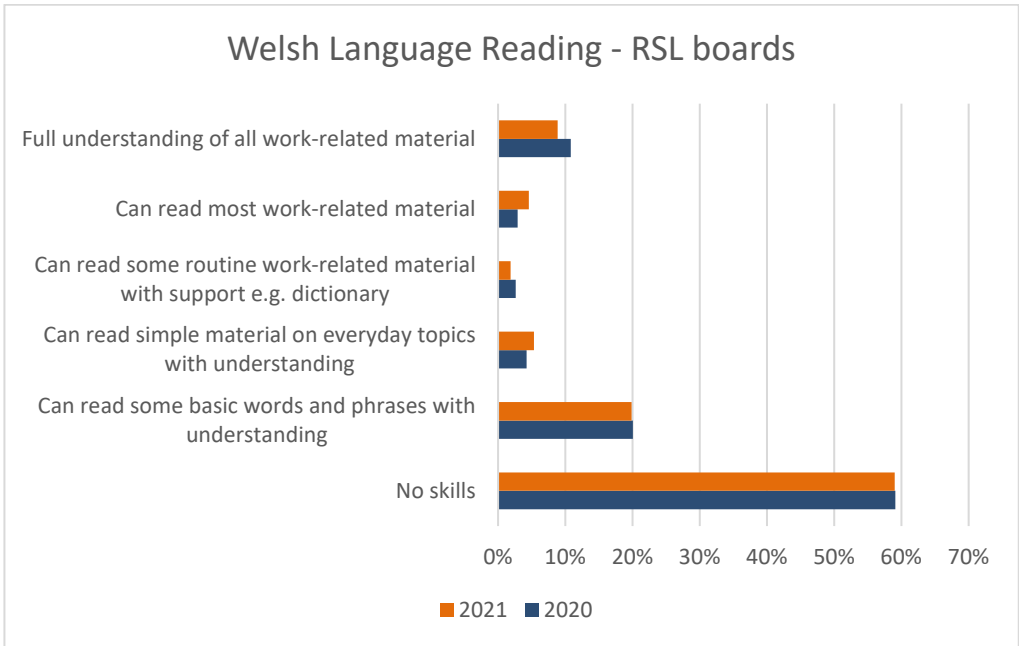
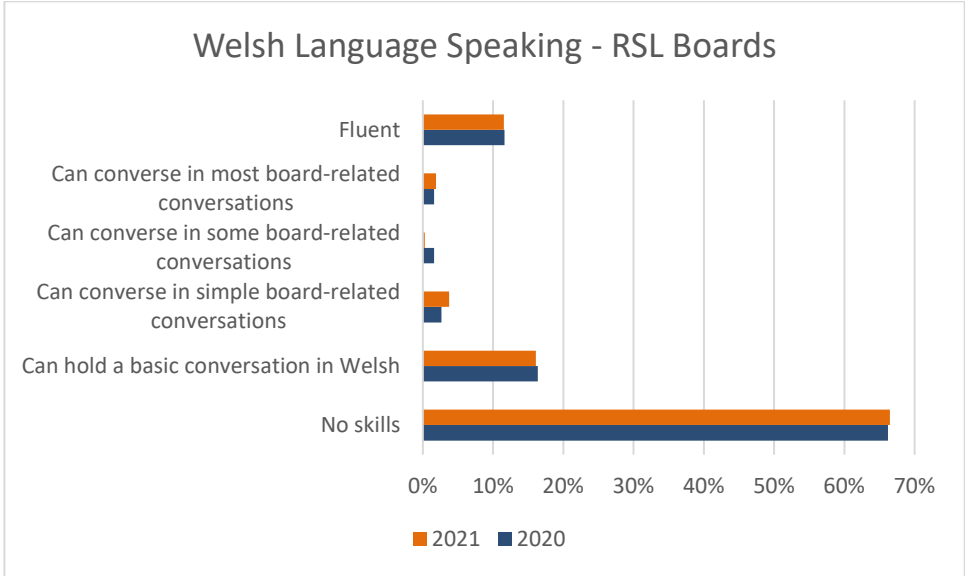
1. Boards should review and publish their diversity data annually, including comparison to local population and tenant population data and action they are taking to address underrepresentation.
2. Boards should maintain the momentum gained in relation to increasing racial diversity in particular through focus on inclusive board cultures to ensure sustainability of positive outcomes.
3. Boards should take action aimed at increasing board diversity in the most underrepresented groups according to their data; this could include:

- i. Setting measurable targets
 - ii. Taking action to increase the pool of diverse candidates interviewed for board positions, e.g. via [Pathway to Board Academy](#)
 - iii. Training all board members, senior leaders and recruitment panels in unconscious bias
 - iv. 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 should continue to monitor the diversity of board members and compliance with the CHC Code on Governance and act on the areas of highest underrepresentation.
5. The regulator should publish this analysis and bring it to the attention of housing association boards.
6. Boards may want to consider adopting or using resources available to improve equality and diversity including, for example, [Recruitment & Diversity - Tai Pawb](#), [Healthcheck for Boards](#), [Deeds no Words pledge](#) or [QED Award](#), [Zero Racism Wales](#), [the Race Code](#), [Equal Power Equal Voice](#), and other initiatives aimed at increasing diversity.

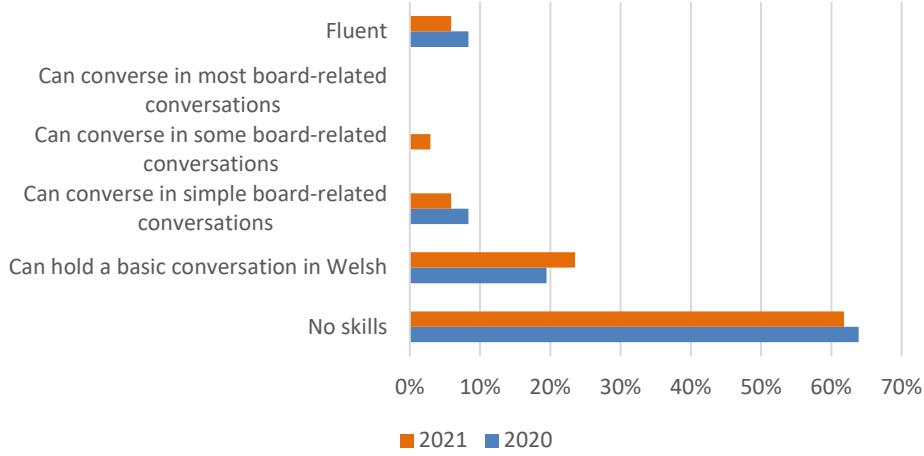
Analysis and report prepared for the Welsh Government by Tai Pawb, April 2024. All board statistics based on figures provided by the Welsh Government regulation team.

Appendix 1

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



Welsh Language Speaking - RSL Chairs



Welsh Language Reading - RSL Chairs

