



what works  
wellbeing

# STRATEGY 2020



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**WHAT IS WELLBEING?**

Wellbeing is how we're doing, as individuals, communities and as a nation. And how sustainable it is for the future.

It is also known as social welfare or social value (HM Treasury)

No policy, project, or business, can be successful unless it improves or protects our wellbeing. And the majority of the UK population agrees\*.

\*YouGov survey in 2014, 2,391 respondents, NatRep, commissioned by Action for Happiness.

**OUR STORY**

We are part of a 'quiet revolution' to improve wellbeing in the UK and reduce misery.

The Centre was established by the UK Prime Minister in response to the Commission on Wellbeing & Policy in 2014 to continue the implementation of the UK National Wellbeing Measurement Programme established in 2010.

Whilst we have a global audience and partnerships, compiling the global knowledge base, our main focus is working with organisations in the UK to work out what works to improve wellbeing across our regions and nations.

Since 2014 we have worked with people and organisations from all sectors.

We find out what works to protect and improve wellbeing for whom, when, where, why, and how. And then put evidence into action.



**UK's national body for wellbeing evidence and practice**

- Centre founded

- Public dialogue and consultations across UK
- Research programmes begin

- First evidence on what works for wellbeing published
- Business Council established

- 82,000+ online visitors
- 14,700+ downloads of our resources
- 60+ events for policymakers & practitioners

- Funded by National Lottery Community Fund to support civil society organisations
- Collaboration with Universities UK

- Loneliness review
- Brief guide to measuring loneliness
- Partnership with Health Foundation
- Evidence knowledge bank

- Wellbeing at the heart of policy
- New data analysis collaborations
- New methods and measures project

Wellbeing Across the Life Course  
 Culture and Sport  
 Community Wellbeing — People, Power, and Place  
 Work, Transitions, and Adult Learning



## WHAT WE'RE AIMING TO ACHIEVE

Our mission is to develop and share robust, accessible and useful evidence that governments, businesses, communities and people use to improve wellbeing across the UK.

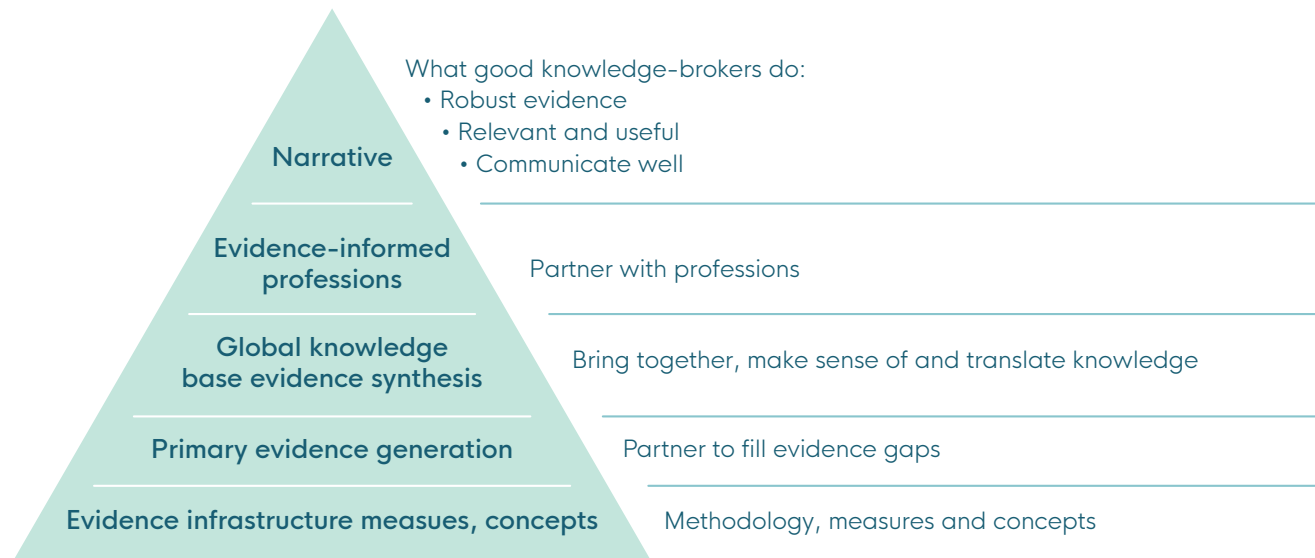
### We are building an evidence system for wellbeing

#### Our role:

- Establish the global evidence base.
- Get that knowledge to people who can and do use it.
- Identify evidence gaps and work with people to fill them.

#### We are successful when:

- Wellbeing is recognised as a meaningful and measurable goal for decision makers.
- Wellbeing evidence is generated that is robust, meaningful and useful.
- Knowledge of what works reaches people who can and want to use it.
- More evidence-informed action taken, and more trials and studies are done which feed back into evidence base.





## WELLBEING, DONE WELL

We aim to improve wellbeing in the UK, and reduce misery.

We do this through understanding what governments, business, communities, and people can do to improve wellbeing.

We are trusted, independent, evidence-based, collaborative, practical, iterative and open.

We are a public good.

We can work with you to understand:

- what do we know? and get that to people who can put it into action
- what don't we know? and partner to find out.

### Why?

- To avoid wasting time, effort, money and lives by doing well-meaning but less effective, even harmful things.
- To use what we already know.
- Learning as we go.

### Our story, our impact

We reach over **12,000 people a month** through our website alone with our digital-first delivery.

This happens alongside **a relational approach to change**. It builds evidence of what works into systems, and develops capacity to add to, and act on, new learning.

#### Building on knowledge

Our approach is built on the knowledge of what works for research use, and the findings of our public dialogues that we pioneered to create a learning system for wellbeing.



#### More on wellbeing

- How we're doing, as individuals, communities and as a nation; and how sustainable it is for the future (Office for National Statistics).
- Feeling good and functioning well.
- How things look from the outside and how we feel in ourselves. How we experience life.
- The idea of positive progress and a conversation about what success is.
- Social value or social welfare (HM Treasury).
- About making a positive difference to people's lives.
- About making the economic, social and environmental work together now, and through capitals, for the future.
- Quality of life and prosperity; for the future quality of life and prosperity; physical, mental and social health; thriving sustainable communities and creating the conditions for us all to thrive.



## OUR WORK



Developing digital guidance and a workplace wellbeing survey for employers

### How we created impact

Commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions to build a nationally-benchmarked, evidence-informed set of wellbeing questions for employer surveys. One of our most popular and downloaded resources.



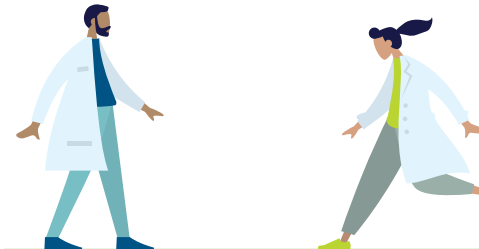
Creating a cost-effectiveness calculator

### How we created impact

This calculator helps employers evaluate and compare the cost-effectiveness of wellbeing activities in the workplace, whether it's flexitime; mindfulness training; workplace layout or workflow design; improving job quality; mental health first aid; learning and training; and so on. We consulted with businesses to develop this and had input from CIPD, BEIS and The Work Foundation.

**"An excellent, clear guide  
...highly recommend!"**

Dr Jeremy Oliver  
UCL Centre for Behaviour Change



Strategic Business Wellbeing Leaders

### How we created impact

We bring together a small and carefully selected number of non-competing stakeholders from the business sector who are not only demonstrating an ongoing commitment to wellbeing within their own workplace, but who are considering wellbeing in their supply chains, of their consumers and within society more broadly. Our longest standing members include BT Group, Nationwide and Maximus.

**"The Centre helps us support a greater number of organisations in reducing financial stress, increasing wellbeing and improving the lives and productivity of employees and, as a result, their organisations."**

James Herbert  
CEO, Hastee



Mapping the evidence of what works from first job to retirement

### How we created impact

Working with the University of East Anglia over four years. Systematic evidence reviews and data analysis on improving wellbeing across our working lives, and what can mitigate the effects of unemployment.



## Shaping the UK's national loneliness strategy

### How we created impact

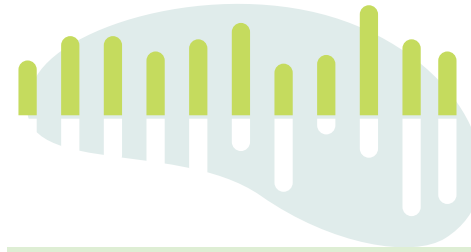
Commissioned by the Department for Media, Culture and Sport, we carried out an evidence review with Brunel University, London. We are now working with a number of organisations to fill evidence gaps for improved action.



## Supporting UK civil society to measure and improve wellbeing

### How we created impact

Our dedicated civil society implementation lead has facilitated sector-wide, bespoke workshops for charities, community groups and funding bodies across the UK.



## Developing local areas wellbeing indicators

### How we created impact

With the Centre for Thriving Places (previously Happy City) and a number of pilot local authorities, we created a 'ready-to-go' and 'ideal' set of indicators to track and compare local wellbeing factors across regions and time. This is now being incorporated into the Public Health England Fingertips tool.



## Giving employers better tools to measure wellbeing and the cost-effectiveness of wellbeing activities

### How we created impact

Commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions to build a nationally-benchmarked, evidence-informed set of wellbeing questions for employer surveys. We worked with the University of East Anglia to create a cost-effectiveness calculator.

## Wellbeing measures as part of Covid-19 response measures

### How we created impact

We made sure high anxiety measure is included in the Wider Impacts of Covid on the Public Health England Fingertips Tool. This tool is widely used by Local Authorities to inform their local policies and programmes.

## Voluntary reporting standards for employers

### How we created impact

Based on our evidence of drivers of wellbeing in the workplace, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Health and Social Care now recommend that employers use our recommended questions — including the ONS4 — as voluntary reporting standards.

## Helping the industrial strategy measure what matters

### How we created impact

Guided by the Centre, the government's industrial strategy includes a range of economic and job indicators as well as wellbeing and social capital metrics developed by our partner, the Bennett Institute.



## OUR FOCUS

Wellbeing is broad and many organisations have a role to play. We are focused on where we think we can make the biggest difference to wellbeing in the UK as well as current expertise and networks.

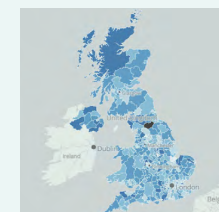
We have also focused on where there are relatively bigger evidence and implementation gaps that are not already being addressed by organisations with more resources where we will be a smaller partner:

### 1. Connection & Community

**Topics:** places and community, loneliness, environment, culture, sports, arts, heritage, physical and mental health.

Social connections are consistently found to be strongest drivers of wellbeing, individually and collectively.

There are big geographical differences in wellbeing in the UK. Emotional and self-perceived health are also strong drivers of wellbeing.



**Map of UK wellbeing**

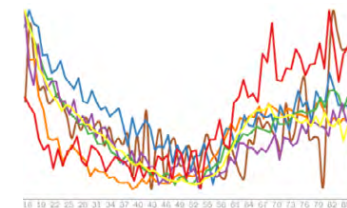
Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

### 2. Working age and business

**Topics:** work, education and learning, income and economy.

We are most miserable between the ages of 23 and 68. Employment has one of the largest effects on wellbeing. Yet, other than being ill in bed, we are most miserable when we're at work with our managers.

Money and basic need do matter, especially to those with relatively little.



**The shape of happiness**  
Relationship between happiness (life satisfaction) and age.

**3. Methods, measures and concepts for wellbeing economics and analysis** This is a relatively new field where methodology such as the WELLBY are still developing. Our evidence reviews and work with policy and practitioners has shown the need to for greater consistency and comparability of measures and concepts. Using and understanding wellbeing data and measures.

Developing methodology for use of wellbeing data and evidence in the field of decision making and wellbeing economics. Increasing use of comparable measures across sectors and disciplines.



**Wellbeing in the HM Treasury Green Book** which sets out how to appraise policies and programmes.

**We are also interested in being a supporting partner working on any of the following topics:**

- Mental & physical health
- Financial security, debt & basic need
- Education & skills
- Built environment, local infrastructure, services
- Ecosystems & sustainability, natural environment
- Personal & partner relationships
- Arts & culture





## HOW WE ACHIEVE OUR AIMS

### Our activities and theory of change



#### Leadership and collaboration

Wellbeing is no one person's or organisation's job. It's all of us we all have a role to play.

Shaping the narrative

We've worked with more than **60 partners** from government and public sector, civil society, business, and academia.



#### Translate and communicate

Make sense of the evidence so we can all understand and get it - and the experts - to you when you need it

Evidence-informed professions

Over **70 clear, relevant resources** downloaded more than **150,000 times**.



#### Evidence and analysis

Bring together what's known, and work out what's not in a way that you can be confident about risk levels of actions you take

Global knowledge base  
evidence synthesis

Evidence infrastructure,  
measures and concepts

Our transparent and robust **methods** mean our findings have been used with confidence:

- in the **Treasury's Green Book**
- to inform the **National Lottery Community Fund strategy**
- to support **local authorities**
- by employers to improve **staff wellbeing**



#### Implementation and new evidence

Using what's known, learning where we don't, working out what you need to know.

Primary evidence generation

The Centre's Theory of Change is based on a major review of the evidence on knowledge mobilisation we commissioned with [Wellcome Trust](#), working with the [Alliance for Useful Evidence](#) and [EPPI-Centre at UCL](#), at the start of the Centre. It identified six mechanisms of knowledge use and looked at the evidence base behind them. It incorporates behavioural insights as pathways for the first time. [Here is an overview of the findings.](#)

## The science of using science: what works in research use

This table sets out the evidence base on which our theory of change is based.

	Mechanism	Evidence	Pathway	Activity	Priority
1	<b>CHAMPION</b> evidence-informed decision making	No/Low	Motivation Opportunity	Use in combination Approach: Be curious with rigour Case studies, partners, norms	Low
2	<b>DEFINE</b> good evidence with community	No/Low	Motivation Opportunity	Use in combination GRADE & SERQUAL, DELPHI, evidence journey, evaluation guidance, methods series	Medium (important for sector)
3	<b>VISIBLE</b> evidence through access and communications	Reliable	Motivation Opportunity combined	Synthesis, design, user experience, index/tools, digital, communications channels, networks, Awareness-Interest-Action, Tail	High
4	<b>INTERACTION</b> between decision makers and researchers	Cautious	Ineffective for capability Motivation Opportunity	Forums, networks, and super users; sector perspectives and academic perspectives	Medium
5	<b>LEARNING</b> building evidence skills and make sense of evidence	Reliable	Motivation Opportunity	E-learning, workshops, cohort, conferences	Medium (where resources available)
6	<b>ADOPTION</b> through decision making structures and processes	Reliable	Motivation Opportunity	Green Book, advisory groups, commissions, innovation labs, template for commissioners, business case content, evidence maps/strategies, What Works Centres/intermediary bodies	High





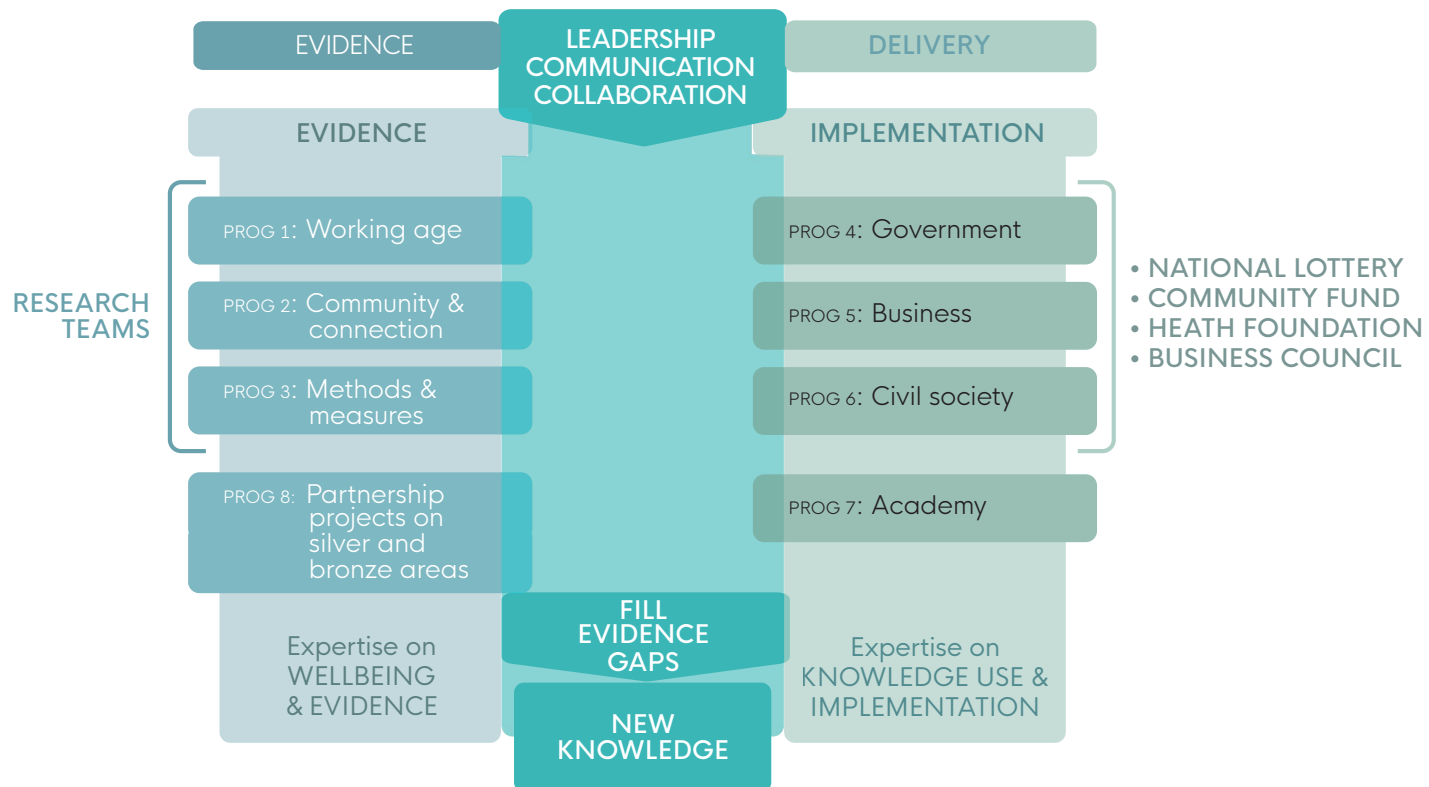
## OUR ORGANISATION

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is part of the What Works Centre Network and newly formed Evidence Quarter. The What Works Centres have been set up as independent centres with the aim to bridge between evidence, or knowledge, and practice for key decision-makers in the UK.

The aim is to improve the way Government and other organisations adopt and generate evidence for more effective decision-making.

As a 'knowledge-broker' organisation, we function as a bridge between academia, policy and practice, ensuring the most robust and relevant evidence reaches the right audiences in the most accessible way.

### Our Structure and Team





## Current organisational priorities

- Relevant** Make wellbeing part of current Covid-19 recovery plans and beyond, for example through Business email series, Inequality email series, and PHE Covid-19 impact toolkit and indicators.
- Sustainable** Be an organisation that is fit for purpose in both funding and capacity. We are continuing to change the business model having built both commissioning and multi-sector bidding capability in-house.
- Louder** Build a stronger voice through champions and visible organisations/ partners and campaigns.
- Expert** Proactively contributing to the fields of wellbeing, evidence, knowledge use and implementation through our What Works Network and Evidence Quarter partners.
- Impact** Continue to build on our current evaluation policy, and evaluation of the Centre by the Economic and Social Research Council, to better measure outcomes and impact.

## How our priorities have evolved

Below are the Centre's priority areas for previous years.

- Communications & Implementation** Increase capacity and balance of the organisation on communications and implementation through partnerships and investment in new implementation leads. We created online platforms, strengthened communication and networks such as the APPG Wellbeing Economics, and developed Civil Society and Local Government Sector lead roles.
- Research Partnership transition** Transition from our four founding academic teams as part of our partnership with ESRC & AHRC to four new teams. We ended the first four year programme publishing an update to the Commission on Wellbeing and Policy and the Knowledge Bank with all reviews.
- Building capacity** Growing the organisation to have its own commissioning and bidding functions as well as the capacity to deliver them. We created a new evaluation function and recruited a workplace analyst.





## OUR GOVERNANCE

Our audience is built into our governance and the way we work. This means deep sector knowledge and networks are embedded in our Board and Advisory Panel.

The aim is to ensure our work is:

a) robust & credible; b) relevant & useful; c) communicated well.

## BOARD

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is led by a board of voluntary Directors. The board is the ultimate decision maker, as outlined in the Articles of Association. The Board is responsible for working closely with the Executive Director and the senior management team to develop and agree a strategy for the organisation, and ensure that:

- a) any activities and executive decisions are made in the best interest of the organisation, its stakeholders and the wider public
- b) any activities and executive decisions contribute to achieving the organisational purpose and aims
- c) that these are delivered effectively and sustainably.

## ADVISORY PANEL

The Centre has an advisory panel that ensures quality assurance and suitability of the products and research outputs that are being produced. Quality assurance is to ensure robustness and improve relevance and accessibility. The Advisory Panel is composed of voluntary members who represent the key sectors and audiences the Centre engages with. These include evidence and/ or wellbeing experts, researchers and academics, members of the original commissioning group, practitioners and decision-makers. The main purpose of this panel is to ensure high quality, transparency, relevance and accessibility of all the Centre's products and research strategies. This group also serves to mitigate risks and manage disagreements or disputes around methodology, measures or theoretical approaches used during the evidence synthesis and translation.