

Delyth Jewell MS
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations
Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

27 October 2023

Dear Ms Jewell,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 October 2023 following up on several points raised during our meeting with the Committee on 21 September 2023 on the future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales.

Feedback from the 2023 International Census Forum

The 2023 International Census Forum (ICF) was held in Montreal between 2-5 October. There were representatives in attendance from Canada, the United States of America, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Scotland, England & Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The subject of language data collection in the Census was raised at this ICF. In particular, there was discussion around how language is collected in the Census and whether any specific challenges had been experienced. Broadly, no country reported experiencing significant difficulties in collection or reporting.

As an example, in the Canadian Census of Population there are four questions on language. These are: can the person speak English or French well enough to conduct a conversation; what language is spoken on a regular basis at home; what language is spoken most often at home; what is the language first learned at home in childhood and still understood.

Countries reported no issues relating to sense of belonging or any other significant issues when comparing Census with Surveys.

As part of the ICF Communities of Practice (CoP) framework, technical working groups exist to carry work forward in a collaborative way. Language collection would come under the data collection CoP and so best practice and approaches will continue to be shared between countries in this working group.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Welsh Government joint work plan on coherence of Welsh language statistics

We recognise the importance of robust data on Welsh language skills for the Welsh Government, to measure progress against the aim of a million Welsh speakers by

2050. We have conducted initial research into the potential of administrative datasets to provide information about Welsh language skills variables, in particular from education sources. This research has suggested that there is comprehensive coverage of Welsh language skills for school age children. However, the administrative sources available do not allow for production of estimates of Welsh speaking at local authority level based on population characteristics such as age and sex.

We recognise that alternative means of data collection may be needed to produce robust Welsh language statistics, for example through government departments' admin data collection or through surveys. We are keen to work with Welsh government to explore administrative sources further, as well as to explore the use of local data sources to provide this information.

Whilst we work to improve the quality of the administrative data, we will continue to use survey data where required to ensure robust statistics on Welsh language skills are available for policymakers and other data users. We are working closely with Welsh Government colleagues and are jointly conducting an ambitious workplan of research to understand the quality of current data collection sources.

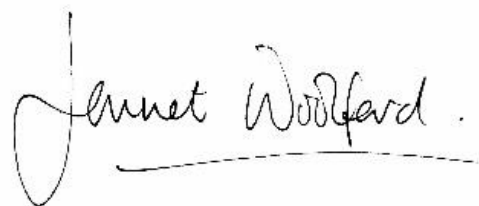
The first results from this workplan have been published and can be found in our joint Differences between estimates of Welsh language ability in Census 2021 and household surveys article¹. This workplan will continue into 2024 and will help to inform Welsh Government's response to the National Statistician's recommendation following the consultation on the future of migration and population statistics in England and Wales.

Please do let us know if you have any other questions, and if we can help the Committee further on either of these topics or any other matters.

Yours sincerely,



Ruth Studley



Jen Woolford

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/differences-between-estimates-welsh-language-ability-census-2021-and-household-surveys>