

Welsh Government | Covid-19 Research | Wave 3

Findings Note | 21.05.2020

Background

The Welsh Government has commissioned BritainThinks to conduct a programme of qualitative research to provide insight into the views and experiences of people in Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This note sets out findings from a third wave of focus groups, each comprising 6 participants and lasting 90 minutes. Fieldwork was conducted on 20th May 2020. Focus groups were conducted online with the following participants:

- A group with participants aged 45 and over living in Rhondda and the surrounding areas.
- A group with participants aged between 18 and 44 living in Wrexham and the surrounding areas.

All participants were BC1C2 socio-economic grade and there was a mix of gender across the sample.

These groups followed two previous waves of focus groups in late April and early May 2020, which delivered insight into views toward the Covid-19 pandemic. This third wave of research was designed to track opinion and test responses to draft 'Keep Wales Safe' creative materials. Specific objectives for this second wave of research were to understand:

- Experiences and views of the Covid-19 pandemic amongst people in Wales.
- Perceptions of the responses of both the UK and the Welsh Governments to the pandemic to date.
- Responses to approaches taken to ease the lockdown measures in Wales, including different approaches being taken in England and Wales.
- Responses to draft 'Keep Wales Safe' creatives.

This note outlines the key findings from the research, followed by a more detailed summary of responses as they developed in the focus groups.

Summary of key findings

- 1. Concern about the pandemic remains high. While participants felt they had adapted to the lockdown, it continues to have a big impact on their lives.**

- In line with the previous wave of research, participants described considerable concern about a perceived increase in others breaking the lockdown rules in Wales, undermining collective efforts to reduce the spread of the virus.
- 2. Participants voiced regret and concern that the UK is no longer taking a joined-up approach to managing the pandemic across all four nations.**
 - All participants voiced a strong preference for a joined-up, UK-wide response. It was felt that taking different approaches has caused confusion and risks leading to an increase in the spread of the virus.
- 3. Despite this, the decision to extend the lockdown in Wales continues to be widely supported.**
 - The UK Government was blamed for the lack of a joined-up response, with the easing of lockdown restrictions in England felt to have come too soon.
 - By contrast, the decision to extend the lockdown in Wales was felt to have been the correct decision for Wales, which rightly prioritises the health and lives of citizens.
- 4. Moving forwards, participants expected that the lockdown will very gradually begin to be eased in Wales. However, they will be looking for signs that the Welsh Government is continuing to take a health-first approach.**
 - While participants could imagine some workplaces and retail businesses opening in the coming weeks, it was felt to be too soon to re-open schools. Across all areas, participants stressed that there needs to be clear social distancing rules in place, with adequate protection and hand sanitising facilities provided.
 - Views on easing restrictions on socialising were more mixed. While all wanted to be able to see family and close friends, there was concern about putting loved ones at risk.
- 5. Participants were positive about the 'Keep Wales Safe' branding tested.**
 - As in the previous wave of research, this was felt to be a strong, clear and motivating message for Wales.

Background views and experiences of the pandemic

- **In line with the previous waves of research, participants described themselves as very concerned about Covid-19. A sense that others are increasingly breaking the rules was identified as a key issue.**
 - While participants had adapted to the lockdown restrictions, the impact of the virus on their lives remains high. As previously, key concerns raised were loss of income and fears for their own health and that of (at-risk) loved ones.
 - Building on findings in the previous wave of research, there was considerable concern about a perceived increase in others breaking the lockdown rules in Wales, undermining collective efforts to reduce the spread of the virus.
 - A number of participants spontaneously pointed to the easing of restrictions in England as contributing to this, by leading to a sense that it is no longer necessary or important to observe all of the guidelines.

“Since the restrictions were eased in England, in Wales, although we’re technically meant to be under the lockdown for another 3 weeks, things do seem to have changed – going to the supermarket, there’s no queues outside any more or restrictions on the number of people that can come in. I think people are thinking that it doesn’t matter anymore, I think because it’s been lifted there. But it’s been extended in Wales for a reason.”

(Wrexham, 18-45)

Views on UK and Welsh Government responses to the pandemic

- **Participants voiced regret and concern that the UK is no longer taking a joined-up approach to managing the pandemic across all four nations.**
 - All participants voiced a strong preference for a joined-up, UK-wide response. It was felt that taking different approaches has caused confusion and risks leading to an increase in the spread of the virus.
 - This viewpoint was amplified for participants in Wrexham given their proximity to the border and connectivity to Chester (e.g. for work).

“Why can’t we just have the same rule for every area? I’m so confused, I’m just staying in most of the time because you don’t know what’s what. It’s just all a little confusing. I don’t understand why the 4 countries have gone their separate ways.”

(Rhondda, 45+)
- **Despite this, participants widely supported the decision to extend the lockdown in Wales.**
 - Participants blamed the UK Government for the lack of a joined-up response. The easing of lockdown restrictions in England was felt to have come too soon, leading to concerns about the impact this could have in increasing the spread of the virus and a potential ‘second peak’.
 - This connects to a continued sense that the UK Government’s response to the pandemic has been lacking.
 - By contrast, the decision to extend the lockdown in Wales was felt to have been the correct decision for Wales. As in the previous wave of research, this was seen as a symbol that the Welsh Government is taking an active role in decision making and acting in the best interests of Wales.

“The [approach] in England is standing out to me. I think [Boris Johnson] wants the second wave to come in now. I honestly think Mark Drakeford is going around it the right way. But not everyone is perfect. Yes, Mark Drakeford might, like Boris, get things wrong, but for the moment I take my hat off to him.”

(Rhondda, 45+)

Perceptions on easing lockdown restrictions

- **Moving forwards, participants expected that the lockdown will very gradually begin to be eased in Wales. However, they will be looking for signs that the Welsh Government is continuing to take a health-first approach.**

- Participants recognised that the lockdown will need to be lifted eventually and, while some were afraid of doing so, appetite for starting to ease lockdown restrictions appeared to be higher than in previous waves of research.
- However, there was a widespread expectation that restrictions will be lifted very gradually, and participants will be looking for reassurance from the Welsh Government that it is continuing to take a cautious approach and is prioritising lives, not the economy.

“They need to be slow and steady because if we get it wrong, it will have a big impact. When the numbers are dropping into double digits or single digits, then I think we can start to lift things more but while they’re still in the hundreds we need to be more cautious.”

(Wrexham, 18-45)

- **While participants could imagine some workplaces and retail businesses opening in the coming weeks, it was felt to be too soon to re-open schools. Views on easing restrictions on socialising were more mixed.**

Area	Response
Workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were relatively comfortable with workplaces starting to re-open in the coming weeks. This was felt to be an important step to take to support the economy. • For workplaces to re-open, participants felt that adequate PPE, hand washing facilities and social distancing measures would all need to be in place to ensure employee safety is protected. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These measures were expected to be easier to put in place in certain types of workplaces compared with others (e.g. offices and call centres versus factories and construction sites).
Shops and retailers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with workplaces, participants were relatively comfortable with non-essential shops and retailers starting to re-open in the coming weeks. Again, this was felt to be an important step for the economy. • As well as ensuring adequate social distancing measures were in place and hand sanitising stations provided, participants felt that re-opening businesses should happen gradually in a clear priority order. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hairdressers were felt to be top of this list. ○ Retailers able to sell products online were not felt to be a priority. ○ Pubs were felt to be high risk and expected to re-open last.

Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants were uncomfortable with schools starting to re-open in the coming weeks. While children need to return to education as soon as possible, the difficulties enforcing social distancing meant this was felt to be too high risk at the current time. Suggestions from the UK Government that primary school aged children will be the first to return added to fears that schools would re-open too soon. This was due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern younger children would be less able to observe social distancing measures. Confusion about why those with important exams next year (current Years 10 and 12) aren't being prioritised. For schools to be able to re-open, participants felt that a clear plan needs to be in place that prioritises the safety of teachers and children (e.g. adequate PPE provision, clear social distancing measures, reduced class sizes).
Public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants were not comfortable with the idea of using public transport and did not plan to do so in the near future. As all had access to a car, this was not a priority. Concerns related to difficulties in social distancing on transport such as buses and trains, as well as the number of different people that would be touching surfaces. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One participant felt that this would be heightened for non-local services, which would be used by a greater number of people from different locations.
Socialising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants had mixed views on lifting restrictions on socialising. While all wanted to be able to see family and close friends, there was concern about putting loved ones at risk. All felt that the measure in place in England was confusing and risked creating a long chain of people interacting with one another, even if one at a time. For restrictions on socialising to be relaxed, participants felt that clarity would be key. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of people you are allowed to see. Where you are allowed to see them. The social distancing measures that need to be observed. If these restrictions are relaxed, then the 'Stay home' messaging was felt to no longer be appropriate.

"Well if they go back to work then they've got to be socially distancing themselves before there's a vaccine. But it's going to be very difficult for some people to manage that. In places where

they've got to work up close, are [employers] going to dress them up in the PPE? If they do and it's safe then great, send them back to work."

(Rhondda, 45+)

"I would like to see the same change [in socialising] in Wales [as in England] but on the other side of it the caution would need to be there because I would be worried about passing it on to family members. Although I do miss my family, I miss my mum, my dad, I think you need to hold out for as long as it needs to be really."

(Wrexham, 18-45)

Responses to 'Keep Wales Safe' creatives tested

- **Participants were positive about the 'Keep Wales Safe' branding overall.**
 - As in the previous wave of research, this was felt to be a strong, clear and motivating message that was specific to Wales.
 - The visualisation of the branding was largely felt to be appropriate. While one participant expressed a concern that it emphasised division between North and South Wales, this was not a widespread view.

"I think it's very good. It's simple, it's not over complicated."

(Rhondda, 45+)

Detailed responses to potential messaging tested

- **A number of different branding options were tested in the groups.**

- While there were no strong preferences overall, a number of participants preferred the logo options with a solid background rather than the ones with stripes. These were felt to be sharper and more recognisable as Wales.

"I think it's a clearer representation and the map of Wales is more realistic. It is clearer, sharper. The lines on the others are a bit funny on your eyes."

(Rhondda, 45+)



- ✓ Preferred option overall.
- ✓ Felt to be the sharpest and most recognisable image.
- ✓ 'Keep Wales Safe' text is clear and stands out.



- ✓ Preferred option from those without a solid background tested.
- ✓ 'Keep Wales Safe' text is clear.

- **Options for including lockup text alongside the brand was also tested. These broadly tested well.**

- In particular, participants praised text that was felt to highlight unity and a collective effort to reduce rates of infection and protect Wales.
- Responses to location-specific messages were less positive. This was felt to detract from the wider message of unity in Wales that participants felt to be motivating and reassuring.

"It's just about all working together. If you split different parts up with different messages, there's no need for it, it gets confusing. We're all in this together."

(Rhondda, 45+)



- **A number of examples of the branding being used in information adverts was also tested. Participants liked the look, feel and positive tone of these creatives.**
 - The creatives tested were felt to be clear and engaging, and have a warm, friendly tone, especially the 'thank you for staying home' example.
 - While some felt that the creatives could do more to provide people with useful information, the examples of the 'Keep Wales Safe' branding in situ were broadly positively received.

"It ['thank you for staying home'] is a nice way to put it. It's showing appreciation to people and encouraging them to keep doing what they're doing. There's a lot of anxiety going around, so something like that would be positive for people. I like the colouring, the photograph, everything about it."

(Rhondda, 45+)