



Arsyllfa Wledig Cymru Wales Rural Observatory

KEY FINDINGS: PAPER 2

An overview of life in rural Wales

This paper provides an overview of life in rural Wales. It is based on evidence and analysis from a more comprehensive report, *Living In Rural Wales*, available at www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk. The paper draws on a survey of 4023 households, incorporating over 9900 individuals, conducted in Spring 2004. It examines population and migration, housing, community well-being and social exclusion, education and employment, services and attitudes towards living in rural Wales.

The report presents key findings for rural Wales as a whole. In addition, it explores variations according to geography, rurality, age, gender, income, class, ethnicity, Welsh language, household tenure and length of residence.

Key findings are:

- The population of rural Wales is characterised by both stability and flux. A quarter of respondents have lived in their current property for at least twenty years; 17% have moved into their property in the last two years.
- Half of those living in rural Wales define themselves as 'Welsh'. Less than half of those who define themselves as Welsh speak Welsh either fluently or quite well.
- Forty-two percent of respondents consider that 'most people' in their area face problems affording housing. However, less than a fifth of people who wish to move cite the lack of affordable housing as a barrier to moving.
- The results suggest a relatively low level of collective community life in rural Wales, but a far higher level of household involvement in wider civic activities.
- Almost half of households in rural Wales include at least one person who has difficulty accessing key services. Income is the single most important factor influencing access to services.
- Employment in rural Wales is characterised by a high proportion of part-time work (19%), self-employment (18%) and multiple job-holding (11%). Self-employment is particularly high, compared to the UK average of 14%.
- While many respondents are happy living in rural Wales, 60% refer to issues that have caused conflict within their locality. Most of these issues relate to planning and development.



KEY FINDINGS

Population and migration

Rural Wales contains a large number of small households. Over half of all households comprise two or fewer people. Single person households are more likely to be based in towns, contain inhabitants of retirement age and to have a household income of less than £10,000.

Sixty percent of households have family members living within 10 miles. This indicates the continued importance of kinship to local life. Family networks appear to be 'closest' in Carmarthenshire and Flintshire.

A quarter of respondents have lived in their current home for more than 20 years, indicating a high degree of stability amongst the rural population. This stability is most prominent amongst those aged 65 and older, Welsh speakers and those who define themselves as 'Welsh'.

However, there is also evidence of considerable flux. Seventeen percent of respondents have lived in their home for less than two years. Almost a quarter of households have had someone move out in the last 5 years. Of these leavers, half have remained in rural Wales, a third have left Wales altogether and almost a fifth have left rural Wales and then returned.

People's motives for moving are wide-ranging. Employment is the most common motivation: 17% of respondents moved into their current home in order for themselves or their partner to gain employment; a quarter of leavers left in order to find employment.

Half of those living in rural Wales define themselves as 'Welsh'. Younger respondents are the most likely to define themselves as Welsh. The traditional 'heartlands' of rural Wales, particularly Carmarthenshire and Gwynedd, continue to have a stronger representation of those who consider their ethnicity to be 'Welsh'.

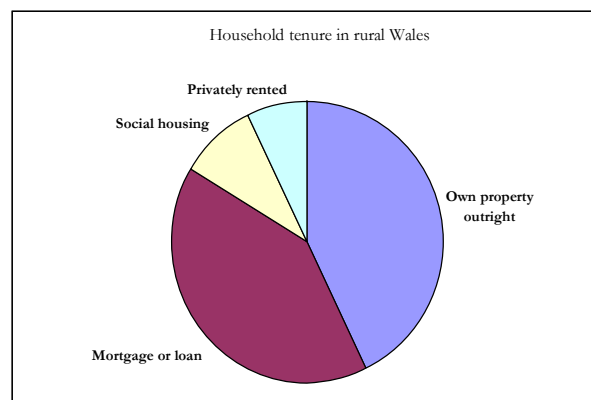
A fifth of all household members speak Welsh fluently. The ability to speak Welsh varies

significantly across rural Wales: twenty times more people in Gwynedd speak the language than in Monmouthshire. There is no clear correlation between a sense of Welsh identity and Welsh language ability. Fewer than half of those who define themselves as Welsh speak Welsh either fluently or quite well.

Housing

The housing stock of rural Wales is predominantly owner-occupied. Forty-two percent of respondents own their property outright, 40% are in the process of buying the property in which they live.

'Social housing' (rented from a local authority or housing association) accounts for 9% of the housing market in rural Wales. This is a low figure compared to the UK average of 14%. The significance of the social housing sector varies geographically: respondents from Anglesey are three times more likely to occupy social housing than those from the Vale of Glamorgan.



There is concern regarding the apparent shortage of 'appropriate housing' and regarding high and rising house prices in rural Wales. Forty-two percent of respondents consider that 'most people' in their area face problems affording housing. This perception is most common in North Wales and amongst young people who do not own property.

Perceptions of a lack of affordable housing do not necessarily tally with the reported experiences of respondents. Less than a fifth of household members who wish to move cite the lack of affordable housing as a barrier to moving.

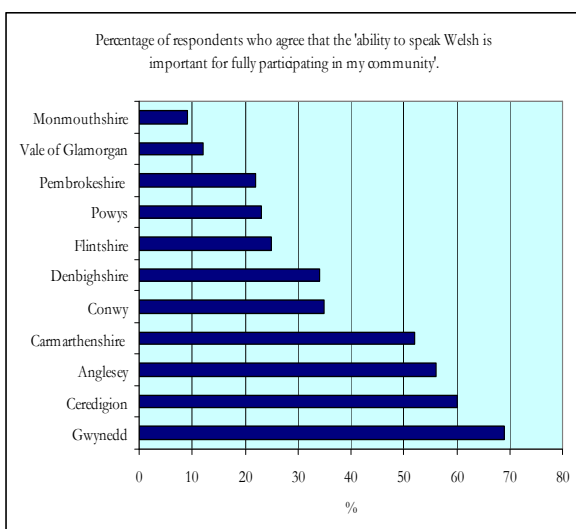
Community well-being and social exclusion

The results of the survey suggest a relatively low level of collective community life in rural Wales. Half of respondents are not involved in any activities organised by local groups and societies. Religion provides the strongest local focus, with 8% of respondents regularly attending church or chapel.

In contrast, the survey results indicate a relatively high level of household involvement in wider civic activities. In the last year (2003-2004), 41% of respondents signed a petition, 28% attended a public meeting, 19% contacted their local councillor and 14% contacted their MP or AM.

Caring activities also form an important part of many people's lives. During 2003-2004, 44% of respondents provided care for friends or neighbours. Lower and middle income households were more likely to have provided this care. Over a third of all respondents undertook voluntary work in the last twelve months.

Experiences and perceptions of community life vary significantly amongst rural residents. The majority appear to be 'very satisfied' with the 'spirit of community' in their local area. At the same time, 14% do not feel that there is a strong sense of community in their local area. Respondents from Ceredigion, Powys and Pembrokeshire are most likely than others to view their communities in positive terms.



Individual circumstances have a strong influence on perceptions and experiences of community life. Respondents who speak Welsh are the most likely to report positive experiences and perceptions of their community. Younger respondents and those from low income households are most likely to report feelings of isolation.

There is a widespread feeling that poverty is prevalent across rural Wales. Forty percent of respondents consider that there are people in their community living in poverty. This perception is most common in rural towns.

The survey suggests that a substantial minority of rural residents experience economic deprivation. Nineteen percent of respondents are from households with a gross annual income of below £10,000. Thirteen percent are from households receiving state income support. Average gross annual incomes vary from £20,500 in Anglesey to £28,500 in Monmouthshire. Incomes tend to be lower in towns and villages than in the open countryside.

Economic deprivation is, to some degree, associated with long-standing illness or disability. Those with long-term illnesses or disabilities are most likely to live in low-income households. One third of households contain at least one person with a long-standing illness or disability.

Services

The majority of rural residents have a positive perception of the quality of rural services. Over two thirds think that schools, post offices, banks, food shops and the NHS are of 'good quality'. This, however, leaves a significant minority who are dissatisfied with the quality of these services. Over a quarter consider that policing and public transport provision is of 'poor quality'.

Almost half of households in rural Wales include someone who experiences difficulty accessing key services. Income is the single most important factor influencing access to services. Respondents from low-income households are far more likely than wealthier residents to experience difficulties getting to a

general hospital, supermarket or other food shop. Thirty-two percent of households with a gross annual income of less than £10,000 do not have the use of a car, compared to just over 2% of households with an income of £21,000 or more.

Education and employment

Many rural areas are characterised by a population with relatively low academic qualifications. Seventeen percent of respondents state that they have no academic qualifications. Almost a third have no post-16 educational qualifications. Those aged 65 and over are six times more likely than those aged 16 to 24 to have no academic qualifications.

The survey findings suggest that many rural residents experience difficulties finding work. A quarter of the economically-active have found it difficult to find a 'suitable' job in their local area. Difficulties are most prevalent amongst those aged 16 -24 and those living in the open countryside.

Employment in rural Wales is characterised by a high proportion of part-time work (19%), self-employment (18%) and multiple job-holding (11%). Self-employment is particularly high, compared to the UK average of 14%. Women are four times more likely than men to work part-time. Self-employment is highest in Ceredigion, Powys and Pembrokeshire, and lowest in Conwy and Carmarthenshire.

Forty-four percent of those in work are employed in public administration, education or health and social work. These sectors are equally significant throughout rural Wales. Agriculture, hunting and forestry account for only 6% of employment in rural areas, reflecting the declining contribution of farming to the economy of rural Wales.

Attitudes to living in rural Wales

Attitudes towards living in rural Wales are wide-ranging, reflecting the diversity of rural Wales and its residents. Over a third of respondents enjoy the 'peaceful and quiet nature' of the area in which they live. Over a quarter refer to positive social and cultural characteristics of their locality. Twenty percent like living in rural Wales because of the

'friendliness of people / nice neighbours'. Older people are more inclined to attach significance to the friendliness of people and positive community spirit in their area.

While many respondents are happy living in rural Wales, sixty percent refer to issues that have caused conflict within their locality. Most of these issues relate to planning and development. New housing development is considered to cause most widespread concern, cited by 12% of respondents. Welsh speakers and those in households earning over £31,000 per year are more likely to perceive new housing as a problem.

Two thirds of respondents dislike at least one aspect of living in rural Wales. Forty-four percent of dislikes relate to the poor quality of services, an unfavourable economy and the high cost of living. Dissatisfaction is highest in the more remote counties of Ceredigion, Powys, Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd.

This paper is one of a series of reports on rural Wales produced by the Wales Rural Observatory.

The Wales Rural Observatory undertakes independent research and analysis on rural Wales. It is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government to support evidence-based policy-making.

The Observatory's activities are focused on four main areas:

- Collecting and analysing social and economic data on rural Wales
- Presenting these data within a Geographical Information System (GIS)
- Producing a series of descriptive and evaluative reports
- Monitoring and reviewing other research and policy relating to rural Wales

A website providing further information about the Wales Rural Observatory, including its activities and outputs, can be accessed at www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk

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