

What Works Wellbeing to close after almost a decade as the UK's leading cross-sector collaborating centre for wellbeing evidence, policy and practice.

Against the backdrop of a challenging funding environment, the Board of Directors has announced today that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing will close on 30 April 2024.

The Centre's priority is to complete its programme of work by the end of the current financial year and secure the best possible legacy for the collective learning that it holds.

Founded in 2014, as part of the What Works Network, the Centre's purpose was to build on the rich and growing data from the UK National Wellbeing Measurement Programme to understand what organisations in government, business, research and civil society can do to improve wellbeing.

For almost a decade, it has built a reputation as the leading UK authority on wellbeing, working collaboratively to deliver this ambition through making evidence accessible as a public good, and translating it into action. In 2021, it formally welcomed the Campaign to End Loneliness, to build collective understanding of why and how people are affected by loneliness and social isolation.

With a small team and limited resources, the Centre has been able to establish an extensive body of wellbeing evidence, insights and assets as a public good that can - and are - being used robustly, consistently and with confidence in the UK and internationally.

*"[The What Works Centre for Wellbeing] consistently outperformed the other Centres ....in relation to the quality of its content and the impact the Centre had on the individual."*

- INVESTMENT IN WHAT WORKS CENTRES: Evaluation report for the ESRC January 2022, pg 34

The Centre's work includes informing the UK's National Wellbeing Framework, positioning wellbeing as a key part of the UK governments' Levelling Up framework, and shaping the UK Treasury's Green Book so that

wellbeing is, for the first time, fully included in official guidance on spending and evaluations. Its impact has also been internationally recognised - helping shape Canada and New Zealand's wellbeing frameworks.

The Centre has also improved collective understanding of:

- What's cost effective for tackling loneliness
- What works for wellbeing at work and job quality including what's cost effective for wellbeing and performance
- The power of music and singing
- The importance of social connection
- The value of volunteer for individuals and the nation
- How places and spaces can be designed and managed to maximise wellbeing and tackle loneliness
- How to use wellbeing evidence and data effectively in local areas

Based on the learning the Centre convenes, recognition of the importance of wellbeing in all its aspects is now much more widespread from policy makers and civil society to businesses and organisations. This breadth of remit, however, has made it challenging to find a focal point for investment and support of the Centre on a sustainable basis.

**Nancy Hey, Executive Director of What Works Wellbeing**, explains:

*“Wellbeing is not one organisation’s job; as a convening organisation we have worked collaboratively to enable others, building the foundations for change into systems. But when it’s everyone’s job, it’s no one’s responsibility.”*

*“Having helped embed wellbeing as core to many aspects of policy, public life, and across businesses - establishing wellbeing and our work as hugely valuable - the problem remains that there is no lead governmental department or existing foundation specifically for wellbeing. This ownership and visibility is key to the Centre’s future sustainability.”*

*“We have always depended on core funding, alongside project-specific funds we have generated, to deliver our mission. Following the reduction and subsequent conclusion of our original multi-year grants, we have been unable to secure an alternative partnership to sustain us long-term, despite our extensive efforts.”*

**Peter Cheese, Chairman of the Board for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing** says:

*“The Board has taken the difficult decision to close What Works Wellbeing while we are still in a position to close in an orderly way and preserve and*

*celebrate its valuable legacy. We recognise that we are neither the first nor, sadly, the last purpose-led organisation that faces the necessity of closure this year.*

*“During these times of uncertainty and rapid change, there continues to be a vital need for good-quality evidence to drive decision making at national policy levels, across civil society, and to ensure wellbeing is at the heart of how we shape working practices and cultures in organisations everywhere.*

*“While the Centre will conclude operations in April 2024, the importance of its mission remains: to secure a future where the wellbeing of people and communities in the UK improves year-on-year and wellbeing inequalities are reduced.”*

In a joint statement **The Rt Hon, the Baroness Morgan of Cotes, Baroness Tyler of Enfield, Lord Layard** and **Lord O'Donnell** add:

*“As friends and supporters of What Works Wellbeing, we are deeply disappointed and frustrated by the lack of appetite from funders to secure its future.*

*“What Works Wellbeing is a powerful convener, translator and champion of wellbeing evidence and practice, helping government, councils, health and wellbeing boards, charities and businesses make decisions on what really matters for the wellbeing of people, communities and the nation as a whole.*

*“Without it, there is no central place that holds and mobilises this essential knowledge. The Centre’s planned closure is a huge loss for the wellbeing mission, one which will be sharply felt. It is imperative that its legacy be preserved.”*

The Board extends its thanks to the organisation’s passionate and committed staff, funders, partners, collaborators, friends and supporters for making the last nine years of progress possible.

**-Ends-**

## Note to editors:

1. For further info, media enquiries or interviews contact Robyn Bignall-Donnelly , Head of Communications and Digital, What Works Centre for Wellbeing  
[robyn.bignall-donnelly@whatworkswellbeing.org](mailto:robyn.bignall-donnelly@whatworkswellbeing.org)
2. See the Campaign to End Loneliness's statement regarding the closure announcement:  
<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/closure-statement-from-the-Campaign-to-End-Loneliness>
3. Read the Centre's Impact Report 2022-23  
<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/our-impact-2022-23/>
4. A full version of the *ESRC Investment in WHat Works Centres Evaluation Report January 2022* is available at:  
<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ESRC-110822-InvestmentInWhatWorksCentresEvaluation.pdf>
5. **About What Works Wellbeing:** The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is an independent collaborating centre that aims to improve wellbeing and reduce misery in the UK. The Centre believes that this is the ultimate goal of effective policy and community action. Established in 2014, the Centre's purpose has been to build on the rich and growing data from the UK National Wellbeing Measurement Programme by making insights accessible to all as a public good, ensuring an understanding of what works and enabling confident action to be taken. By accelerating research and democratising access to wellbeing evidence, What Works Centre for Wellbeing develops and shares robust evidence for governments, businesses, communities and people to improve wellbeing across the UK. The Centre hosts the Campaign to End Loneliness, founded in 2011 as a place for people to come together, collaborate and build the evidence base for loneliness and make the case for action.
6. The National Measure Wellbeing Programme began in the UK in 2011, following a public consultation on what matters most to people. After over a decade of use, the national framework and its indicators were reviewed and updated in 2023 as the UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard. It brings together the latest data across 10 domains of national well-being to offer a visual overview of how people in the UK are doing as individuals, communities, and a nation. It also considers how sustainable our well-being is for the future.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/ukmeasuresofnationalwellbeing/dashboard>

7. The What Works Network uses evidence to improve the design and delivery of public services.  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>
8. The Levelling Up framework is a framework of regional policy with 12 national missions, which was announced in The Levelling Up White Paper, published by the UK Government in March 2022.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk>
9. The HM Treasury Green Book is guidance on how to appraise and evaluate policies, projects and programmes in central government and sets out how government economists can incorporate wellbeing into cost benefit analysis with confidence including in the spending review.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government>