

Wales  
**TUC**  
Cymru

# Securing a Fair Recovery

5 key findings on what  
workers in Wales want

# About this Research

In December 2020 Wales TUC commissioned YouGov to survey 1,030 workers in Wales in order to better understand how they view their working lives, their experiences of the Covid crisis, and their priorities for the future of the country. This was followed up with a series of focus groups and further survey work in January and February of 2021.

Ahead of the 2021 elections to the Senedd, this short document sets out five of the most important findings from this research.

It has been published alongside our *A Workers' Manifesto for Wales* which details a series of policies that we believe would provide a future Welsh Government with the best prospect of addressing the concerns below.



# Work and the Welsh Economy in 2021

Workers in Wales in 2021 are dealing with an economic landscape that could not have been imagined 12 months ago. The Welsh Government's Chief Economist has said that unemployment could rise as high as 114,000 this year and not return to pre-crisis levels until 2024 - increasing both poverty and inequality and having long-term scarring effects on those who are left without work.<sup>1</sup>

But we shouldn't allow the unique challenges presented by the economic fallout from a pandemic to mask the chronic failings of an economy - and an economic model - that long ago stopped working for large sections of the population.

The scale of the recovery challenge now is linked to our failure to respond properly to the last crisis. The failure to address quality of work issues as part of the response to the 2008 recession undoubtedly weakened the Welsh economy.

By most measures, worker power diminished in the decade that followed. The result has been the longest period of wage stagnation for 200 years, a rise in in-work poverty and a massive increase in precarious work.

We subsequently went into the Covid crisis in a position that was much more vulnerable than the headline employment figures suggested. Unsurprisingly the impact has been biggest on those who have faced the greatest discrimination and who are afforded that least protection - including young workers, BAME workers, and agency workers.

Much of the reluctance to tackle work quality stems from an inability to look beyond the stale and outdated economic thinking of the 1980s and 1990s.

For the past 40 years the UK's labour market model has prized 'flexibility' over all else - and, in particular, a one-sided form of flexibility that has granted ever-increasing power to employers and steadily reduced the ability of ordinary people to exercise meaningful control over their working lives.

Even on its own terms this model is failing. As Andy Haldane, the Bank of England's Chief Economist, has observed, "*there are natural limits to the benefits of a "flexible" labour market in boosting an economy's efficiency*".<sup>2</sup>

There is some belated recognition of the need to rebalance economic relations in Wales. Over the last five years the Welsh Government has begun to map out a range of policy responses that would better use the limited levers it has to strengthen workers' power in the labour market. The Welsh Government's Economic Contract, the work of the Fair Work Commission and the implementation of its recommendations, and the new Social Partnership and Procurement Bill all have the potential to help redress the balance. But progress in this area has been slow.

And at a UK level - where most of the power to bring about change resides - there appears to be little appetite to tackle or even acknowledge the growing disparities of power in the workplace and their economic consequences.

That is the backdrop to our survey of workers in Wales. What follows provides some key indicators of where workers priorities lie and where the next Welsh Government should be looking to act.

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1 <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-12/chief-economists-report-2020.pdf>

2 [can-good-work-solve-the-productivity-puzzle.pdf](https://www.thersa.org/~/media/Policy-and-Programs/Work/2019/04/can-good-work-solve-the-productivity-puzzle.pdf) (thersa.org)

# 1. A stronger, better funded public sector and pay rises for public sector workers

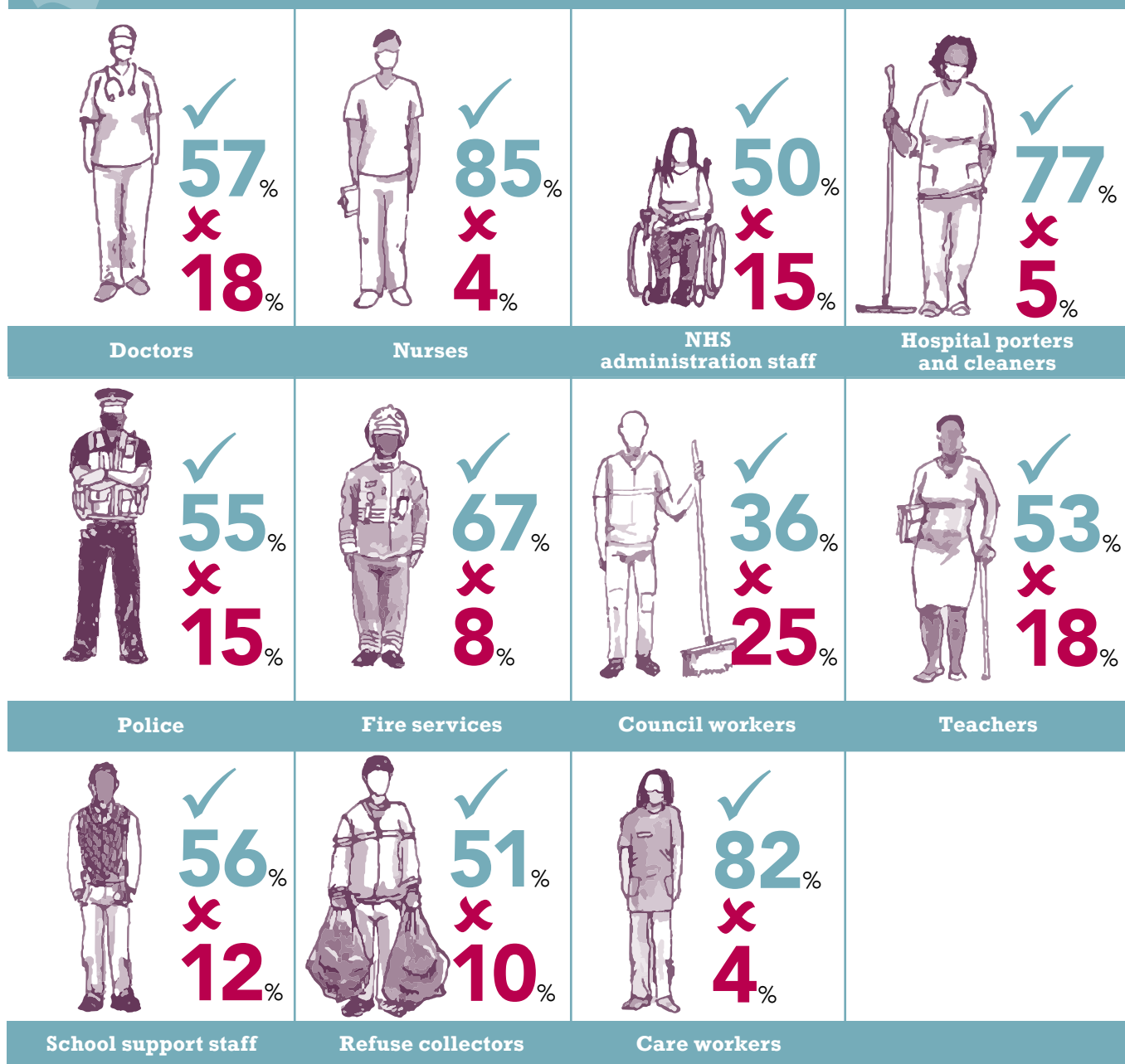
Asked to choose their policy priorities for helping workers, the economy and society, the most popular response (with 42%) is increasing funding for public services like the NHS, social care and local government.

In particular, the need to address the chronic underfunding of social care is widely recognised. 62% say that spending on social care has been below what has been needed in recent years – with only 13% saying that it has been about right or too much.

Workers in Wales support pay rises across the board for the surveyed public sector professions. Nurses, care workers, hospital porters and cleaners garner particularly strong levels of public support.

**“Key workers need action rather than empty words and gestures. Give them a pay rise and support them in a way that matters.” - focus group participant**

To what extent would you support or oppose each of the following professions receiving pay rises?



## 2. Fairness at work and a stronger voice for workers in the decisions that affect them.

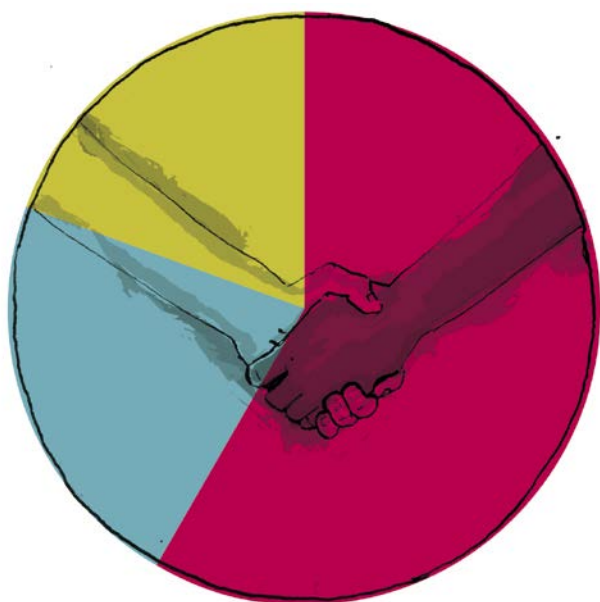
A significant number of workers in Wales are anxious about their work and financial prospects. 27% say that they are worried about being made redundant in the near future and almost one in three (32%) say that they expect their financial position to get worse by the summer.

As policy makers look to kickstart the economic recovery from the Covid crisis, it is vital, however, that the mistakes that were made during the glacially slow economic recovery of the last decade are not repeated. We should be looking to use the Welsh Government's money and policy interventions to support and develop good quality jobs.

The survey shows clear support for pro-worker conditions being attached to any government funding for businesses in Wales.

The Wales TUC has consistently argued that employers that benefit from government funding must be expected to allow trade unions access to their workforce and seek a trade union recognition agreement where workers request it. This position is backed by a ratio of more than 4 to 1 – with 40% in favour and only 9% against.

The business lobby will often argue that any attempts to attach conditions to such funding in a way that would strengthen workers' power relative to their bosses is a threat to prosperity. But this research demonstrates the extent to which that sentiment is out of step with public opinion.

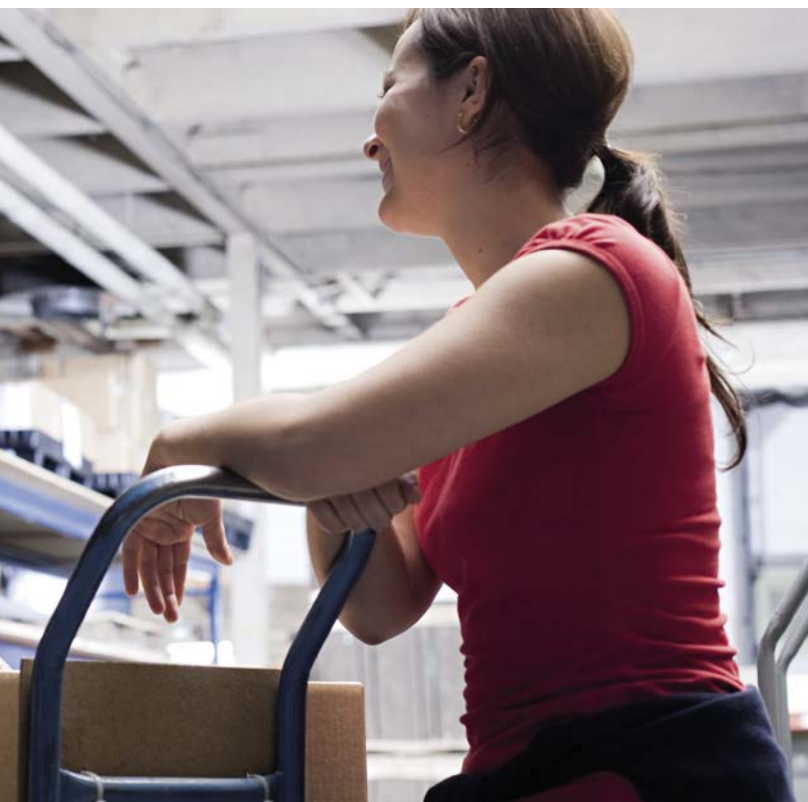


Please indicate whether the **FIRST** statement or the **SECOND** statement comes closer to your views, even if neither is exactly right.

**58** Workers need better rights to make sure bosses can't exploit them

**22** Businesses need less regulation so they can grow and create more jobs

**19** Don't know



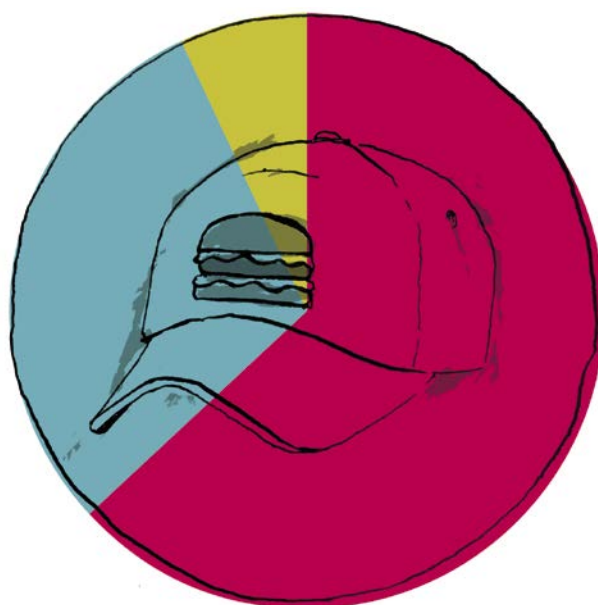
**A zero-hour contract is a type of contract between an employer and a worker according to which the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum working hours. To what extent would you support or oppose banning zero-hour contracts?**

There is also significant public support for banning one of the most blatant examples of one-sided flexibility – the zero-hour contract.

Workers support the idea that government should work in partnership with employers and trade unions in developing and implementing policy. This approach – known as social partnership – is commonplace in many countries across Europe and helps to ensure that workers have a voice in decisions that affect them. 44% back this concept – with only 8% opposing it.

Workers identified fair pay (41%), health and safety (30%), and flexibility (27%) as the top issues that they are concerned about at work.

The survey also found that hundreds of thousands of the 1.5m workers in Wales have significant frustrations about their treatment in work – 29% say that they are not paid fairly, 21% say that management do not listen to their views, 28% say that their employer does not offer good development opportunities, and 30% say that decisions taken in their workplace are not explained to them. 36% say that they are not able to easily get the training that they need to progress their career – and that figure rises to 46% for workers with lower levels of educational attainment.



**55** Total support

**26** Total oppose

**06** Don't know

### 3. Safer workplaces

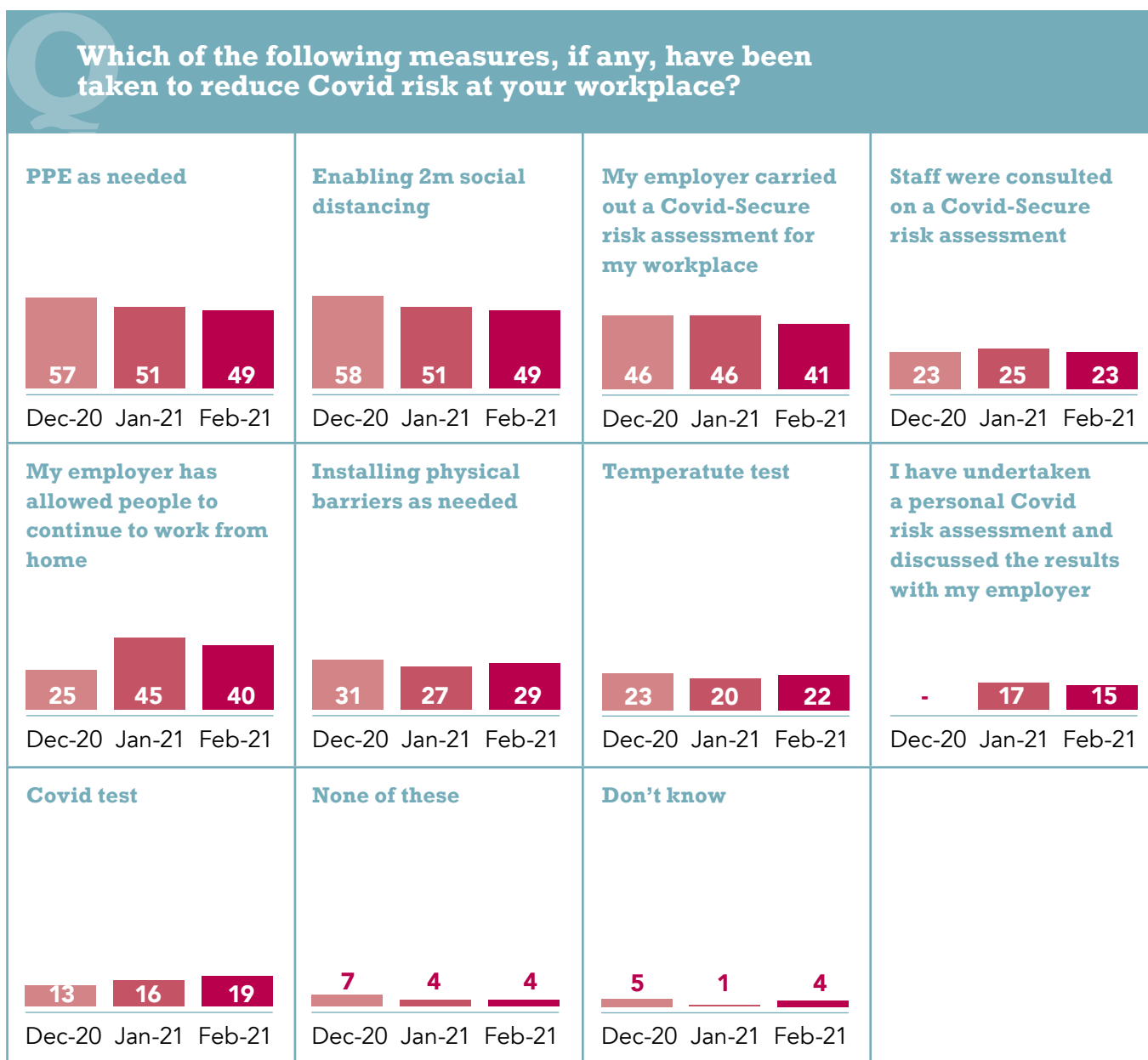
Covid has shone a light on the weaknesses of the systems that are meant to protect us at work.

Since December, we have surveyed workers on a monthly basis about their health and safety concerns and the steps that have been taken to keep their workplaces Covid-free. The results have been troubling.

Despite clear guidance to employers from Welsh Government, only 41% of respondents say that their employer has carried out a Covid risk assessment. 23% say that staff were consulted on a risk assessment. The guidance is now fixed in law as part of the Covid regulations<sup>1</sup> but there has been no discernible impact of this strengthening yet.

On worker voice in relation to health and safety, 16% report not being comfortable raising COVID risks at work. This problem is most acute among 16-24-year olds (27%), workers with lower levels of educational qualifications (26%), part-time workers (24%) workers from households with under £20k annual income (23%).

19% report being dissatisfied with employer's approach to managing COVID risk. Dissatisfaction is strongest among 16-24 year-olds (27%) and workers with lower formal qualifications (29%)



<sup>1</sup> [Coronavirus legislation: restrictions on individuals, business and others | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-legislation-restrictions-on-individuals-business-and-others)

## 4. A fair and green recovery

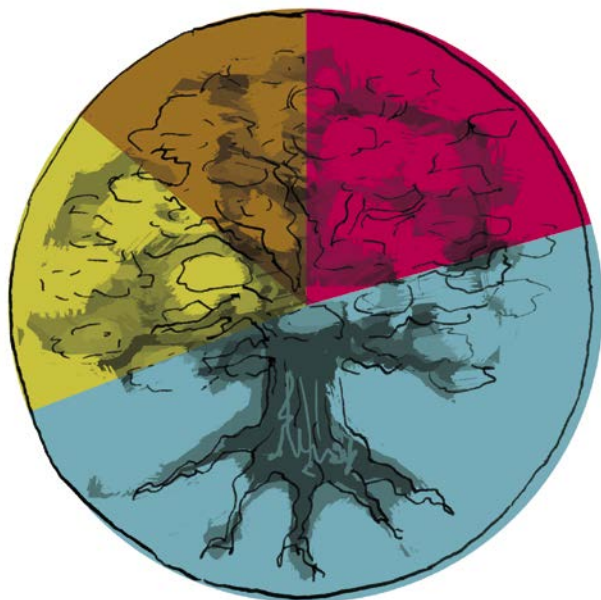
After investing in strengthening the public sector, the next highest priority for the recovery is creating jobs through public investment in green infrastructure, including faster broadband, greener homes, and new electric transport (30%). Wales TUC research has set out how funding in this area could create up to 60,000 jobs over the next two years.<sup>1</sup>

Workers also support the principle of ensuring a just transition for workers as part of any move to a greener economy.

Other suggestions to score highly as priority areas for the recovery are “introducing skills and retraining schemes for workers at risk of redundancy” (21%) and “public investment in industries hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic, such as aviation, aerospace and hospitality” (21%).

There is also very strong support for taking more radical action to help tenants in the private rented sector.

**Thinking about after the coronavirus crisis, which of the following comes closest to your view?**



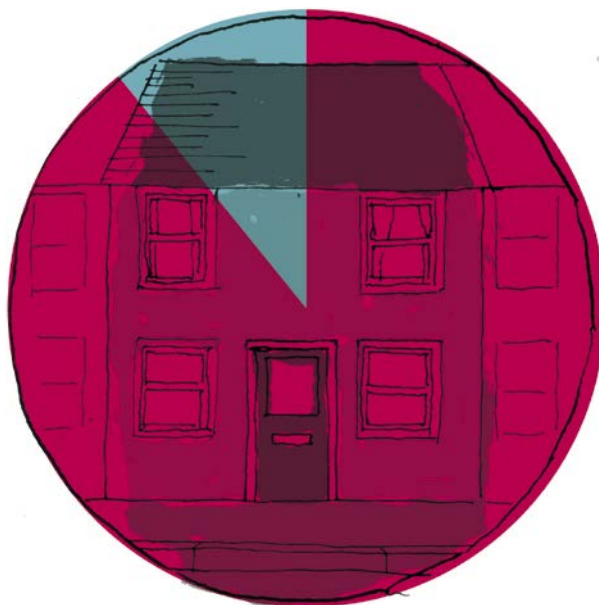
**21** After the coronavirus crisis, we should move towards a green economy where climate change and sustainability are priorities

**49** After the coronavirus crisis, we should move towards a green economy, but only if retraining or employment is provided to those who are at risk of losing their jobs

**17** After the Coronavirus crisis, we should not be moving towards a green economy anyway as there are other priorities that are more important

**14** Don't know

**To what extent would you support or oppose rent controls, where the UK government sets caps on what landlords can charge, or freezes rents?**



**66** Total support

**08** Total oppose

# 5. Greater devolution of powers to Wales

When asked where key decisions should be made, workers support the Welsh Government controlling areas like education and health where powers are already devolved. They also support Cardiff rather than Westminster making policy on welfare and taxation issues. And, perhaps most notably given recent debates about the UK Government’s plans to control funds for its ‘levelling up’ programme, workers in Wales also strongly back Welsh Government control of economic development policy.



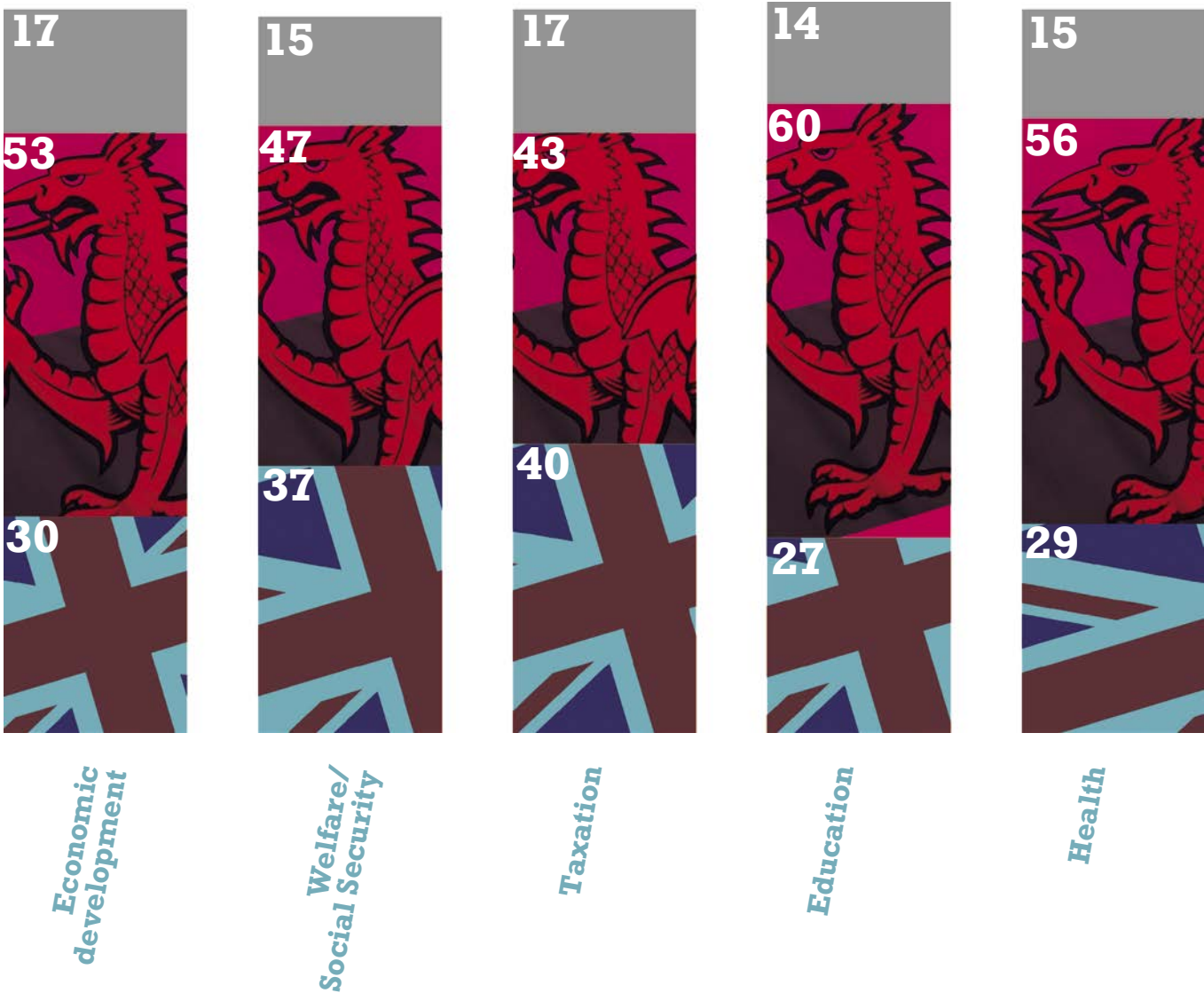
The UK Government should have control



The Welsh Government should have control



Don't know



# Acknowledgements:

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