

# A Survey of The Welsh Language: The 1992 Welsh Social Survey



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## Introduction

This article describes a survey of the Welsh language. The survey was the largest survey ever - with the exception of the Census - to have inquired into both the ability of people to speak Welsh, and the degree to which the language is actually used.

The survey formed part of the 1992 Welsh Social Survey. Full advantage was taken of the multi-functional character of the Welsh Office to ensure that this survey met several disparate policy needs in an extremely cost-effective manner.

## Background

In Wales, the Census has asked questions about Welsh since 1891. In that year, 54 per cent of the population were returned as Welsh speaking. From that time until 1981, the story was one of continual decline: in 1981 only 18.9 per cent claimed to be Welsh speakers. However, also in that year the proportion of school age children who were Welsh speaking increased for the first time and the 1991 Census showed a further increase. These results were seen as encouraging signs that the long decline of Welsh was finally being arrested.

There has been a growing demand to know what the bare census figures mean: how well do the Census defined Welsh speakers speak Welsh, when is the language used, by whom and in what situations? Since the establishment of S4C (the Welsh Fourth Channel) in 1982 and the inclusion of Welsh in the National Curriculum in Wales it has become more important than ever to answer some of these questions.

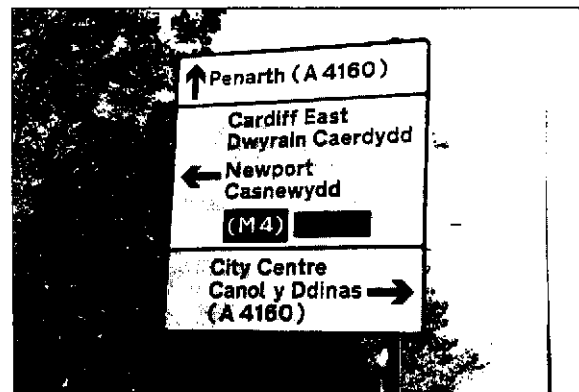
In 1992, the Government announced its intention to introduce a new Welsh Language Act. A Bill was presented to the House of Lords in December 1992 and completed its progress through Parliament in

October 1993. One of the Bill's main provisions is to establish the already existing Welsh Language Board as a statutory authority with a wide range of responsibilities including agreeing with public authorities operating in Wales statutory schemes for providing services to Welsh speaking customers. These events and considerations formed the background to the Welsh Office's decision that further information to supplement that available from the Census was required.

## The 1992 Welsh Social Survey

The Welsh Office was planning to undertake a national house condition survey in 1992-93 using a two-stage design. The first stage would involve a large sample interview survey. The second stage would be a physical survey, undertaken by building surveyors, of a smaller number of properties targeted by the first stage survey. It was realised that the interview survey could be enhanced to meet the requirement for detailed information about the language.

As planning for the first stage went ahead in 1992, the Secretary of State for Wales took over responsibility



for the delivery of training in Wales from the Department of Employment's Office for Wales. In order to monitor progress towards meeting the national training targets the Welsh Office decided that information was needed about the training and educational

qualifications of the workforce, at both national and Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) area levels. The social survey was again identified as being a suitable means of collecting this information. The cost-effectiveness to the Welsh Office of this approach was further enhanced by the securing of additional funding for the survey from all the TECs in Wales.

The 1992 Welsh Social Survey thus had three main objectives:

- to provide information on housing policy topics and to enable a stratified sample design to be implemented for a subsequent Welsh House Condition Survey
- to provide information on the Welsh language to supplement the information available from the Census of Population
- to provide information on training and education to both the Welsh Office and all the Welsh Training and Enterprise Councils.

## Methodology

### Survey method

For both Welsh and training and education, it was highly desirable that as far as possible the individual should be the informant, rather than the head of household. Thus, after a successful pilot, the following survey method was implemented.

Two main questionnaires were used: one to collect information on household composition and housing related issues and one to collect information on the Welsh language and training.

The first questionnaire was used with the head of every household identified at the specified sampled addresses.

After an interview with the head of household, a separate questionnaire was used for each individual, combining questions on Welsh and training, either in an interview, or by means of on the spot self-completion, with all present aged 16 or over. These questionnaires were also completed in respect of children aged

3 to 15 with the head of household again acting as the informant. In the case of persons aged 16 or over who were absent at the time of interview questionnaires were left for self-completion and return by post.

All questionnaires were available in either English or Welsh and interviewers were instructed to ask which language version respondents wished to use.

### Questionnaire about Welsh

The key concern was to obtain a fuller understanding of what the Census figures meant. It was therefore necessary to try to ask exactly the same question as asked in the Census and then to elicit further information which would enable an enhanced understanding to the response to be gained.

The Census form, addressed to the head, or joint head, or members of the household aged 16 or over, asked in respect of every individual in the household:

“Does the person speak, read or write Welsh?”

Responses were recorded using separate boxes for the following:

- speaks Welsh
- reads Welsh
- writes Welsh
- does not speak, read or write Welsh.

In the Social Survey, the head of household was asked in respect of every member of the household in an interview “Does[the person]speak Welsh?” (It was important to use 'Does' as the verb rather than 'Can' which is the question asked of Gaelic speakers in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. This was varied when asking individuals about reading to see what effect, if any, this semantic difference has).

Individuals aged 16 or over were asked the same question in respect of themselves alone, subsequent to the interview with the head of household. This meant that for an individual for whom a response was recorded on a Welsh and training questionnaire there were two measures on whether the individual spoke Welsh. Thus:

- the reliability of the head of household as an informant about the language used by house

hold members could be assessed (see Technical Footnote below), and

- any tendency for Welsh speakers to be more or less inclined to respond to the Welsh and training questionnaire could be assessed.

Over 30 other language related questions were designed to throw light on a number of sociolinguistic issues. For example, to monitor intergenerational transmission of the language, questions were included about the language ability of both the mother and the father, and Welsh speakers were asked which language had been spoken mostly as a child at home. Other questions dealt with the use of Welsh in a variety of situations (language domains), reading ability and habits, viewing and listening habits, interest in learning Welsh and attempts to do so. From the point of view of aiding interpretation of the Census results, the key question was that which asked all individuals, whether or not they claimed to speak Welsh, to choose a statement about ability in Welsh which described themselves best. Response to this question permitted the population's ability and usage of Welsh to be represented as a spectrum rather than as the usual Census dichotomy.

### Sample frame and selection

The sample of 19,056 addresses was selected as a stratified random sample from the lists of addresses used to compile the Council Tax Valuation Lists. Stratification was by district authority area. In order to ensure sufficiently precise estimates for individual TEC areas, the local authority district areas within Powys, Clwyd and Gwynedd were sampled more heavily, to varying degrees, than would have been the case had sampling been proportional to the number of addresses in each district authority area.

### Response and estimation methods

12,700 households were successfully interviewed using the household questionnaire and these repre-

sented a response rate of 73.3 per cent of the 17,322 households eligible for inclusion in the survey.

31,920 persons were identified at the 12,700 households and of these 30,632 were aged 3 or over and thus eligible for the Welsh and training questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were obtained for 27,720 of those eligible, a response rate of 90.5 per cent. These returns represent a sample of just under 1 per cent of the total population.

Various sets of weighting factors were calculated in order to produce population estimates. Those for



application to households were calculated for three groupings of Council Tax valuation bands for each district authority. Weights used to obtain population totals incorporated multiplicative factors to correct for an undercount of males aged 15-34. Further factors were calculated to adjust for the non-response by individuals to the separate Welsh and training questionnaires. These latter factors made allowance for a small bias which resulted from achieving a slightly higher response to the individual questionnaires from Welsh speakers.

The resultant population estimates relate to the last quarter of 1992. The estimates relate to the population resident in domestic dwellings and exclude those not resident in households

### Key Results

The 1991 Census showed 18.7 per cent of the population as Welsh speakers. In comparison, the Social Survey has two measures. The first measure is that

based on information provided by the head in each household and this produced an estimate of 20.4 per cent. The second measure, based on the individuals' own assessment, produced an estimate of 21.5 per cent. A 95 per cent confidence interval for the individual based social survey measure was calculated to be 21.5 per cent plus or minus 0.6 percentage points. Account was taken in this calculation of the intra-cluster (household) correlation. The overall design

effect for the whole of Wales was estimated to be 1.6. Given that people are obliged by law to make Census returns whereas response to the Social Survey was wholly voluntary, and that the Social Survey did not, unlike the Census, include persons in institutions, all three measures are very similar (as are the patterns at a county level) and the absolute differences between them are reassuringly small.

**For the whole population, the following spectrum of abilities and uses was found**

Individual's assessment of own ability/use	Individual's own response* to: "Do you speak Welsh?"		
	Yes	No	Total
Cannot speak Welsh and never have		79.2	62.2
Cannot speak Welsh but could once		5.0	3.9
Can only speak a little Welsh	24.2	15.0	17.0
Can speak a fair amount of Welsh	14.4	0.5	3.5
<b>Fluent in Welsh:</b>			
but never/hardly ever speak it	2.1	0.2	0.6
but speak it only occasionally	7.3		1.6
and speak it about half the time	13.2		2.8
and speak it all or most of the time	38.8		8.3
Did not answer		0.1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* apart from 3 to 15 year olds where the informant was the head of household.

The responses suggest that the question "Do you speak Welsh?" is often actually interpreted as a question of ability rather than as a question of usage.

Preliminary results of the survey were issued in a Press Release on 29 July 1993. A final report will be published early next year.

## Technical Footnote

### Head of household's assessment compared to individual's assessment.

*For the same individual*, there was considerable discord between the assessment recorded in response to the question "Does [the person] speak Welsh?" on the household form (for which the head of household was meant to be the informant) and that recorded on the Welsh and training form (for which the individual was the informant if aged 16 or over) in response to exactly the same question.

**By age group the following pattern was found:**

<b>Individual aged:</b>	<b>Percentage of assessments in disagreement</b>
3 - 15	11.5
16 - 29	5.3
30 - 44	3.4
45 - 64	2.9
65 and over	2.9

In every age group analysed, there were more cases of the household form recording a person as not speaking Welsh while the Welsh language and training form recorded them as speaking Welsh, than vice versa. The high percentage of disagreements for the 3 to 15 age group is perplexing as, in theory, the head of household was the informant for both assessments in that age group. The data need to be analysed further but they seem to provide prima facie evidence that the

language assessments for children in particular are rather unstable, even at the same point in time. This is significant for the interpretation of Census results, particularly as the Longitudinal Study of 1971 and 1981 Census data also suggests instability: of those aged 13 to 24 in 1981 who had been Welsh speakers in the 1971 Census, 20 per cent were returned as not speaking Welsh in 1981.

## Acknowledgements

The entire project was overseen by myself on behalf of the Welsh Office. Research and Marketing Ltd of Cardiff was the main contractor (appointed after competitive tendering) and was responsible for all fieldwork and data preparation. Dr Paul Longley, of Bristol University, and Dr Laurence Moore, were appointed as sub-contractors by Research and Marketing. They in turn appointed Mr Roger Thomas of the Joint Centre for Survey Methods as a sub-contractor. In conjunction with myself, Mr Thomas developed the sample design, and Drs Longley and Moore developed the estimation procedures. Dr Moore alone was responsible for the calculation of sampling errors.

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