



Size Analysis of Active Businesses in Wales, 2021

14 Apr 2022
SB 8/2022

Key points for 2021:

There were an estimated 262,800 enterprises active in Wales, employing an estimated 1.2 million people.

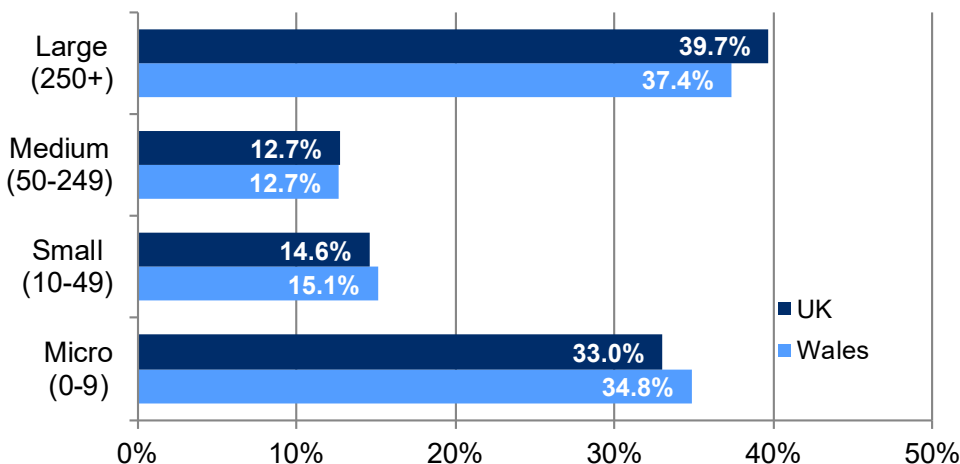
Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Wales accounted for 62.6% of employment and 39.4% of turnover, with large enterprises accounting for the remainder.

- The majority of active enterprises were SMEs (0-249 employees), accounting for 99.4% of total enterprises in Wales in 2021. Micro enterprises (0-9 employees) accounted for 95.0% of the total enterprises in Wales.

Large enterprises (those with 250 or more employees) accounted for 37.4% of employment in Wales compared to 39.7% for the UK.

- Around 0.5% of enterprises active in Wales were non-UK owned, accounting for 14.2% of employment. This relatively high employment share is because non-UK enterprises are more likely to be large enterprises than SMEs.

Employment shares by employee size-band, 2021



About this release

This annual release provides data on the structure of enterprises active in Wales between 2003 and 2021, including estimates for the very smallest businesses that operate below the Value-Added Tax (VAT) threshold.

The enterprises covered are all private sector enterprises, public corporations and nationalised bodies.

In this bulletin

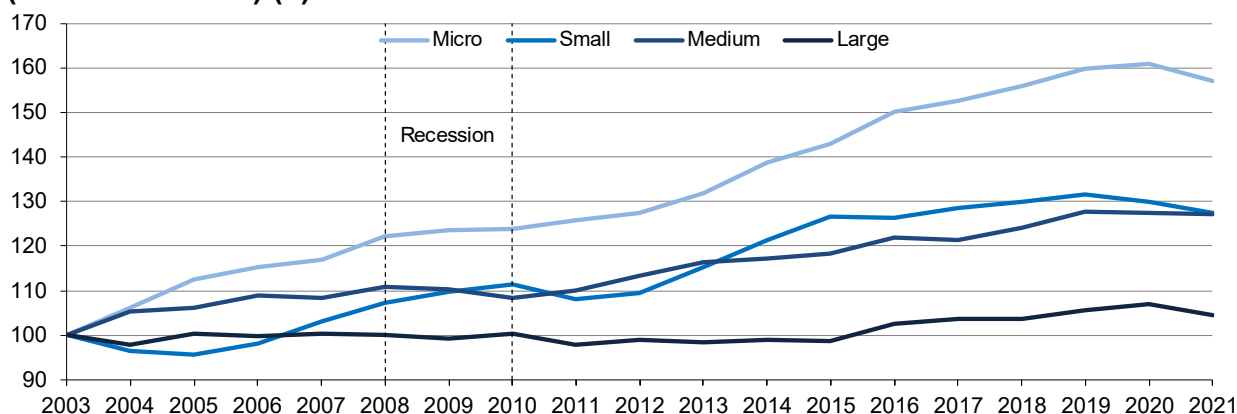
This bulletin contains new data on:

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1. Business structure in Wales

There were an estimated 262,800 enterprises active in Wales in 2021. This is a 2.4% decrease from 2020, the first annual decrease since the start of the series in 2003. Compared to 2003, enterprises have increased by 55.0%, largely due to growth in micro-sized enterprises (up 57.1%). The number of enterprises in the large size band has been fairly stable over the period, increasing slightly since 2016, and was 4.5% higher in 2021 than compared to 2003. (Chart 1.1)

Chart 1.1: Number of enterprises active in Wales by employee size-band, 2003-2021 (Index 2003=100) (a)



(a) Chart 1.1 uses indexed data (where 2003 is equal to 100) to show the change in active enterprises over time. The data is indexed because the number of enterprises active in Wales is largely dominated by the micro size-band.

In 2021, enterprises in Wales employed an estimated 1.2 million people and had an estimated combined annual turnover of £131.1 billion. Over the year the largest decrease in the number of enterprises was the micro size-band, which fell by 2.5%. The medium size-band has had the smallest decrease in the number of enterprises since 2020 (down 0.3%). (Table 1.1)

Table 1.1: Size-band analysis of enterprises active in Wales, 2021 (a)

	Enterprises (b)				Employment				Turnover (c)			
	Level (000s)	% change since 2003	% change since 2020		Level (000s)	% change since 2003	% change since 2020		Level (£bn)	% change since 2003	% change since 2020	
SMEs	261.1	55.5	↑ -2.4	↓	723.5	34.8	↑ -1.6	↓	51.6	.	0.1	↑
Micro (0 - 9)	249.8	57.1	↑ -2.5	↓	402.5	41.0	↑ -2.0	↓	20.0	.	-3.1	↓
Small (10 - 49)	9.2	27.5	↑ -2.0	↓	174.5	27.7	↑ -2.0	↓	14.3	.	2.0	↑
Medium (50 - 249)	2.2	27.1	↑ -0.3	↓	146.5	27.6	↑ 0.1	↑	17.3	.	2.5	↑
Large (250+)	1.7	4.5	↑ -2.4	↓	431.6	13.1	↑ -3.1	↓	79.5	.	-1.1	↓
All	262.8	55.0	↑ -2.4	↓	1,155.0	25.8	↑ -2.1	↓	131.1	.	-0.6	↓

(a) The full series are available on [StatsWales](#).

(b) This is a count of enterprises that are active in Wales, including multi-region enterprises registered outside Wales.

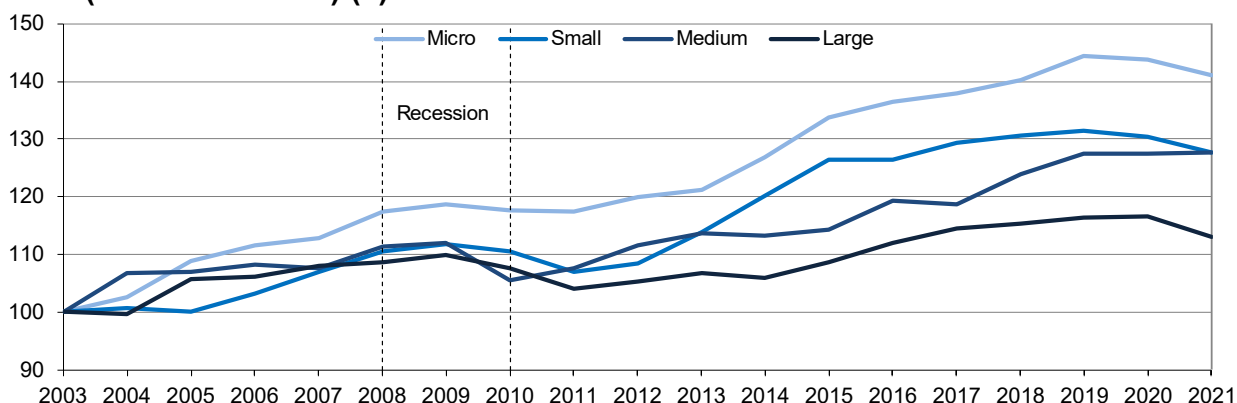
(c) This excludes turnover in the financial and business services sector.

Between 2003 and 2021, employment in enterprises active in Wales grew by 25.8%. Enterprises in the micro size-band had the largest percentage growth in employment in Wales (up 41.0%).

The trend over the period was not stable with distinct periods of growth before and after the recession and falls in employment between 2009 and 2011 across all size-bands. Since 2011, employment increased across all size-bands until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Over the year,

employment decreased by 2.1%¹, with large size-band enterprises having the highest decrease (down 3.1 %). (Chart 1.2)

Chart 1.2: Employment in enterprises active in Wales by employee size-band, 2003-2021 (Index 2003=100) (a)



(a) Chart 1.2 uses indexed data (where 2003 is equal to 100) to show the change in the number of employees over time.

Over the year, turnover decreased by 0.6%, with the largest decrease in the micro size-band (down 3.1%). Small and medium size-bands both saw an increase over the year, whereas micro and large size-bands saw a decrease. Turnover in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) increased by 0.1% which was mainly driven by the increase in medium size band enterprises (up 2.5%). (Table 1.1)

Table 1.2: Size-band proportions for enterprises active in Wales, 2021 (a) (b)

	Enterprises (c)			Employment			Turnover (d)		
	Level	change since 2003	change since 2020	Level	change since 2003	change since 2020	Level	change since 2003	change since 2020
SMEs	99.4	0.3 ↑	0.0 ●	62.6	4.2 ↑	0.4 ↑	39.4	.	0.3 ↑
Micro (0 - 9)	95.0	1.2 ↑	0.0 ●	34.8	3.8 ↑	0.1 ↑	15.3	.	-0.4 ↓
Small (10 - 49)	3.5	-0.8 ↓	0.0 ●	15.1	0.2 ↑	0.0 ●	10.9	.	0.3 ↑
Medium (50 - 249)	0.8	-0.2 ↓	0.0 ●	12.7	0.2 ↑	0.3 ↑	13.2	.	0.4 ↑
Large (250+)	0.6	-0.3 ↓	0.0 ●	37.4	-4.2 ↓	-0.4 ↓	60.6	.	-0.3 ↓

(a) The full series are available on [StatsWales](#).

(b) Arrows depicting change over time are based on values to 1 decimal place.

(c) This is a count of enterprises that are active in Wales, including multi-region enterprises registered outside Wales.

(d) This excludes turnover in the financial and business services sector.

In 2021, 99.4% of total enterprises active in Wales were small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), with micro enterprises (0-9 employees) accounting for 95.0% of the total. SMEs accounted for 62.6% of employment and 39.4% of turnover in 2021. Although large enterprises only accounted for 0.6% of enterprises, they accounted for 37.4% of employment and 60.6% of turnover. (Table 1.2). Since 2003, the proportion of employment in the large size-band decreased by 4.2 percentage points in Wales.

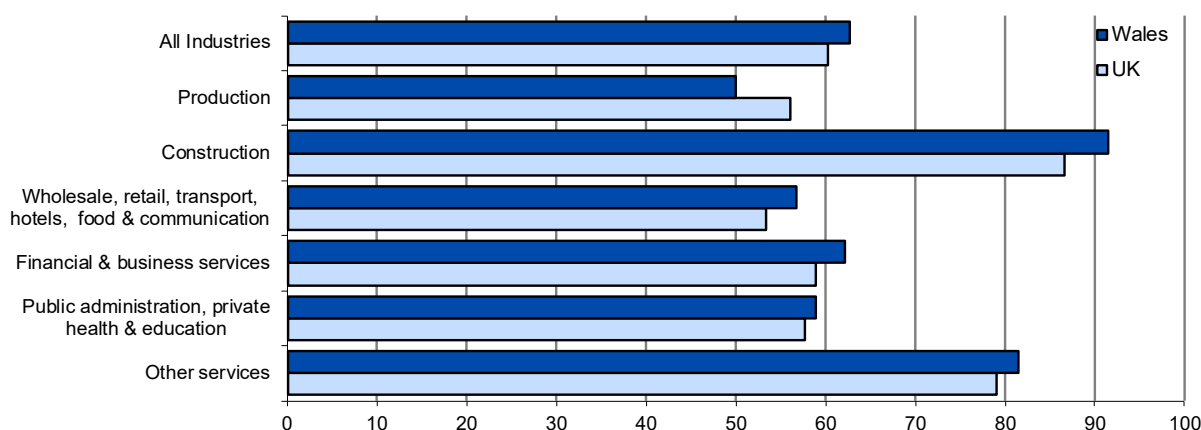
¹ The employment estimates presented here are based on extracts of data from the Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR), which are not the basis of the official headline labour market statistics on employment. The headline estimates for employment may show a different picture for Wales over the same period. IDBR data are used for consistency with the other estimates in this bulletin, but are not regarded as the official source of employment estimates.

2. Industry and business structure in 2021

The construction sector had the largest proportion of employment in small/medium enterprises (SMEs) in Wales and the UK in 2021 (excluding agriculture for disclosure reasons). The smallest proportion of employment in SMEs in Wales was in the production sector whilst the wholesale, retail transport, hotels, food and communication sector had the smallest proportion of employment in the UK. (Chart 2.1)

Wales has larger proportions of employment in SMEs than the UK in five of the six industry sectors (excluding agriculture). Of these, the largest difference in employment is in the construction sector, 91.5% in Wales compared to 86.6% in the UK. The UK has a larger proportion of employment in the production sector, 56.1% in the UK compared to 49.9% in Wales.

Chart 2.1: Proportion of employment in small/medium enterprises (SMEs) by industry, 2021(a)(b)

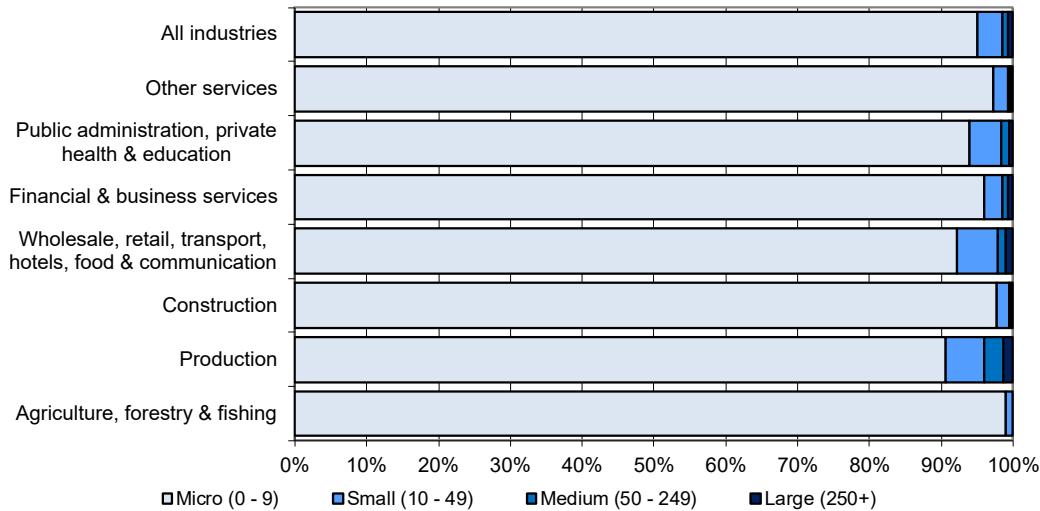


(a) Agriculture excluded due to disclosure.

(b) "Public administration" in public administration, private health and education excludes Local and central government organisations.

In 2021, wholesale, retail, transport, hotels, food and communication was the largest sector in Wales, with 65,200 enterprises and employment of 394,300. Production had the highest turnover at £59.3 billion. The three largest sectors based on the number of enterprises (the wholesale, retail, transport, hotels, food and communication sector; the financial and business services sector; and the construction sector) accounted for 63.9% of all enterprises active in Wales in 2021 and 61.7% of total employment in enterprises active in Wales. (Chart 2.2)

Chart 2.2: Enterprises active in Wales by size-band and industry, 2021(a)(b)(c)

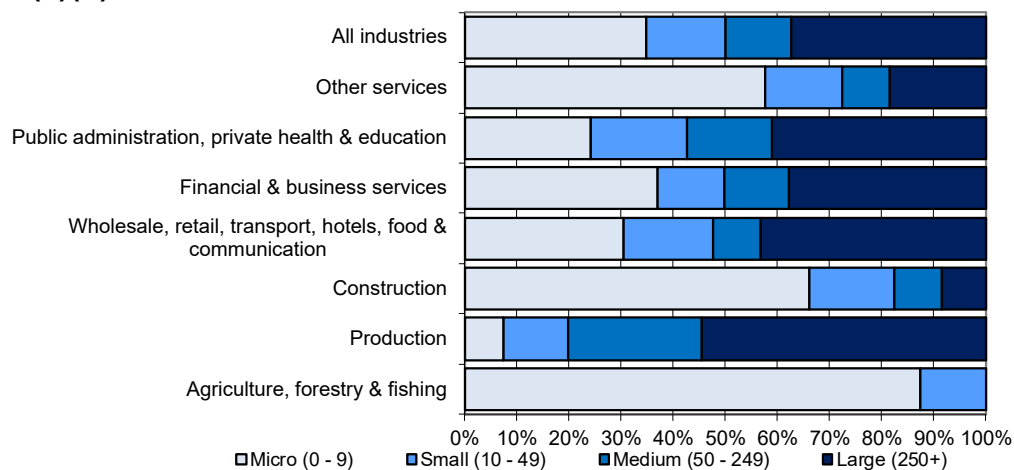


- (a) This is a count of enterprises that are active in Wales, including multi-region enterprises registered outside Wales.
- (b) Small, Medium and Large categories for the Agriculture Sector have been combined to avoid disclosure.
- (c) "Public administration" in public administration, private health and education excludes Local and central government organisations.

The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector had the largest share of employment in micro enterprises in Wales (87.3%). Whereas, in the small size-band enterprises, the largest share of employment in Wales was in the public administration, private health and education sector (18.4%). The production sector had the largest share of employment in Wales for both the medium and large size-bands (23.5% and 50.1%, respectively). (Chart 2.3)

The wholesale, retail, transport, hotels, food and communication sector had the largest proportion of enterprises and employment in SMEs accounting for 24.7% of active SMEs in Wales, and 30.9% of employment.

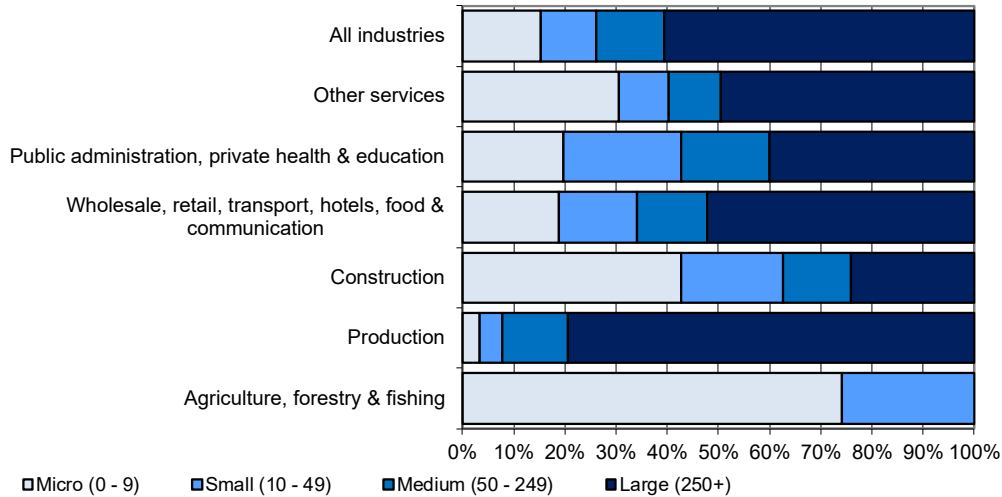
Chart 2.3: Employees in enterprises active in Wales by size-band and industry, 2021(a)(b)



- (a) Small, Medium and Large categories for the Agriculture Sector have been combined to avoid disclosure.
- (b) "Public administration" in public administration, private health and education excludes Local and central government organisations.

The largest proportion of turnover in the micro size-band in Wales was in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (74.2%) whilst the smallest proportion in the micro size-bands was in the production sector (3.3%). Whereas, in the large size-band, the production sector had the largest proportion of turnover at 79.4%. (Chart 2.4)

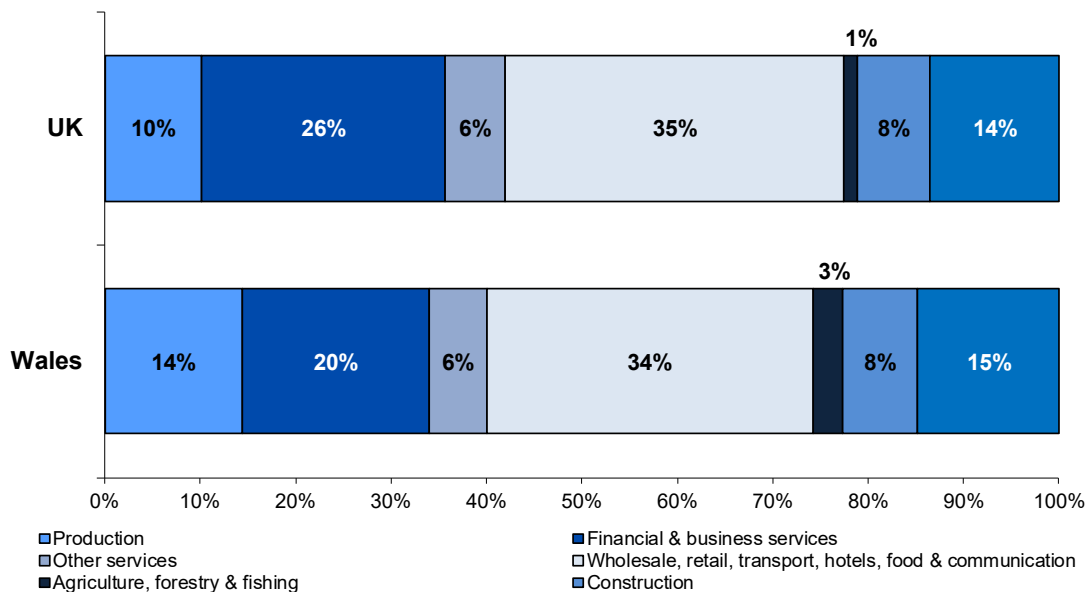
Chart 2.4: Turnover in enterprises active in Wales by size-band and industry, 2021(a)(b)(c)



- (a) This excludes turnover in the financial and business services as data is not available on a comparable basis.
- (b) Small, Medium and Large categories for the Agriculture Sector have been combined to avoid disclosure.
- (c) "Public administration" in public administration, private health and education excludes Local and central government organisations.

The largest proportion of employment in both Wales and the UK was in the wholesale, retail, hotel, food and communication sector and the smallest proportion was in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector. For most industries, there is only a small difference between Wales and the UK. The financial and business services sector has the largest difference, at 6%.

Chart 2.5: Share of workplace employment by industry, Wales and the UK, 2021(a)

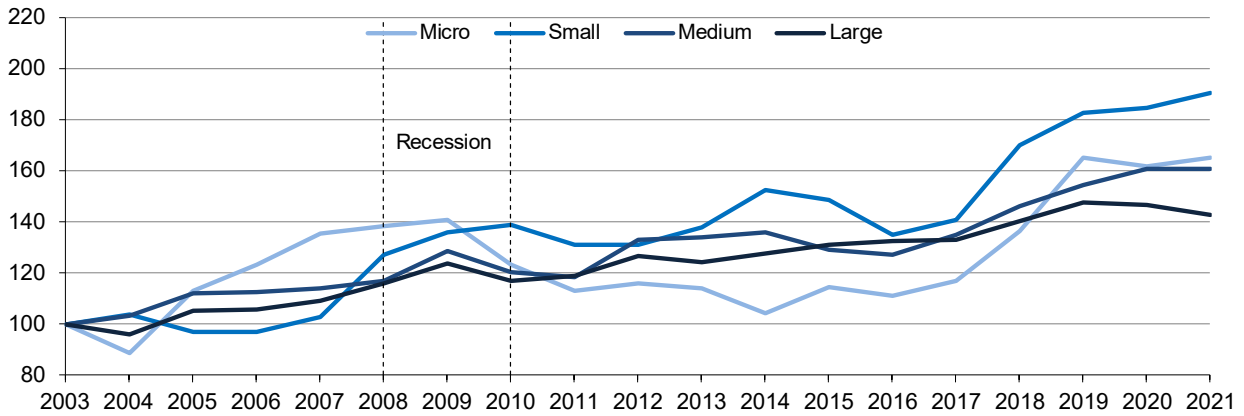


- (a) "Public administration" in public administration, private health and education excludes Local and central government organisations.

3. Foreign ownership in Wales

In 2021, around 0.5% of enterprises active in Wales were non-UK owned. These businesses accounted for 14.2% of employment, up from 12.5% in 2003. Over the latest year the number of non-UK owned enterprises operating in Wales decreased by 0.4% with employment in these enterprises decreasing by 1.8%.

Chart 3.1: Employment in foreign owned enterprises active in Wales by employee size-band, 2003-2021 (Index 2003=100)



- (a) Chart 3.1 uses indexed data (where 2003 is equal to 100) to show the change in employment in foreign owned enterprises over time.
- (b) Data is published on [StatsWales](https://www.statswales.gov.wales/)

The number of UK owned enterprises active in Wales increased by 55.0% between 2003 and 2021 compared to a 55.8% increase in non-UK owned enterprises. Employment in non-UK owned enterprises increased by 49,400 (43.0%) since 2003, compared to an increase of 187,200 (23.3%) in UK owned enterprises.

4. Local authority business structure 2021²

In 2021, the largest share of enterprises was the micro size-band for each of the 22 local authorities in Wales, ranging from 88.2% in Merthyr Tydfil to 94.9% in Powys. The medium size-band had the smallest share of enterprises in each of the local authorities.

Cardiff had more active enterprises than any other local authority in Wales (37,400), followed by Swansea (20,200) and Powys (17,100). Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent had the smallest number of active enterprises (3,100 and 3,700, respectively).

Chart 4.1: Proportion of employment by size-band and local authority, 2021

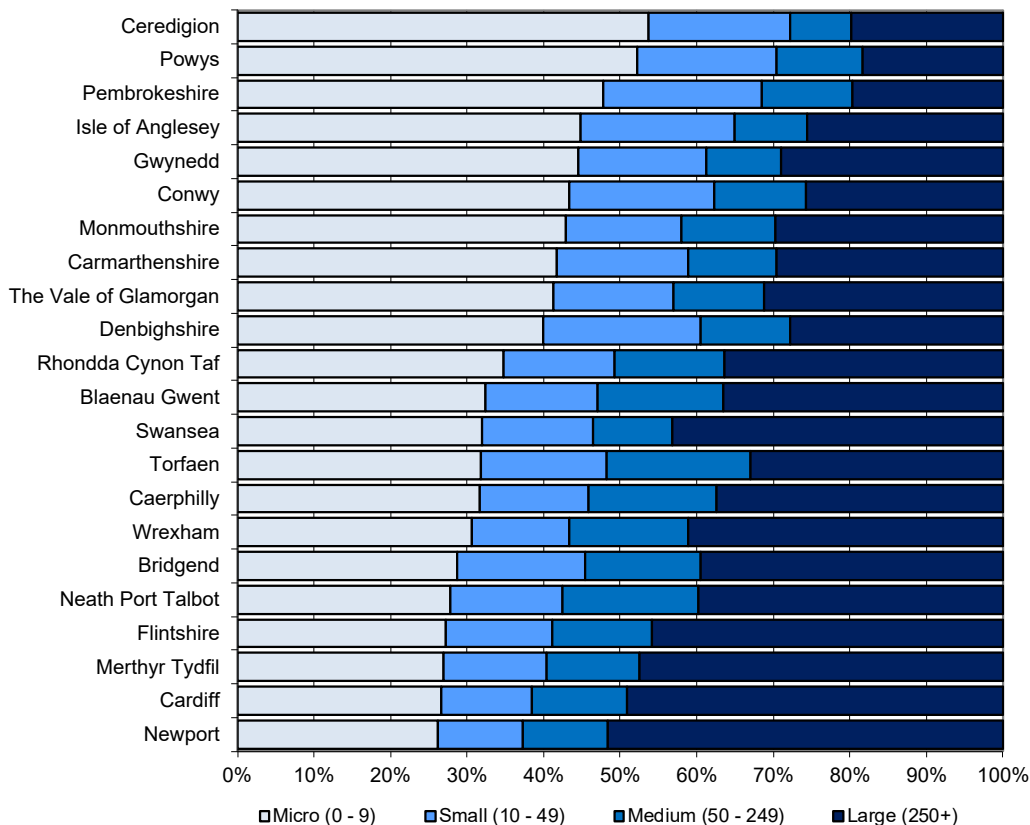
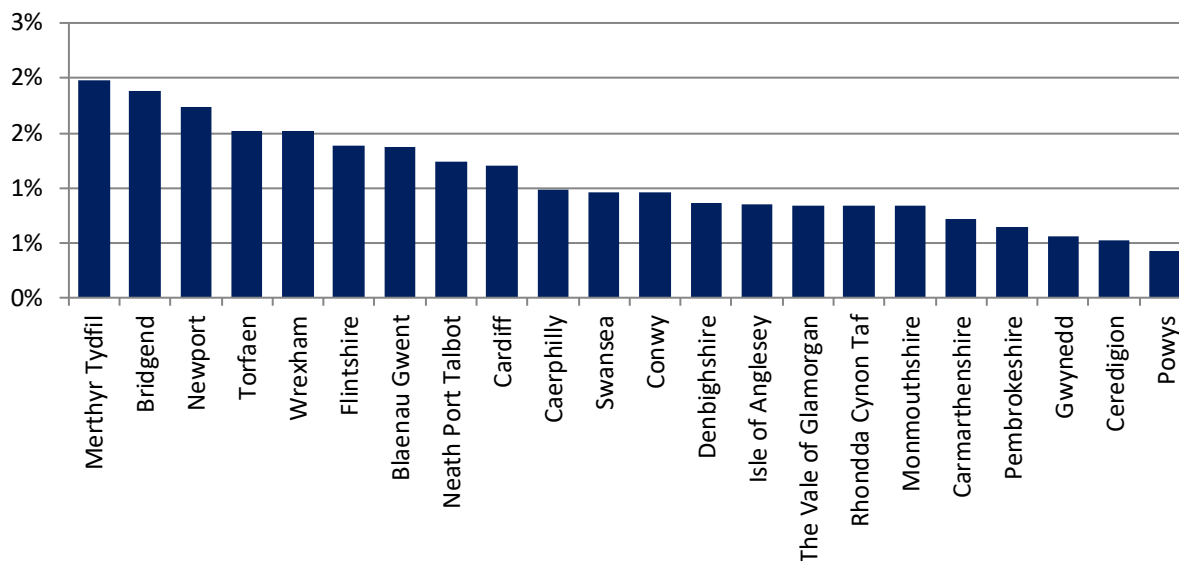


Chart 4.1 shows the proportion of employment by size-band in each of the Welsh Local Authorities. Ceredigion had the largest share of employment in micro sized enterprises and Newport had the largest share of employment in large sized enterprises. In general, urban areas tend to have a larger share of employment in large businesses and rural areas tend to have a larger share of employment in micro businesses.

Charts 4.2 and 4.3 show the proportion of non-UK owned enterprises and the proportion of employment in these enterprises across the 22 local authorities in Wales.

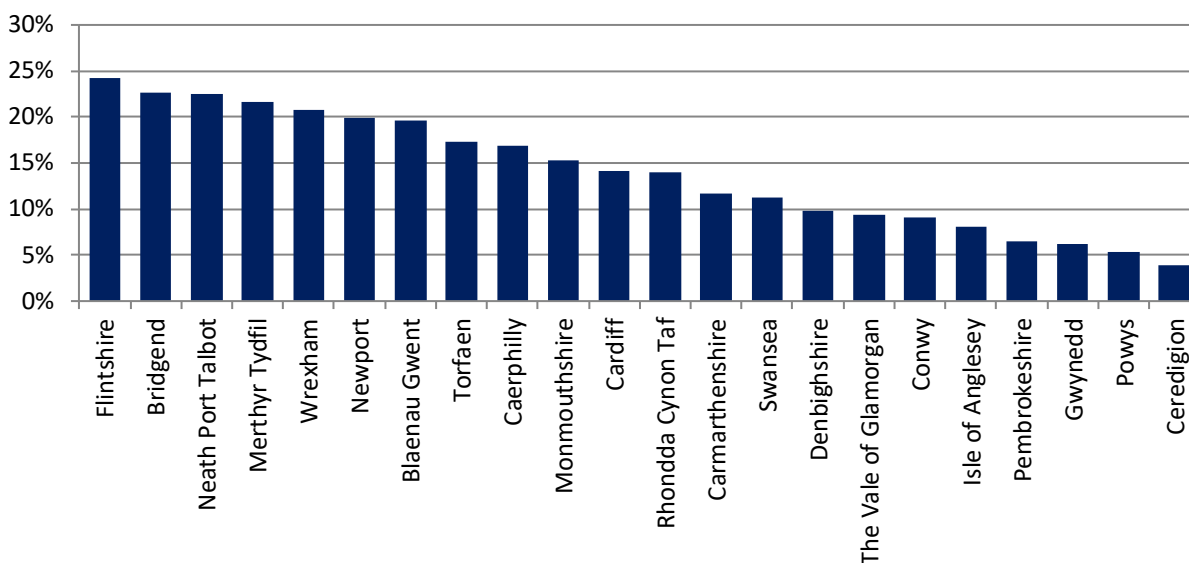
² Geographical breakdowns of the data are workplace based. Each enterprise and its related employment and turnover is allocated to a sub-area of Wales based solely on the physical location of the enterprise or its sites. The employment aggregates take no account of the area in which those employed in an enterprise reside.

Chart 4.2: Proportion of enterprises active in Wales that are non-UK owned, by local authority, 2021 (a)



(a) Based on the ultimate ownership of the enterprise.

Chart 4.3: Proportion of employment in non-UK owned enterprises active in Wales, by local authority, 2021 (a)



(a) Based on the ultimate ownership of the enterprise.

Merthyr Tydfil had the largest percentage of non-UK owned enterprises (2.0%) whilst Powys had the smallest percentage (0.4%). When looking at the proportion of employment in non-UK owned enterprises, Flintshire had the largest percentage (24.2%) and Ceredigion had the lowest percentage (3.8%).

5. Key quality information

Relevance

This bulletin provides estimates of the total number of businesses active in Wales including unregistered enterprises by size-band. These statistics are used by the Welsh Government to monitor changes in the structure of Welsh businesses. The primary data source is a detailed extract taken in March of each year from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) maintained by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This gives details of all enterprises active in Wales, including the UK employment and turnover and derived figures for the Welsh elements of employment and turnover (using information about the sites in each enterprise which are located in Wales). It also includes Standard Industrial Classification codes, geographical location, foreign ownership and legal status of each enterprise.

The analysis in this release is based on enterprises with some activity in Wales, regardless of the region of its headquarters. In this context, an enterprise is taken to be an entire organisation, including its head office and all the individual UK sites, wherever they may be located. The region of the enterprise is usually based on the location of its head office, although the individual sites may be located in other regions. The figures given for employment and turnover for Wales in this analysis relate only to the sites located in Wales.

The size-band of the enterprise is based on the number of UK employees (whether full-time or part-time) in the enterprise. An enterprise employing 10,000 UK staff but only a handful in Wales is categorised as a large, and not a micro, enterprise.

The data shown for foreign ownership is based on the ultimate ownership of the enterprise. It is assumed all unregistered enterprises (i.e. those which are not VAT or PAYE registered) are UK owned and those with unknown ownerships are UK owned.

The enterprises covered are all private sector enterprises (that is companies, sole-proprietorships, partnerships, private non-profit making bodies and mutual associations), plus public corporations and nationalised bodies. Local and central government organisations are excluded.

Accuracy

The IDBR covers a very high proportion of the employment and turnover in the UK, but it excludes most of the very large number of smallest businesses that operate below the VAT threshold so its coverage of the number of enterprises is less than 50%. To correct for this, the figures presented in this release include estimates for unregistered enterprises, together with their related employment and turnover. These estimates for unregistered enterprises are calculated using a combination of:

- IDBR data;
- information on persons who are self-employed in their main or second job, taken from the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)/Annual Population Survey \(APS\)](#) carried out by the ONS; and
- information on the numbers of sole traders and partnerships from the Survey of Personal Incomes data provided by [HM Revenue and Customs \(HMRC\)](#)

Unregistered enterprises are assumed to be UK owned as these sole-proprietors/partnerships will be included as part of the APS, which is a survey of UK households.

A fuller description of the [methodology](#) is found on [StatsWales](#).

Estimates for turnover exclude figures for the financial and business services sector throughout the release. The turnover information recorded on the IDBR for enterprises in the financial services sector includes amounts involved in the transactions carried out by these enterprises and is therefore not comparable to turnover information from the other sectors.

As enterprise counts in this release have been independently rounded to the nearest five, employment counts to the nearest 100 and turnover aggregates to the nearest million pounds, the figures may not sum to totals exactly. The symbol “-” indicates that the figure is less than half the final digit shown.

To avoid suppression of data due to disclosure control (which must occur for any aggregates based on less than 20 enterprises), some size-bands are presented in aggregated form. These are shown in italics.

As the estimates of unregistered enterprises and their associated activity are based mainly on survey data, they are subject to a degree of sampling error. The unregistered estimates are included within the analysis as given but are not presented separately.

The Welsh Government revisions policy is found on the [Welsh Government website](#). Where the data is not from the Welsh Government, the revisions policy of the individual Government department is followed.

Timeliness and punctuality

The Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) extract used in this release was taken in March 2021. The IDBR is updated using administrative and survey-based data sources with a variety of reference dates. For example, data referred to here as 2021 could have been updated at any point up to March 2021.

Accessibility and clarity

All the data given in this release can be found on [StatsWales](#).

Comparability and coherence

The industry data prior to 2009 is based on SIC 2003, whilst industry data from 2009 onwards is based on SIC 2007. As such the sections are not comparable due to changes in the classification below section level. For more information see this article on the [Office for National Statistics website](#).

In 2015, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) extended the coverage of businesses on the Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) to include solely PAYE based UK businesses that were previously excluded because of a risk of duplication. Improvements in matching of administrative data and research into those units excluded indicated that the risk of duplication is very small. Of these businesses in 2015, 5,885 are located in Wales and 5,845 of them have less than 10 persons in employment.

At the UK level the estimate of the total number of VAT or PAYE registered enterprises increased by 253,000 between the start of 2011 and the start of 2012. Due to improvements made to HMRC computer systems approximately 53,000 extra businesses were added to the government Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) at the UK level at the start of 2012.

Of those 53,000 extra businesses, some will have existed before 2011 and may have been active in Wales and therefore should have been included in previous estimates of the total business population. It is possible some of these previously existing businesses were captured in earlier estimates of the business population, but unfortunately the precise number cannot be calculated. The 2008/09 SPI data remains missing as it is not available from HMRC. The 2009 estimates of sole proprietors use the 2007/08 SPI data.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) produces annual estimates of businesses by size-band for the UK regions. The BEIS Business Population Estimates (BPE) release can be found in full on the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk).

Table 5.1 compares Welsh Government and BEIS enterprise and employment estimates for 2021. The BEIS analysis doesn't pick up all of the private sector employment in Wales. For the smallest size-bands these differences are mainly due to timing, coverage and methodology differences, but for the larger size-bands, the effects of the differing methods for allocating employment to regions are more apparent.

BEIS analysis excludes charities and non-profit bodies, which account for around 3,900 VAT/PAYE registered enterprises and 84,800 employees in Wales in 2021 (for the UK these figures are 73,600 enterprises and 2.1 million employees).

The BEIS analysis allocates enterprises and their related activity to a single region, generally using the location of the head office. This means counts of enterprises by region are meaningful but employment and turnover statistics less relevant. The BEIS analysis does not take into account enterprises registered outside Wales but with activity in Wales. This under-estimates the employment of businesses in Wales, particularly in respect of larger employers.

Table 5.1: Comparisons in enterprise counts and employment, 2021

Size-band	Welsh Government (WG)	Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)	Difference (BEIS - WG)	Percentage difference
Enterprise count (000s):				
Estimates:				
Micro (0 - 9)	249.7	197.7	-52.1	-20.9%
Small (10 - 49)	9.2	8.2	-1.0	-10.9%
Medium (50 - 249)	2.2	1.3	-0.9	-39.9%
Large (250+)	1.7	0.2	-1.5	-87.0%
All	262.8	207.4	-55.4	-21.1%
Percentage shares by size band:				
Micro (0 - 9)	95.0%	95.3%		
Small (10 - 49)	3.5%	3.9%		
Medium (50 - 249)	0.8%	0.6%		
Large (250+)	0.6%	0.1%		
All	100.0%	100.0%		
Employment (000s):				
Estimates:				
Micro (0 - 9)	402.5	359.0	-43.5	-10.8%
Small (10 - 49)	174.5	161.0	-13.5	-7.7%
Medium (50 - 249)	146.5	127.0	-19.5	-13.3%
Large (250+)	431.6	223.0	-208.6	-48.3%
All	1,155.0	870.0	-285.0	-24.7%
Percentage shares by size band:				
Micro (0 - 9)	34.8%	41.3%		
Small (10 - 49)	15.1%	18.5%		
Medium (50 - 249)	12.7%	14.6%		
Large (250+)	37.4%	25.6%		
All	100.0%	100.0%		

Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Welsh Government

The BEIS Longitudinal Small Business Survey provides a wide range of reliable data on Small and Medium Size Enterprise (SME) performance and the factors that are associated with this. An [analysis](#), including data for Wales, was published in 2021.

National Statistics status

The [United Kingdom Statistics Authority](#) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

These statistics last underwent a [full assessment against the Code of Practice](#) in 2011.

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Removed large tables of data from the release and ensured that the data is available in online interactive tables
- Built new interactive tables to make more information available to users.
- Improved visuals and commentary to make it easier for the readers to draw out key messages

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators ("national indicators") that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before the National Assembly. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Well-being of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

Further details

The document is available at:

<https://gov.wales/size-analysis-businesses>

Next update

November 2022 (TBC)

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to economic.stats@gov.wales.

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