

2. Demography

This profile has been written in the context of an ageing population. Reactions to the changing age structure of the population vary from concern over the predicted costs of an ageing population through to celebrating the success of longevity in this country.¹ Growth in the proportion of older persons has been slight, but more rapid change is predicted over the next twenty years. Population projections have been used to predict huge increases in the costs of supporting the older population. It is important to have information about the population age structure across Wales because this will have a bearing on the type and level of services required.² However, it should be recognised that chronological age is an imperfect way of defining the 'older' population and their needs. A 70 year old today is likely to be more healthy and independent than a 70 year old 30 years ago.¹ In addition, an individual's need for health and social care will be strongly influenced by the availability of informal carers and, although the cost of health care in people aged 85 and over is far higher than in younger age groups, the highest costs occur in the few months preceding death irrespective of age.¹ Despite its limitations, chronological age is the only viable method for defining 'older persons'. Where possible, information in this profile is broken down by five or ten year age bands to highlight the differences between 'young' and 'old' older people.

This chapter examines life expectancy data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) across Wales and highlights the variation that exists. Information on the proportion of the population made up by persons aged 65 years and over is presented at local authority level. Change in the older persons population at the all-Wales level over the last 10 years is shown as well as projected change over the next 10 years. Finally, the proportion of the population who are non-white and the proportion whose first language is likely to be Welsh are presented since older persons from minority ethnic backgrounds and, in particular, those whose first language is not English, may have needs over and above those of the older population in general.

2.1 Life expectancy

Life expectancy has continued to increase for both males and females in recent years. In 2001, life expectancy at birth in the UK for males was 76 and for females 81 years.³ In Wales, life expectancy is slightly lower at 75 for males and 80 for females.⁴ Figure 2.1.1 shows life expectancy at birth for males, by local authority between 2000-2002. The chart shows that life expectancy is significantly higher than the Welsh average in Ceredigion, Powys, Monmouthshire, Gwynedd and Flintshire and significantly lower in Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly and Newport. The range between the lowest and highest life expectancies for males is approximately five years, a stark illustration of the variation in health outcomes in Wales.

Figure 2.1.1

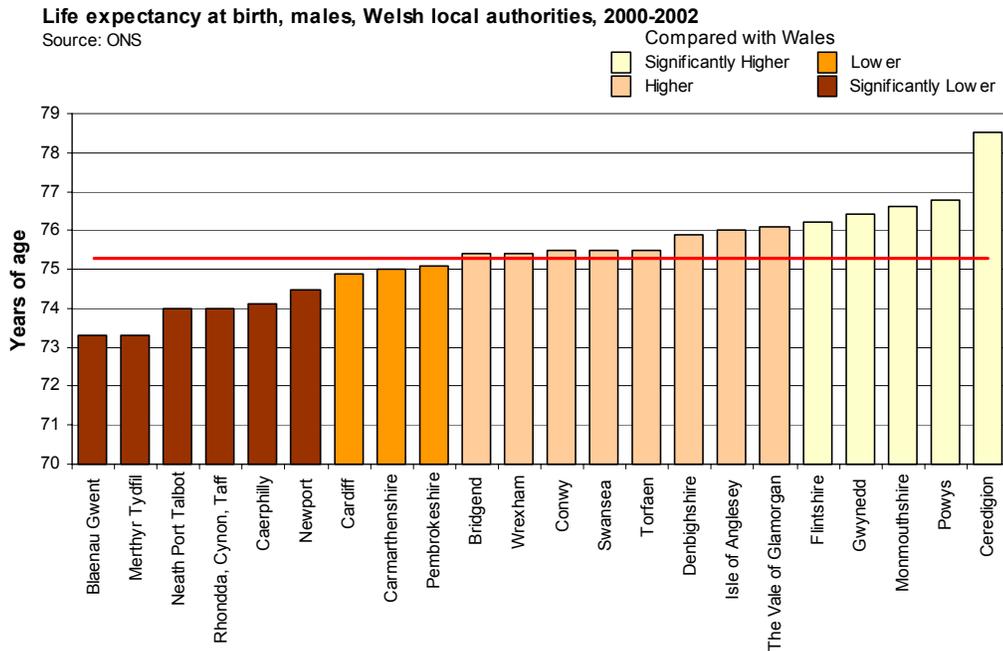
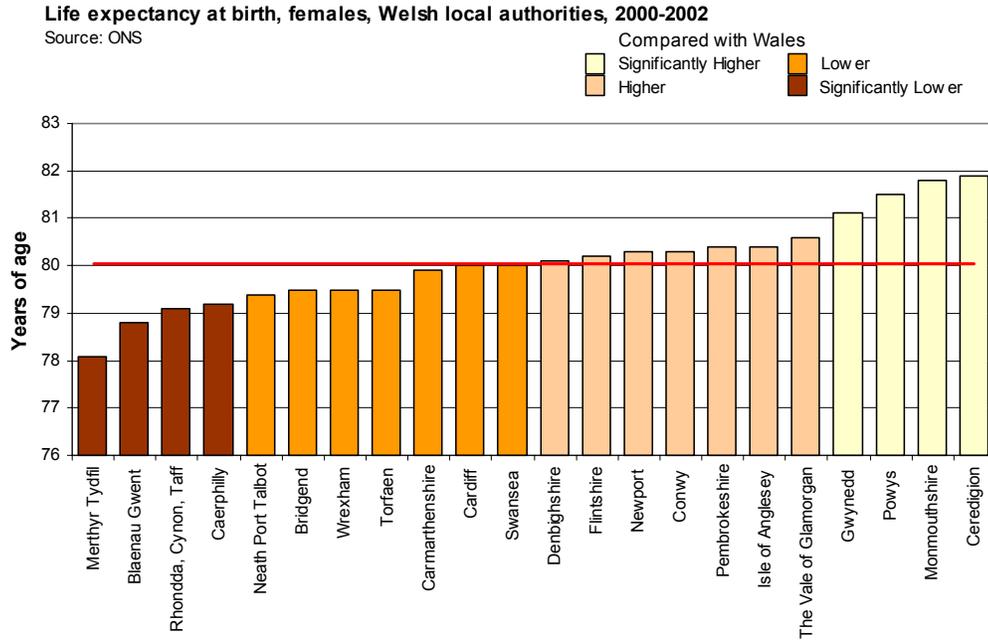


Figure 2.1.2 shows the same information for females. The chart shows significantly higher life expectancy in Ceredigion, Monmouthshire, Powys and Gwynedd. Life expectancy is significantly lower in Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Caerphilly. Variation in life expectancy for females across Wales is slightly lower than that for males at just under four years.

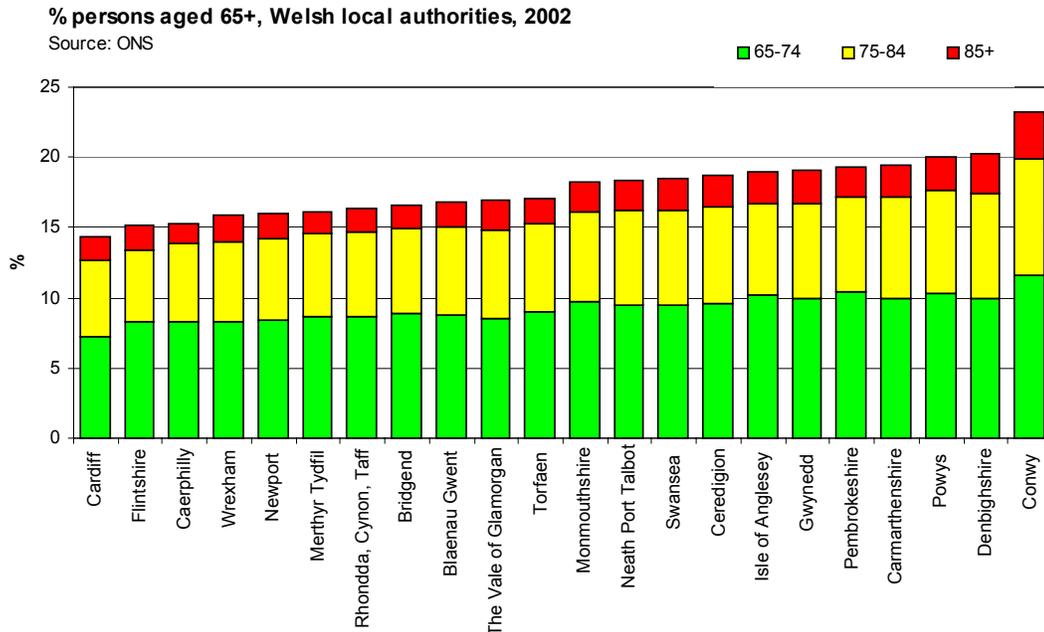
Figure 2.1.2



2.2 Population

Figure 2.2.1 shows the population aged over 65 years, in three age groups, 65-74, 75-84 and 85+, as a proportion of the total population at local authority level. The chart illustrates the considerable variation which exists.

Figure 2.2.1



Older people make up a larger proportion of the total in Conwy (23 per cent) and Denbighshire (20 per cent). Many older people migrate to areas along the north Wales coast such as Llandudno, Colwyn Bay and Rhyl to retire. According to the 2001 Census, 56 per cent of residents in Conwy aged 65 years and over were born in England, whilst the figure for Denbighshire is 52 per cent.⁵ The proportion of the population who are aged 65 and over is lowest in Cardiff at just over 14 per cent. This is the result of a large working age and student population.⁶

Figure 2.2.2 shows the population of Wales aged 65 and over by age group and sex. The chart shows clearly how, as age increases, the number of females surviving is greater than males. In the 85+ age group there are two and a half times the number of females than males.

Figure 2.2.2

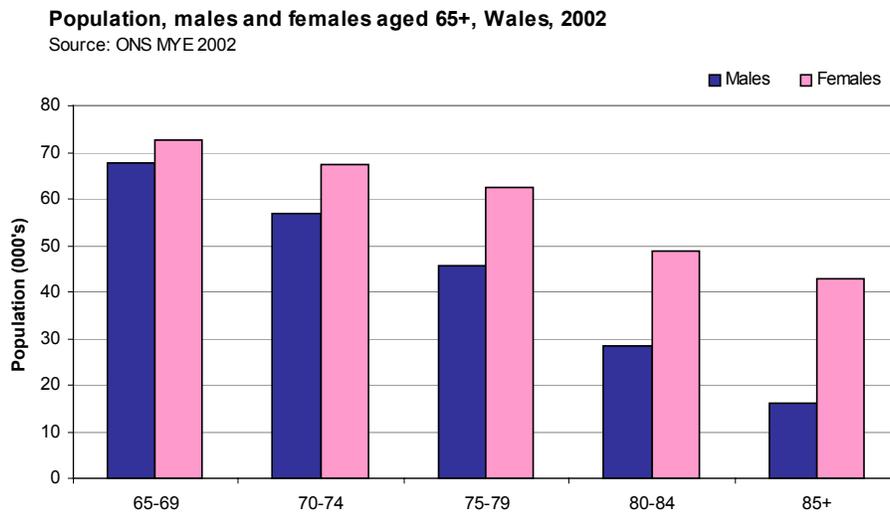
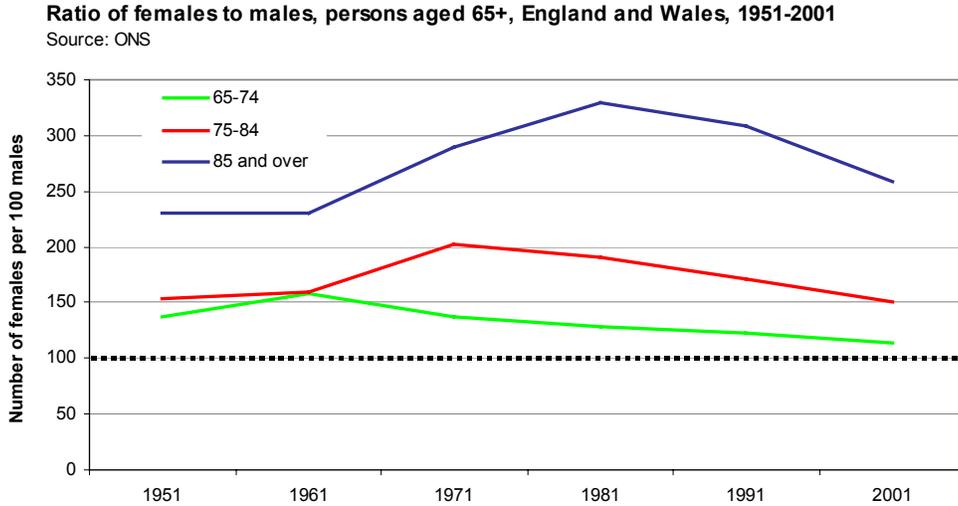


Figure 2.2.3 shows that over the past 40 years the preponderance of females in the older population has decreased. This is because mortality rates in males have fallen more quickly than for females in these age groups.³

Figure 2.2.3



2.3 Population change

In 2001, older persons accounted for a greater proportion of the total population in Wales than any other British region at 17 per cent.⁷ In the same year, the median age of the population in Wales was 38 years, up from 36 in 1991 and 34 in 1981.⁷ The post-war trend of ageing among the overall population is particularly evident among 'older' old persons in Wales. The number of people aged 85 or over has grown five-fold over the last half century, reaching 59,000 in 2001.⁸

Figure 2.3.1 shows the change in the population of Wales between 1993 and 2002 for 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80-84 and 85+ year olds. The chart shows the overall increase amongst the older populations is slight. However, it is clear that there has been a shift in the age structure with an increasing number of 75-79, 80-84 and 85+ year olds. This growth may have implications for service provision, as the very oldest age groups tend to have greater health and social care needs.⁹ This change in the age structure of the population may be viewed as a positive result of improvements in public and preventive health measures, advances in medical care and improvements in the socio-economic well-being of the population.¹

Figure 2.3.1

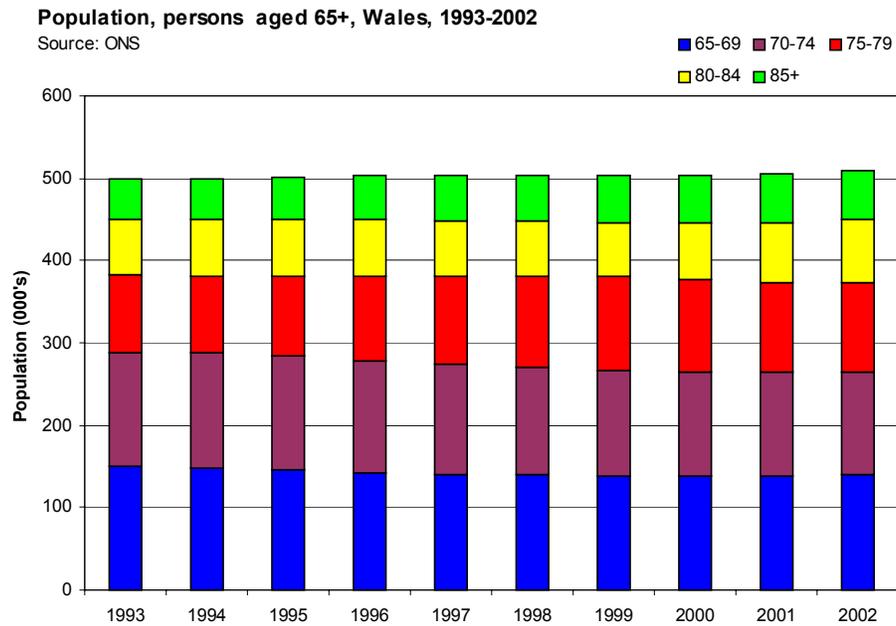
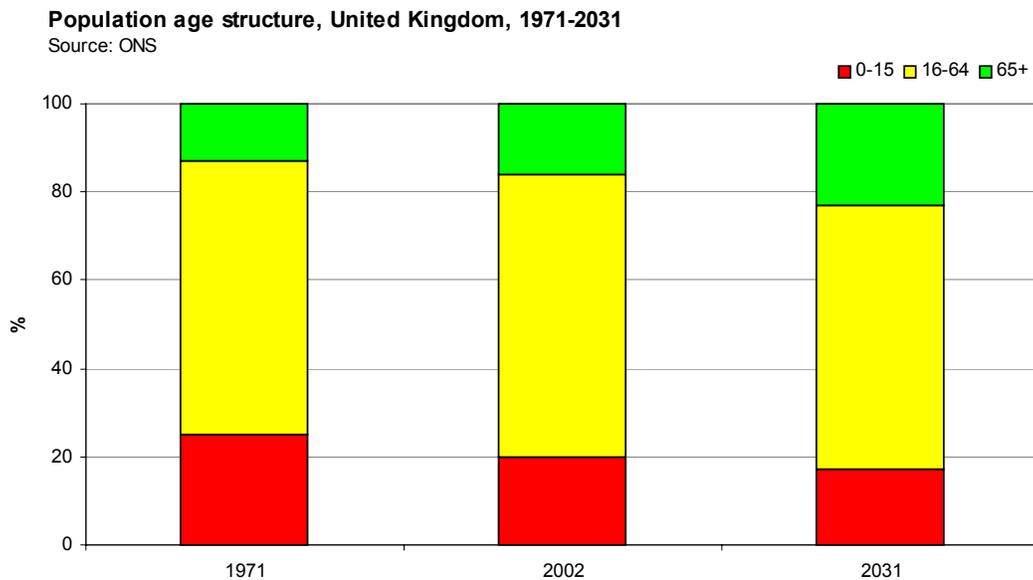


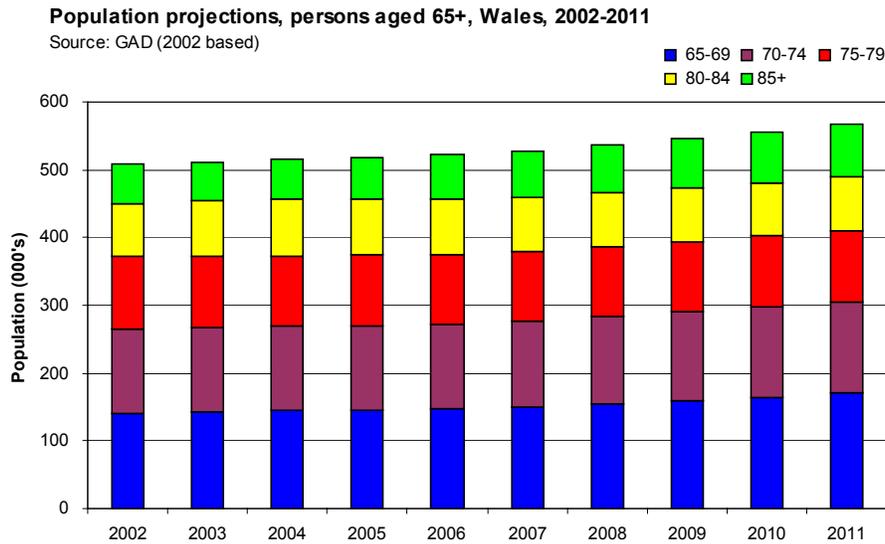
Figure 2.3.2 shows that older people in the UK are increasingly making up a larger proportion of the overall population. Between 1971 and 2002 the proportion of those aged over 65 increased from 13% to 16%, with a projected rise to 23% by 2031. The increased proportion is the result of the both a decline in the number of children being born and decreasing mortality rates.³

Figure 2.3.2



The Government Actuary's Department is responsible for the production of population projections for the United Kingdom and its constituent countries. The most recent projections are the 2002 based set, published in December 2003.¹⁰ Figure 2.3.3 shows the projected change in population between 2002 and 2011 for persons aged 65 years and over in five-year age bands. The chart shows that the population of most age groups is expected to rise, especially amongst those aged 65-69, as the post war 'baby boom' generation reach retirement age. Higher numbers are also expected amongst the 85+ age group as anticipated life expectancy continues to increase as a result of improvements in individuals' lifestyle, living conditions and health and social care.¹¹

Figure 2.3.3

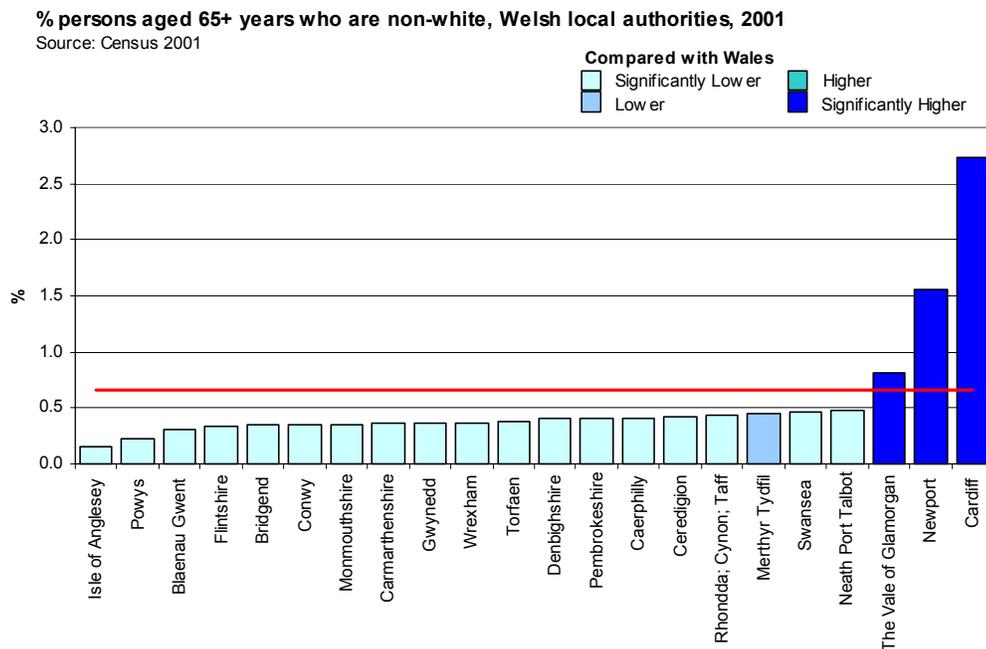


2.4 Ethnicity

Evidence shows that the non-white population (both young and old) is more likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged. Specifically, incomes are lower and housing tends to be of poorer quality with fewer amenities in the non-white population.¹² In addition, in general, the non-white population is more likely to suffer ill-health.¹³

A further disadvantage suffered by non-white older persons may be difficulty in accessing health and social care services due to language and cultural barriers.¹⁴

Figure 2.4.1

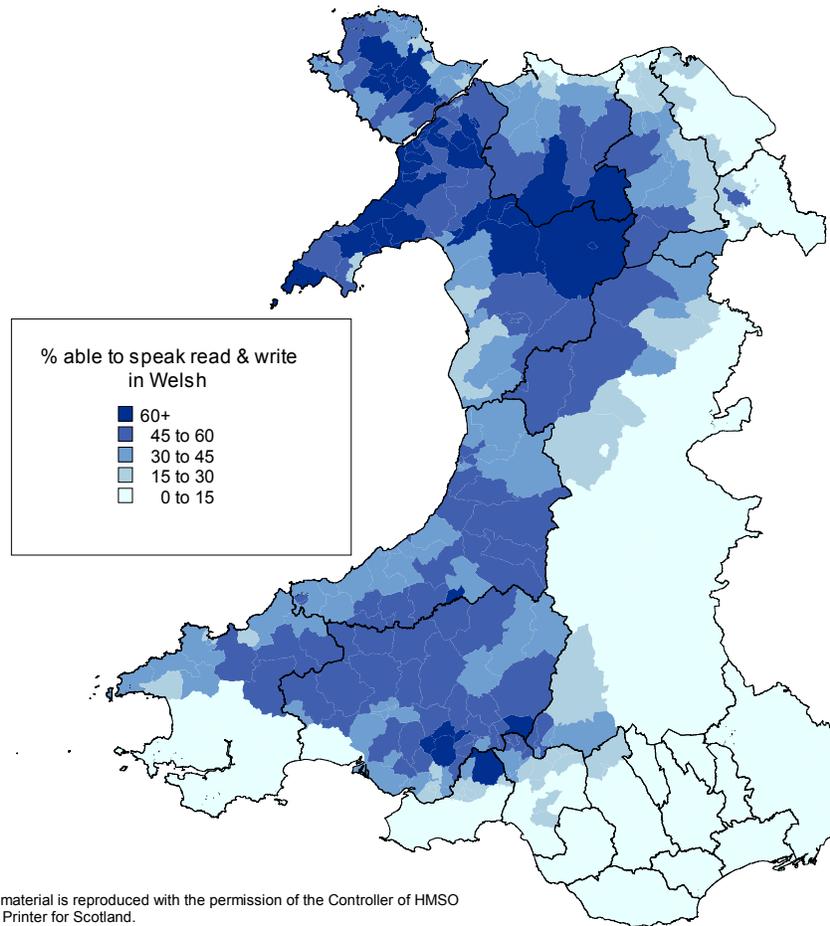


The chart shows the proportion of persons aged 65 and over who are non-white. It is clear that this group makes up a very small proportion of the older person population at less than half a per cent in 19 local authorities. Slightly higher proportions are found in the Vale of Glamorgan, Newport and, more especially, Cardiff where the proportion is over 2.5 per cent. It is important to recognise that the non-white population is not spread evenly throughout places like Cardiff and Newport, but is concentrated in a few areas such as Butetown, Riverside and Pill.

2.5 First language Welsh

Figure 2.5.1 shows the percentage of people, aged 65 and over, who are able to speak, read and write in Welsh. This measure is recommended as a proxy for measuring the number of people whose first language is Welsh[†]. Older persons whose first language is Welsh may have difficulty communicating with health and social care professionals in English. The map illustrates that the greatest proportions of older people who speak, read and write Welsh are found in North West Wales, specifically in parts of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy and Denbighshire. There are also pockets where the proportion is over 60 per cent around Carmarthenshire and Swansea.

Figure 2.5.1 % persons aged 65+ able to speak, read and write in Welsh, Welsh electoral divisions, 2001. Source: Census 2001



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[†] Advice was taken from the Welsh Language Board

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