

Housing in the UK

National comparisons in typology, condition and cost of poor housing

Justine Piddington, Helen Garrett and Tad Nowak





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The Publisher
IHS BRE Press
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Watford
Herts WD25 9XX
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Printed using FSC or PEFC material from sustainable forests.

FB 62

First published 2013

ISBN 978-1-84806-330-3

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Acknowledgements

The preparation of this report was funded by BRE Trust. BRE would like to thank the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Welsh Government and the Local Government Data Unit in Wales for their guidance and advice on using their data.

The support of our colleagues at BRE is gratefully acknowledged:

- Kevin White for estimates of poor housing for Scotland
- Claire Summers for data on fuel poverty
- Louise Jamal for technical support.

Executive summary

This report brings together key information from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on their housing stock profile and condition. For consistency purposes, most results are confined to occupied dwellings only, and the reference year is 2008 (the latest common reference year to date). The exceptions relate to poor housing, where figures are extracted from individual BRE reports (see sections 4.1 and 4.3 for more detail), and fuel poverty, where figures relate to households.

The results show that Wales has the greatest proportion of owner-occupied dwellings (73%) and Scotland has the smallest (63%). The typology of occupied dwellings is very different across the four nations in that Wales has the oldest stock and Northern Ireland has the newest.

There is some variation in the use of central heating and fuel type nationally, but this is likely to be linked to the number of purpose-built flats (which generally use electricity for cooking and heating, rather than gas).

Homes with cavity walls were more likely to be insulated in Northern Ireland than in the other UK nations, whereas dwellings with lofts were more likely to have thicker roof insulation in Wales. Average SAP ratings were higher in Northern Ireland and Scotland than in England and Wales, but this is due mainly to the age and typology profile of their stock.

In terms of health and safety (HHSRS), Wales has a notably higher incidence of dwellings with Category 1 hazards than England and Northern Ireland, including a higher incidence of falls and cold homes. Scotland does not collect this information.

The combined general repair bill for occupied dwellings in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is £34.4 billion. This figure would be much higher if Scotland, and vacant dwellings, were included.

The general repair bill includes disrepair that does not have a direct impact on the health and safety of occupants. An alternative measure is the total cost of poor housing (defined as a home that has one or more Category 1 HHSRS hazards), and this work is estimated to be £21.1 billion for the UK as a whole. This has been calculated as costing the National Health Service (NHS) just under £760 million per year, if the homes are left unimproved. Using this information, the direct payback period for fixing all hazards in the UK is calculated at 27.8 years, if the repairs or improvements were all done immediately. However, the direct cost to the NHS accounts, at most, for only 40% of the total cost to society (which includes things such as lost future earnings and increased spending on benefits). Therefore, the total cost to society is approximately £1.9 billion per year, and the payback period for repairing all hazards at the outset would be reduced from 27.8 years to 11.1 years.



1 Introduction

There is a regular call for UK housing statistics, usually to compare them with statistics for other European or world nations, but each time they have to be compiled from the four separate and different housing stock surveys run by the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Therefore, to have a summary document containing the key information in an accessible format was thought to be useful. Better still, would be to combine the data sets at a given time with a set of weights enabling analyses to be undertaken once, rather than four times. Unfortunately, this is not that simple.

The four surveys use four different methodologies. They are undertaken over different timescales, with different sampling criteria. Even questions that appear similar are often subtly different. Scotland and Wales do not inspect vacant dwellings, whereas England and Northern Ireland do. England has an additional form for houses in multiple occupation. Although some information is truly comparable across nations, the most interesting information – energy efficiency, repair costs, health and safety, space standards – is more problematic, and more difficult to compare.

Nevertheless, there is plenty of information that can be reliably compared. All the surveys have a common heritage, but each has taken a different course to meet its own national agenda. The physical inspection parts of the English Housing Survey and Northern Ireland House Condition Survey and large parts of the Living in Wales survey form are identical, and all three use the same consistent briefing provided by BRE. The Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) methodology is a development of that used in England before 1986.

This report first puts together a set of the most commonly asked questions about UK data in a tabular form, and compares them with published data from similar nations: Germany, France and the US.

It then undertakes a country-by-country comparison to explain the sometimes surprising differences between the housing stocks of the UK nations, and quantifies the total repair bill and cost of poor housing to the UK.

It does not provide a combined data set; this is a possible next step. Nor does it look at detailed household comparisons, which, if there is demand, might be the subject of an additional report, illustrating housing similarities and inequalities between the people of the UK nations.

1.1 The national housing surveys

Each of the four UK nations undertakes its own survey to assess its housing stock. These are as follows.

English House Condition Survey and English Housing Survey

The English House Condition Survey (EHCS) was carried out every five years until 2001, after which it became a regular annual survey. The survey is analysed using two or three years of data to give a larger sample size. In 2008, the EHCS was integrated with the Survey of English Housing to form the new English Housing Survey (EHS). The EHCS/EHS has three component surveys:

- a household survey (with a sample of around 17,000 households)
- a subsequent physical survey involving around 8000 occupied and vacant properties
- a desk-based market value survey of a subsample of these dwellings (this component was discontinued in 2010).

The survey is commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and more details are available on the Department's website^[1].

Northern Ireland House Condition Survey

The Northern Ireland House Condition Survey (NIHCS), commissioned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, is not a continuous survey, but does occur every few years. It comprises a physical survey and a social survey (householder interview), undertaken by the same dwelling surveyor. For the 2009 NIHCS, 3000 dwellings were selected for the house condition survey, and 2174 were surveyed^[2], 1901 of which were occupied. Further details and information on the most recent (2011) survey can be found on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website^[3].

Scottish House Condition Survey

Since 2003, the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) has been an annual continuous survey gathering information on both the physical condition of dwellings and the experiences of households. Commissioned by the Scottish Government, it is the single largest housing research project in Scotland. From the 3800 or so households interviewed, around 3000 physical surveys are undertaken annually. Unoccupied dwellings are not fully surveyed. Although key statistics are published using annual data, detailed analysis is based on a three-year sample because of sample size. In 2012 the SHCS was combined with the Scottish Household Survey, and is now referred to as the SHS. Further information is available on this and previous surveys on the Scottish Government website^[4].

2 Profile of the UK housing stock

2.1 Distribution of occupied housing in the UK

In 2008, there were 25.5 million occupied dwellings in the UK. The distribution of these dwellings across the four nations making up the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) was unequal, as shown in Figure 2.1. Some 21.2 million occupied dwellings were in England, accounting for 83% of the UK stock, and therefore the profile of the UK stock was, and still is, heavily influenced by the English stock. Scotland had the second largest number of dwellings, at 2.3 million (9%). The 1.3 million dwellings in Wales accounted for 5% of the UK stock, and the 0.7 million in Northern Ireland represented 3%.

Data to support all of the Figures in this report are provided in the Appendix.

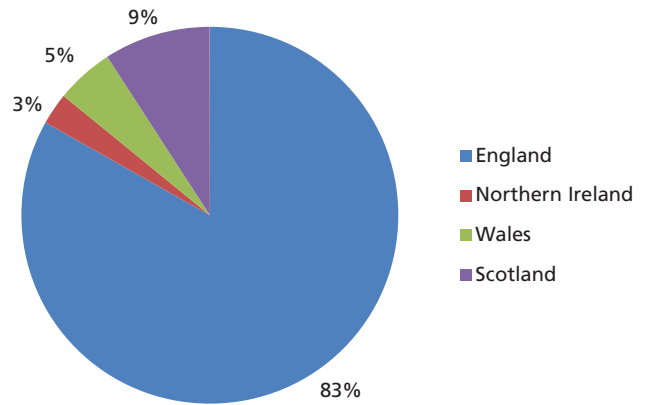


Figure 2.1: Distribution of the UK housing stock

2.2 Tenure profile of housing in the UK

More than two-thirds (68%) of occupied dwellings in the UK were owner-occupied in 2008. The remaining UK dwellings were rented: 19% in the social sector (split roughly equally between local authority/Housing Executive and housing association landlords), and 13% in the private sector. This is shown in Figure 2.2.

In the UK, Wales had the greatest proportion of owner-occupied dwellings (73%), and Scotland had the smallest (63%). Renting was also common, with Northern Ireland having the largest share of private rented dwellings (18%) and Scotland having the largest share of social rented dwellings (28%). Figure 2.3 shows the breakdown by tenure for each nation.

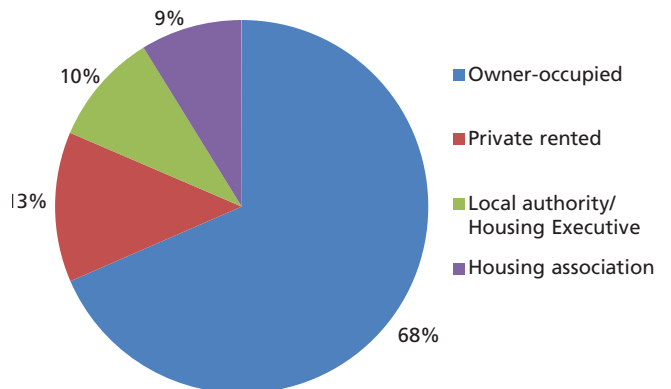


Figure 2.2: Tenure profile of the UK housing stock

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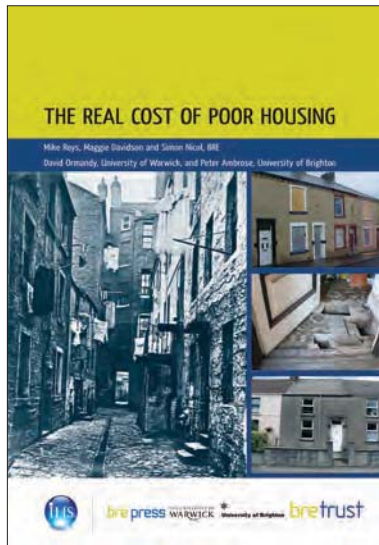
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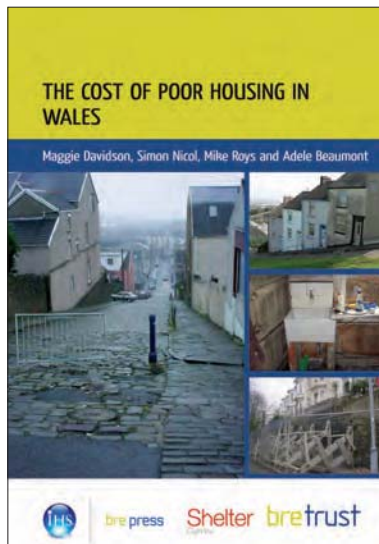
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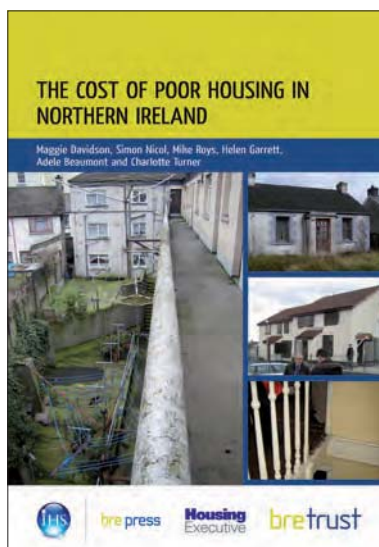


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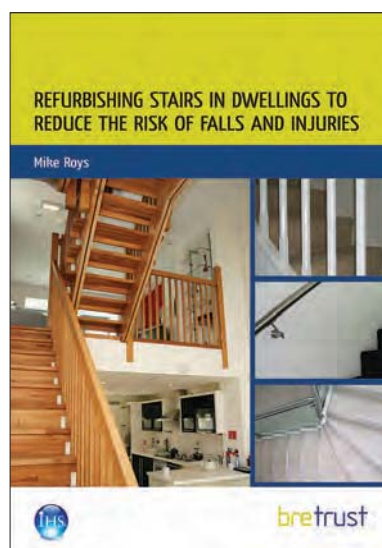
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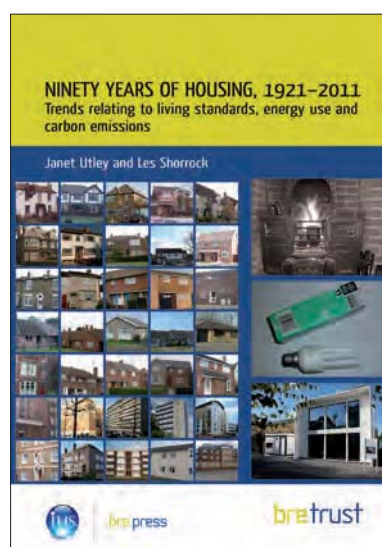
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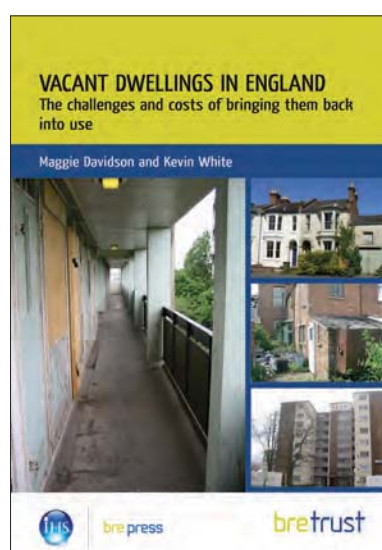
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This report undertakes a UK comparison to explain the, sometimes surprising, differences between the housing stocks, and quantifies the total repair bill and cost of poor housing to the UK. Using the results of the English Housing Survey, Northern Ireland House Condition Survey, Living in Wales Survey and Scottish House Condition Survey, the report provides key information on the housing stock profile and condition.



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