

[Predicting the future of Wales: Welsh Government report published](#)

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Population expansion, economic growth and flooding are just some of the things on the horizon for Wales, according to a [‘Future Trends Report’](#). The report, published by the Welsh Government on May 5 2017, is a requirement of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

In the words of the physicist and philosopher Niels Bohr, “prediction is very difficult, especially if it’s about the future”. Yet decisions that affect Wales’ future are made on a daily basis by Welsh public authorities. The purpose of the report is to help ensure the choices made are the best for tomorrow’s Wales, as well as today’s. The report states:

...no one would wish to discover that the policies or plans we make in the Welsh public sector today have resulted in adverse unintended consequence, or wasted investment.

To achieve this, the document uses six themes to spotlight future trends important to social, economic and environmental decision-making. It is intended that the document will encourage public bodies to employ an “insightful and habitual” longer-term view. The report admits that whilst such thinking does not always come naturally, it could pave the way for Wales to take a lead in “intelligent use and interpretation of data sources”.

Wales’ future trends in six key areas

The six areas explored are listed below. Graphical representations of the trends are [provided on the Welsh Government website](#). It uses data currently available to find patterns and trends for the future, while also summarising key observations from recent years. Key future trends for the six



areas include:

Population

The population of Wales, [currently 3.1 million](#), is set to increase by 5% over the next 20 years, fuelled equally by natural births and inwards migration. The proportion of over 75's is likely to increase from 9% to 13 % by 2030.

Health

With an ageing population will come a rise in dementia. By 2025, there could be 50,000 people aged 65 or more living with dementia in Wales, with nearly a quarter of people over 90 suffering from the disease. It is predicted that smoking levels will continue to reduce, while obesity is expected increase slightly.

Mental health illnesses have shown an increase, from 9% of adults in 2009 13% in 2015. Cancer rates have shown little change, although numbers have increased with population ageing and growth.

Economy and infrastructure

The GDP of the UK and Wales is currently growing gradually. It is likely Wales' growth rate will be overtaken by rapidly developing countries such as China and Mexico who's economy is expanding faster.

Wales has "untapped" potential to generate energy which is complimented by a current growth in the low carbon energy sector in Wales.

The provision of rural broadband in Wales is being rolled out slower than the rest of the UK. Despite this, there has been an increase in the construction of mobile internet infrastructure which is set to continue. This infrastructure may provide faster internet to those areas lacking broadband.

Private vehicles are set to remain the dominant mode of transport in Wales in the short to medium term.

Climate change

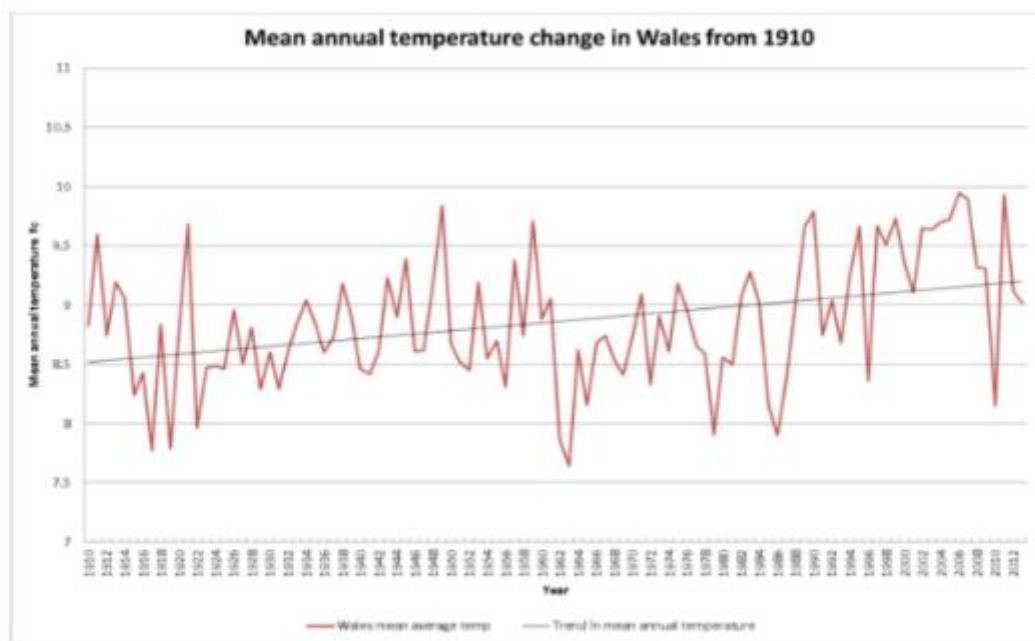
The report states there is an "overwhelming consensus" that the science underpinning climate change is sound. The 2017 [UK Climate Change Risk Assessment](#)



identified areas for priority action that include flooding, risk to health from high temperatures, water shortages and risks to the natural environment.

Wales' infrastructure, such as transport networks, underground infrastructure, energy and digital infrastructure and public water supplies are already exposed to climate hazards. It is expected these will increase in frequency and severity. It is anticipated that the interdependency of certain infrastructure networks will lead to a 'cascade' of impacts in the future.

There has been a significant decline in soil carbon in habitat land over the last ten years and more work is needed to better understand this trend. Conversely, recent increases in soil carbon in woodland until 2007 have now stabilised.



Average temperatures have increased in Wales since 1910 with the average annual temperature increasing from a level of 8.69°C (over the period 1910 to 1939) to 9.22°C over the latest 30 years (1984-2013).

Based on Met Office data

Land use and natural resources

Wales' ecosystems are likely to have insufficient resilience to the challenges presented by a changing climate, with long-term projected downward trends in biodiversity.



By 2050, average river flows in winter may rise by 10–15% but reduce by 50–80% in the summer. Ground water recharge could also be affected which may have implications for water scarcity.

The number of households in Wales is increasing faster than the number of properties available. There is likely to be a decrease in suitable land for development as floodplains and low lying land become more prone to flooding.

Society and culture

The number of single person households is predicted to rise by 30% over the next 20 years. Poverty levels are currently slightly higher in Wales than the rest of the UK. It is estimated that relative poverty levels in the UK will rise from 21% in 2014–15 to 24% in 2021–22. Child poverty in the UK is set to see an even bigger increase of 7% over the same period.

Welsh speaking has declined since 2011 although more recent data suggest there has been an increase in those who speak Welsh but are not fluent. Future Welsh speakers are more likely to have learnt at school than at home.

Wales' future trends – the influencing factors

Forecasting of any kind is subject to a degree of uncertainty, and forecasting national trends is no exception. The latter half of the report draws attention to the political, social, technological, legislative and environmental factors that could be highly influential in Wales's future.

Brexit is amongst the biggest of the uncertainties, with wide-ranging implications from economic growth to migration. This is coupled with a global trend towards politically led 'de-globalisation' leading to decreasing global trade patterns and increasing protectionism. The report states this has the potential to significantly affect industries in Wales.

Another sizeable source of uncertainty is the impact of technology, or failures thereof, on all aspects of life in Wales, from healthcare to environmental modifications. Some could have far-reaching effects, for example, antibiotic resistance and artificial climate engineering that could affect global weather patterns.

The effects of increasing CO₂ emissions are expected to damage global and regional economic networks, and will likely impact on food and water resources and associated



global conflicts. There may be other unpredictable consequences such as increased temperatures causing outbreaks of new diseases.

The report concludes with a set of questions that aim to stimulate discussion amongst public officials, as part of the decision-making process. Examples include investigating options for green-growth opportunities and how an ageing population could alter demands on social housing in Wales.

For more information, including background information and additional resources, [see Annex A of the report](#) (PDF 393KB) which summarises the seven well-being goals as part of the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, as well as links to data sources used.

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