

Our Legacy 2014-24

Celebrating 10 years of
What Works Wellbeing



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Authored by Robyn Bignall-Donnelly,
with the support of Ingrid Abreu Scherer, Nancy Hey and Joanne Smithson

Foreword

“ For the past decade, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing has been at the vanguard of generating, collecting and sharing wellbeing evidence to inform policy and practice across a wide range of sectors and contexts.

As part of The What Works Network, the Centre has been an integral part of informing the way public services are designed and delivered. Its dedication to rigorous, high-quality research and knowledge translation has also shaped how businesses support their employees and wider communities, and the way the evaluation of charities' activities are planned for and conducted.

The Centre has pioneered evidence-informed knowledge use in its methodology and action, building the collective understanding of 'the science of using science'. Its ability to combine the what with the how, and not only embody this but also articulate it with integrity and generosity is where the Centre's super power lies.

Its successes are recognised both within and beyond the UK, with governments emulating the evidence-informed model and wellbeing frameworks.

This final report celebrates 10 years of remarkable work driving change, and shares a legacy of learning that the team can be incredibly proud of.

We have worked hard to share this learning with others to now take forward to help improve wellbeing for individuals, across organisations, public services, and wider society. We are all sad to see the Centre close, but hope and believe the work of the Centre will inspire many more to come.

**Peter Cheese CEO, CIPD & Chairman,
What Works Centre for Wellbeing**



“ The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has created the conditions for the UK to become world leaders in wellbeing evaluation and embed wellbeing as a theme in many aspects of policy, public life, and across businesses.

It has enacted its mission in service, and with an impact disproportionate to its size and funding. In doing so, it has embodied pride, pace, professionalism and passion, and I am proud to have been its Patron.

A good criterion of success is to leave people wanting more, and with its closure the Centre leaves a gap in the landscape of wellbeing evidence and practice that will be keenly felt.

**Lord Gus O'Donnell, Patron,
What Works Wellbeing**



Introduction

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's about feeling good and functioning well as individuals, and together.

Wellbeing is sometimes referred to as social welfare or social value. It can be thought of as quality of life, and used as a measure of societal progress beyond metrics like GDP alone in Wellbeing Frameworks.

The care of human life and happiness ... is the first and only legitimate object of good government - Thomas Jefferson

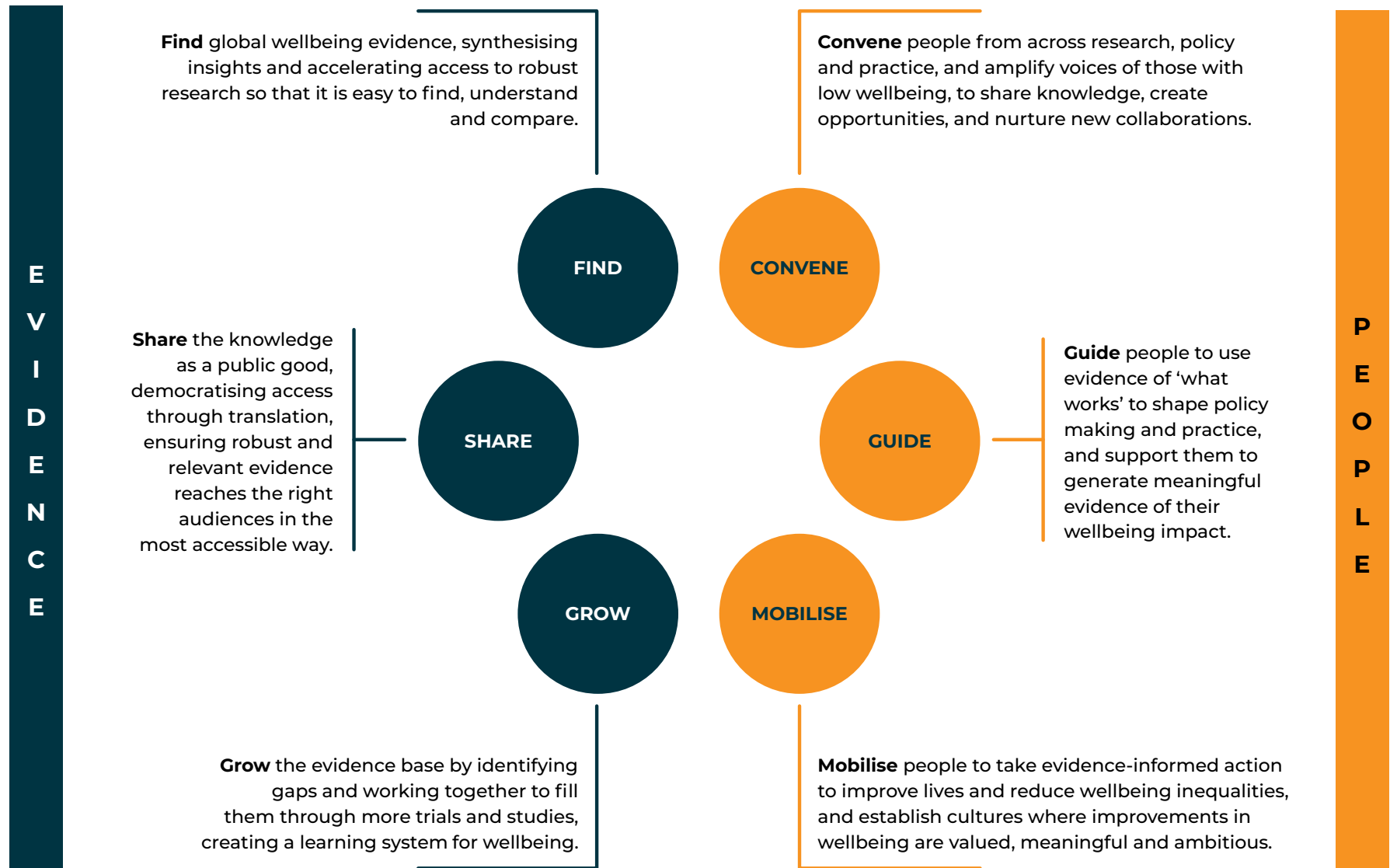
All What Works Centres, including ours, are based on the principle that good decision-making must be informed by the best available evidence. Where it is not available, we use robust methods to find out what works and share that collective learning with those who can put it into action.

We were set up in 2014 as an independent collaborating centre to improve wellbeing and reduce misery in the UK. We believe that this is the ultimate goal of effective policy and community action.

Across the last 10 years, we have worked towards a future where:

- Wellbeing is recognised as a meaningful and measurable goal for decision makers.
- Knowledge of what works and how to implement it reaches people who can and want to use it.
- More evidence-informed action is taken to improve people's lives.
- More trials and studies are done which continue to build the evidence base.

In working to achieve this vision, our role has been to:



Since launching our four flagship research programmes in 2015, there has been a noticeable increase in UK parliamentary references to 'wellbeing', indicating we made significant in-roads.

Overall, we have:

- **Pioneered wellbeing measurement and evaluation** as a way to track national progress and organisational impact.
- **Established an extensive body of insights** and resources, bringing together the global knowledge base in an accessible, impactful and relevant way, using existing collective knowledge.
- Used our expertise in wellbeing and evidence methodologies to **proactively contribute to and grow knowledge** of the fields of wellbeing, evidence, knowledge use and practise, helping to refine concepts and platform discussions to move forward methodology.
- Brought life to our rigorous evidence by **translating and sharing findings in impact-focused, inclusive language and formats**, and sharing evidence with policy makers and practitioners so that it has meaning where it counts.
- Supported wellbeing in business and the workforce through **developing relevant and robust guidance**.
- Developed **practical tools, measures, methodologies and resources** for the VCSE sector, as well as driving continuous capacity and capability building by deliver training and support.
- Convened and **mobilised our strong, active cross-sector network of experts and practitioners** to identify where evidence can have the greatest impact including COVID-19, levelling up and reducing inequalities, and thinking beyond GDP.
- Cultivated **new partnerships and strengthened existing collaborations** through conversation and knowledge sharing to learn more where there are evidence gaps, working out what those in policy and practice need to know to seed evidence-informed action to improve wellbeing.

This legacy report outlines the impact we have had over the past decade as we have delivered our mission to find out what works to improve wellbeing and partner to put that evidence into action, creating conditions for us all to thrive. It shares our learnings, reflects on the challenges, and sets the direction for current and future actors in the wellbeing field.

Thank you to our founding partners and all of the funders over the last 10 years whose vision and commitment has made our activity possible.



Our approach

Audience-focused

To ensure our work was informed by **real-life views and aspirations**, we ran a UK wide series of public dialogues in 2015, speaking to over 4,000 practitioners, researchers, policymakers and members of the wider public from across the UK.

The conversations were summarised in a cross-cutting themes report, and revealed what wellbeing means to people:

- **Feeling safe** - financially comfortable, having good physical and mental health, good food, job, housing, access to natural environment and transport.
- **Feeling loved** - respected and appreciated, belonging, having positive connections, time alone, appreciation of difference and feeling part of something bigger.
- **Feeling fulfilled** - a sense of achievement, inspiration, feeling valued, fun, learning, opportunities, control, agency and choice.

Along with our stakeholder engagement, these dialogues helped ground our work in people's lives and understanding, and respond to the experience of practitioners.

Mission-led

We continued to put our **audiences' needs and interests** at the heart of what we did, through our brand and outputs, and through our ways of working, guided by a commitment to being:

- Independent
- Evidence-informed
- Collaborative
- Practical
- Iterative
- Open

To do this, we operated a multidisciplinary, cross-sector core team that brought together expertise across five distinct functions:

1. Leadership and collaboration
2. Evidence and analysis
3. Implementation and learning
4. Communications and digital
5. Governance and operations



The Centre never lost its DNA on being focused on evidence: working with academics on the highest levels of systematic reviews as a core foundation.

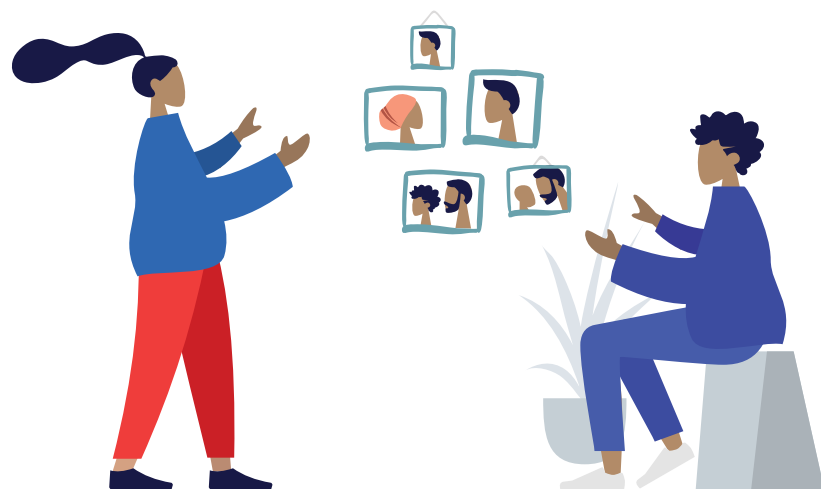
Board member

Our **diverse, international team** has been a cornerstone of the organisation and crucial to its success. The experience and effectiveness of colleagues enabled us to consistently deliver a high level of impact, working creatively within the constraints of limited resources. This was supported with a remote-first, flexible policy.

Our **Board** of voluntary directors has been responsible for working closely with the Executive Director and the senior management team to develop and agree strategic direction for the organisation. It has ensured that our activities and executive decisions were made in the best interest of the organisation, its stakeholders and the wider public; contributed to achieving the organisational purpose and aims; and were delivered effectively and sustainably.

Across the years, we have also been able to bring in additional freelance and contracted expertise as necessary to augment and compliment our in-house capacity and provide specific skills. The ability to work **flexibility** and **responsively** has been a great asset.

We are immensely grateful for the excellence and hard work of our staff, past and present.



Since joining the Board of Directors, I've been blown away by the particular skill the brilliant staff teams from the Centre and the Campaign have for translating between the worlds of evidence and academic insight and "boots on the ground" delivery. It's a rare talent. We need more of this translation work so we can mash the best "thinking" and the best "doing" together.

David Hopkins, Board Member



I hope the team are all so proud of the valuable cross-sector collaboration, novel interdisciplinary approaches and impactful data their activities have contributed to.

Jo Ward, The Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, London School of Economics

Sharing generously

Our Communications and Implementation teams have worked collaboratively throughout the past decade to ensure that the resources we published were **appropriate** for and **meaningful** to each of our audiences.

We have refreshed and evolved our brand to embody our values and increase accessibility, integrating enhanced considerations and inclusive language.

To reach our audiences, we prioritised a **digital-first** model, establishing our website as a rich and maturing central repository of resources. In tandem, we built our presence on social media and through newsletters to help **share** this wealth of collective knowledge, **build** learning communities, **strengthen** evidence literacy, and **deepen** our connections.

A move to online and hybrid events, fast-tracked by the pandemic, became an opportunity to further increase accessibility and reach and helping in our aim of accelerating and democratising access to wellbeing evidence and practice.

Drawing on our experience, we have shared our learning about evidence-informed policy making and implementation in book chapters, peer-reviewed journals, discussion papers, policy documents, guidance tools, conference presentations and blogs.

We did this all as a **public good**.



The Centre's bulletins have been very accessible, informative and supportive to us over the years.

Rob Hunter, Chair,
Leicester Ageing
Together



The whole team has done a great job over the years to create a comprehensive and trusted source of evidence for a whole range of people with an interest in wellbeing.

Dr Paul Litchfield,
former Chairman,
What Works Wellbeing



...the Centre was one of my thinking partners. You keep pulling out lots of interesting and useful stuff. And then you deploy it.

Kate Shurety,
Interim Programme Director,
Campaign to End
Loneliness

Rigorous and robust

Our **advisory panel** of voluntary members represented the key sectors and audiences the Centre engaged with. Along with a wider consultation group for each of our projects, the panel ensured the high-quality, transparency, relevance and accessibility of all the Centre's products and research strategies.

To ensure our work was not only robust, but also useful, we took an evidence-informed approach to knowledge implementation. We partnered with the [Wellcome Trust](#), the Alliance for Useful Evidence and the [EPPI-Centre at UCL](#) to understand how research evidence can be best used in decision making, creating [The Science of Using Science](#). This enabled us to choose effective approaches, and gave us confidence that insights would be applied in practice.



The Centre was a founding member of our Health Equals campaign, bringing rigour and insight to our approach.

Jo Bibby, Director of Health,
The Health Foundation



I can think of so many examples where I would be presenting and be using materials from the Centre to give a bit of robustness to the thinking and the strategising.

Stakeholder



Practical and pragmatic

We took complex concepts and made them more **accessible** and easier to use for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers, **translating** findings and learnings into **practical**, usable and relevant resources.

With a small team and limited resources, we have always taken a pragmatic approach, choosing to focus on priority areas where we could make the biggest difference:

1. [National measures and methods](#)
2. [Place and community](#)
3. [Loneliness and connection](#)
4. [Working age and workplace](#)

We have identified evidence and insights that can be transferred between and applied to different contexts to augment impact.



What Works Centre for Wellbeing has been a beacon of sensible and inspirational advice, data and information for organisations and individuals seeking to improve wellbeing for people and communities.

Dr Sadie Watson,
Hon Research Associate,
University of York



What good work you and your team have done over the years and really made a difference - especially in highlighting some of the 'hidden' pandemic costs and impacts. Always so pragmatic too in terms of workable solutions with enough good news stories to get traction on important issues, from work-related wellbeing to social isolation.

Senior Scientific Adviser,
National Institute for Health
and Care Research



Learning together

To widen our reach, we have collaborated across the whole of life and across regions and nations of the UK and beyond.

We built a **global network of associates and supporters** that was second-to-none in the wellbeing evidence space. It included top wellbeing evidence and policy research teams, leading practitioners and policymakers, and wellbeing experts.

Our position as **knowledge brokers and conveners** enabled us to bring together people and organisations from across all sectors, and get valuable wellbeing evidence and resources to those who can put it into action.



The Centre plays an important role in linking research to practice.

Review panel member



My involvement with the centre has been one of the highlights of my career.

Professor Rhiannon Cocoran, University of Liverpool

From 2014 to 2024 we developed and shared knowledge with:

- **Government and public bodies** - national, devolved and local government, the wider public sector including policy professions and local authorities across the UK, and arms length bodies including the Office for National Statistics, Historic England, Sport England, Arts Council England, Money and Pensions Service, Ofsted, and the National Archives.
- **Research** - individuals and research organisations across the UK and globally, such as the London School of Economics, the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, East Anglia, Liverpool, Sheffield, Glasgow, Birmingham, Warwick, Brunel University London and Leeds Beckett University.
- **Businesses** - large, small and multinational, and professional bodies including CIPD, BT, Bupa, Maximus, SOM, The Federation of Small Businesses, TUC, IWFM, Association of Convenience Stores, Nationwide, and Sky.
- **Civil society** - charities, social enterprises and community groups, as well those who fund and support them, including The Children's Society, The Health Foundation, Centre for Thriving Places, Locality, New Economics Foundation, Centre for Local Economic Strategies, Nesta, Marie Curie, Historic England, Pro Bono Economics, Spirit of 2012 Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and People's Health Trust.



What Works Centre for Wellbeing has played a pivotal role in furthering the wellbeing movement.

Carnegie UK



The Centre has been instrumental in building wellbeing evidence, policy and practice in this country and has been an invaluable 'friend' to the Trust. Thank you for the fantastic leadership and direction, work and support given to the Trust and the sector over the last decade.

Strategy and Impact Director,
Canal & River Trust



Thank you to What Works Centre for Wellbeing for their partnership over the years and their tireless, vital work to gather evidence on wellbeing.

Spirit of 2012



The Centre has done immensely valuable and accessible work in advancing understanding and knowledge exchange on wellbeing.

Programme Manager,
Greenspace Scotland

We hosted the **Campaign to End Loneliness** since 2021. The Campaign was 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.

As part of the **What Works Network** we work in partnership to support more evidence-informed policy making. This included collaborations with the Wales Centre for Public Policy, Centre for Local Economic Growth, Foundations, and Centre for Homelessness Impact.

By working in **partnership**, we have been able to create alignment and consensus around a narrative of wellbeing across different sectors and audience groups, contributing to the sustainability and resilience of the field.

Thank you to the public service leaders, policy makers and experts, researchers, economists, business leaders and wellbeing leads who have chosen to work with us over the past 10 years, sharing their expertise and investing their trust in ours.

10 years of What Works Wellbeing

2014

- Commission on Wellbeing and Policy
- What Works Centre for Wellbeing established



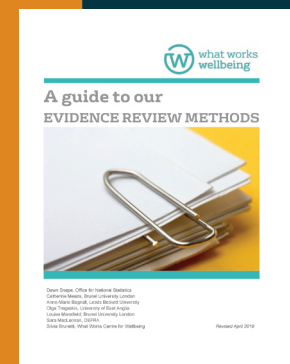
2015

- Public Dialogues: we spoke to over 4,000 practitioners, researchers, policymakers and members of the wider public from across the UK
- Expert Teams and Board Members appointed
- Collaborative development of the initial four evidence programmes
- Developed and began to deliver a number of learning courses, including a Civil Service Policy Profession Knowledge Series



2016

- Centre's first evidence review published, alongside Evidence Review Methods Guide
- What Works for Research Use? The Science of Using Science: report published exploring how to get evidence used in decision making
- Business Council launched in partnership with BT, Bupa, Nationwide and Maximus
- First annual lecture held at the BT Centre in London
- Board of Directors expanded
- Continued to develop and test our Theory of Change
- Hosted OECD conference



2017

- New Local Area Wellbeing Indicator Set published
- Methods series launched: drawing together views from leading experts alongside a real-world insights from across different sectors using evidence in practice
- 23 reports published, including Measuring wellbeing inequalities, the first report of its type in the UK
- Audience increased 75%
- Assumed Secretariate to the Social Impact Taskforce



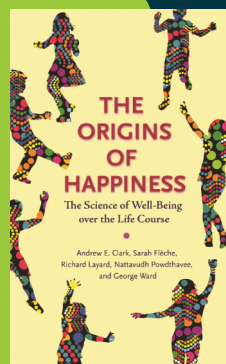
2018

- First review of loneliness evidence; UK's first Minister for Loneliness appointed and publication of the world's first national strategy for tackling loneliness
- Awarded a multi-year grant from the National Lottery Community Fund
- Online guide to wellbeing measurement launched
- Workplace Wellbeing Index
- Case study synthesis methodology developed
- Centre's first National Conference on Understanding Wellbeing in the UK, led by Brunel University London, to mark the end of the first three year Evidence Programme Took on Secretariat to All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Wellbeing Economics



2019

- The *Origins of Happiness* published, informed by Centre review exploring the drivers of life satisfaction over the course of people's lives
- Knowledge Bank published, collating all the Wellbeing evidence produced by the Centre's lead systematic reviews
- 12,000 people a month using our website
- Number of core staff doubles
- First dedicated implementation role with local government and health sector and maximise local wellbeing three-year programme launched
- Three new secondary data analysis initiatives announced on community, loneliness and social isolation
- Conceptual review of loneliness and guidance on measurement published



2020

- Wellbeing at the Heart of Policy landmark report published
- Evaluations included: What works to improve personal subjective wellbeing?, What works for volunteer wellbeing? and What works for student mental health?
- Wellbeing/well-being was word of the year
- Centre well-placed to operationally respond to Covid-19 and delivered weekly evidence bulletins on work and place, data analysis and understanding of fortnightly subjective wellbeing data and how to apply it.

Wellbeing evidence at the heart of policy

Delia Haskins with Nancy Hay & Silvia Forciniti February 2020

what works wellbeing



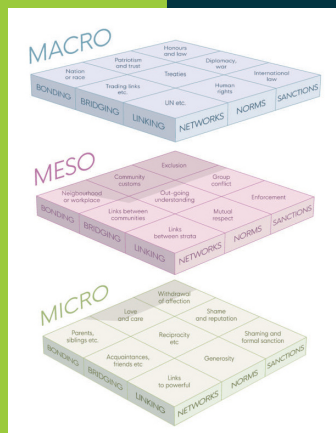
2021

- Wellbeing Guidance for Appraisal: informing the UK Treasury's Green Book guidance so that wellbeing is, for the first time, fully included in official guidance on business cases, spending and evaluations
- Covid:WIRED: a major project to understand the pandemic's early impact and map wellbeing inequalities, applying the UK wellbeing framework to create interactive database
- Three major analysis projects with UCL to better understand the pandemic's impact on loneliness, wellbeing and mental health and what helped people cope.
- Campaign to End Loneliness formally hosted by Centre and Tackling Loneliness Hub launched
- First loneliness conference
- Evaluations included: What works to improve mental wellbeing?, What matters for our sense of purpose? (UK's first) and What works for communities to thrive?
- Measuring wellbeing measures bank launched



2022

- Wellbeing established as the overall outcome of the UK governments' Levelling Up framework
- Amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill (now Health and Care Act 2022) for England requiring every part of England to provide specialist palliative care as a legal requirement.
- Evaluations including What works for place-based arts and culture?, What works to build social capital? and What works to improve wellbeing within communities?
- E-learning 'Introduction to wellbeing' developed
- Six hallmarks of coherent wellbeing policy making published
- Board Level and Governance wellbeing roles research in partnership with NHS England

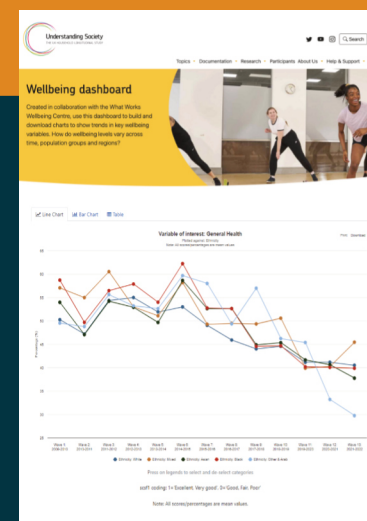


2023

- Evaluations included: What works for community agency and control?
- Contributed our expertise to the first ever review of the UK Measures of National Wellbeing Dashboard;
- Wellbeing incorporated as a topic in the 'Mental Health & Wellbeing JSNA' OHID public health profile;
- Wellbeing evaluation top-up fund created: enabling existing evaluations to add wellbeing measures alongside their other outcomes to make best use of evaluation resources and learn more about how wellbeing interacts with other outcomes of interest to public policy.
- Collaboration with Campaign to End Loneliness to map and grow the loneliness evidence base
- Guidance created for improving wellbeing of staff in schools and colleges and for supporting employees with terminal illnesses
- In-house data analysis function expanded, producing exploratory analysis of English Housing Survey wellbeing data, Time Use data and the Health Index



- Evaluations included: *What works to improve Life Satisfaction?*, *What works for creativity and wellbeing?* and *What works for reducing frontline worker burnout?*
- Learning partner for *Spirit of 2012's legacy*
- Developed and launched Understanding Society *wellbeing data dashboard* in collaboration with the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex
- Launched practical guidance for *maximising wellbeing in kidney care*
- In-house analysis published including *Annual Population Survey wellbeing data insights*
- Centre closed



In numbers

Over the last 10 years we...



National wellbeing measures and methods

Measuring wellbeing is essential to understanding how we're doing, tracking progress, and improving quality of life.

Over the past decade, our goal has been ensuring that wellbeing is recognised as a **meaningful** and **measurable** goal for decision makers in the UK, used alongside metrics such as GDP and life expectancy to assess national progress.

As a **bridging** organisation we have worked collaboratively to enable others, building on the rich and growing data from the ONS UK Measures of National Wellbeing programme to understand what all sectors can do to improve it and **embedding the foundations for change** into systems.

Our analysis and research over the years has provided a recent [OECD review](#) with evidence of current practice from the UK. The report concluded that a growing number of governments, community organisations and businesses are collecting subjective wellbeing data.

We focused on:

- Communicating a consistent definition of what wellbeing is.
- Increasing visibility and understanding of wellbeing data and measures across sectors and disciplines - for example, by analysing, explaining and summarising ONS data releases since 2015.
- Encouraging methodological development to develop new measures, refine and solidify concepts, and support the confident and informed use of wellbeing data and evidence in the field of decision making and wellbeing economics. For example, supporting the development of the [WELLBY](#) – a wellbeing adjusted life year – to better value a good and happy life at all life stages.
- Promoting the appropriate and consistent use of appropriate measures to understand what different organisations can do to improve wellbeing now and for the future.
- Developing evidence-informed tools, recommendations and guidance on wellbeing and how to use wellbeing measurement in decision making, evaluations and impact reporting.



What Works Centre for Wellbeing has contributed to elevating wellbeing as the focus of measuring progress, providing a wealth of knowledge for so many of us working in the field of wellbeing measurement.

Georgina Camp,
Founder and CEO of
Huber Social



- Inspiring others to generate new evidence through partnering on primary research and trials, including through the wellbeing evaluation top-up fund.
- Building capacity and capability, and accelerating access to wellbeing datasets, by providing high-quality guidance on wellbeing and measurement and creating a [wellbeing data usage library](#) to make it cheaper, quicker and easier to do robust analysis.
- Engaging political and senior leaders, policymakers, sector bodies, funders and commissioners who set strategy that mobilises services and resources around wellbeing, through effective digital communications that distilled findings into impactful messages, and by hosting convening events.
- Contributing to the development and use of wellbeing frameworks within the UK and globally, sharing examples of practice from Canada, New Zealand, Norway.

As part of the [What Works Network](#), a core strand of our activity is systematically identifying, assessing and summarising evidence from evaluations that use wellbeing frameworks and standardised measures. We have done this to build the evidence base, support measurement usage, and ensure identification of the right measurement depending on the context, laying the groundwork for others to build on.



What Works Centre for Wellbeing and the ONS have been an inspiration for us in Norway.

Norwegian Directorate of Health



I cannot thank you enough for all you have given the world, even beyond the borders of your mandate. You have been a real beacon of hope and inspiration for many in Canada, and we promise to do our best to keep the momentum of the wellbeing mission.

Chris Barrington-Leigh,
Associate Professor,
McGill University

Core 'what works' rapid reviews in this area are:

1. [What works to improve personal subjective wellbeing?](#) - Exploring impact evaluations that use the harmonised [ONS4 indicators](#) of worthwhileness, happiness, anxiety, and life satisfaction.
2. [What works to improve mental wellbeing?](#) - Synthesising the evaluation literature that uses [WEMWBS](#) to map the evidence base in relation to mental wellbeing.
3. [What works to improve Life Satisfaction?](#) - Two rapid reviews collating high-quality evidence on effective interventions and broad drivers to inform experimental research and policy development.
4. [What matters for our sense of purpose?](#) - Exploring eudaimonic wellbeing, a less commonly researched aspect that is independent from feelings and emotions of pleasure or pain, through a rapid review and new analysis.



From a funder's perspective, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing has played a critical role not just in identifying what interventions are effective or not, but in building our understanding of the state of the existing evidence base and where new research is desperately needed to address key gaps in our knowledge.

Dr Jen Gold, Director of Research, ESRC

We have also explored the effect that changes in our [health and income](#) have on our wellbeing, and the [role of autonomy, power, control](#), and contributed our understanding to the [prevention and promotion of health](#). Our work has informed the Public Health programme Every Mind Matters, which is used by millions across the UK.

For a fuller summary of our work in this area, see our deep-dive blog on [national wellbeing measures and methods 2014 – 2024](#).



SPOTLIGHT: Connecting evidence and practice

Guidance on measuring wellbeing impact

In order to support organisations to design and deliver meaningful wellbeing evaluations which can grow the evidence base across sectors, we developed an [Online Guide to Measuring Wellbeing Impact](#). This self-guided microsite of eight learning modules provides a practical introduction to planning and carrying out a wellbeing evaluation. It was developed with support from voluntary sector organisations and partners to be practical, to value a range of evidence types, and to set out robust approaches to evaluation.

Although originally designed for small and medium-sized charities, it has been used widely across the public and private sector, with an average of 28,000 visits every month. Since its launch in January 2018, we have supported the site's use with a programme of learning and advice for charities who are planning or undertaking wellbeing evaluations, building confidence and capability.

This has variously consisted of:

- One-to-one advice surgeries to help organisations troubleshoot and plan
- Group workshops for organisations working in a sector, impact area, or locality
- Workshops for grantees of national funding programmes
- Presentations at sector conferences

As part of our iterative, audience-led approach, we refreshed and expanded the resource in February 2021 following user feedback. This included adding a [Wellbeing Measures Bank](#), a searchable database of robust wellbeing metrics and measures, including information on data benchmarking.

Following our closure in April 2024, the microsite will be stewarded by Nottingham Trent's VCSE Data and Insights Observatory, enabling its continued development.



The advice surgery was very useful in looking at we already do, looking at how to improve it, and coming up with new ideas that we hadn't thought of. I would recommend the service to anyone who has to evaluate their project or activities in a robust manner.

VCSE advice surgery participant



This is a great resource to help charities and others focused on social change to measure their impact.

Microsite user



The microsite resonates deeply with our commitment to supporting the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector to generate meaningful learning, and to enhancing societal impact through rigorous research and insightful data analysis.

Prof. Jo Richardson, Associate Dean for Research, Nottingham Business School

Measuring Children and young people's wellbeing

We have been a long time partner with [The Children's Society](#), who provide children's subjective wellbeing data for the UK in their annual Good Childhood Report. We have amplified the findings every year since 2016, highlighting the importance of regular data collection for young people and focusing our commentary on different aspects of children's wellbeing.

In 2021, we worked with the Children's Society to map out and understand what [existing measures and tools](#) are being used in the UK. This showed a gap in appropriate measurement of eudaimonic wellbeing, which the Children's Society seeks to address in its [upcoming 2024 study](#).

In tandem, we've explored a variety of issues affecting young people and what works to support them, including: employment, student mental health, education, and the care system.



It's hard to overstate the seminal impact that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing has had on the development and initial delivery of the #BeeWell programme. It has advised us since we first mooted the idea some five years ago. Nancy, in particular, has been a steadfast supporter and critical friend in ensuring that the programme is as good as it can possibly be. We wouldn't be where we are today without her and the team's efforts.

David Gregson,
Co-founder, #BeeWell

We have also been active partners in data collection. For example, as long-term advisors on [#BeeWell](#) since its inception in 2021. The programme implemented and utilised our framework for measuring children's wellbeing. #BeeWell surveys young people from secondary schools in Greater Manchester, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton and insights are used to understand children's wellbeing and drive positive educational and community-level change.



The Centre has been a fantastic resource for us as we work to improve the wellbeing of children' and young people.

Julie Randles,
CEO, Power2



We are so grateful for What Works Centre for Wellbeing's leadership and advocacy for wellbeing. We have loved working with you and will keep championing why wellbeing matters so much.

Mark Russell, CEO,
The Children's Society



Maximising local area wellbeing

In 2017, following a six-month scoping project in collaboration with The Centre for Thriving Places and co-commissioned by ONS and Public Health England, we published a [new set of indicators](#).

This has enabled local authorities, public health leaders and Health and Wellbeing boards to use additional, real-world metrics at a regional, county or unitary level on the drivers of wellbeing. This offers insights into what really matters to local residents' lives and helps capture where communities may be at risk of health, financial and social problems.

This framework is now included in the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) Fingertips [Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\) profile](#). Bringing together data, and making it available in this type of public health data tool, embeds wellbeing metrics in decision making across the country by increasing access to insights. It also helps shift focus from mental ill-health to positive wellbeing.

To further research how to use wellbeing evidence in practice to maximise local wellbeing, we delivered a programme of tailored support for 10 local authorities in an implementation cohort. Outputs included a [report](#) and [maturity model for wellbeing policy making](#). We also shared our evidence, evaluation and implementation expertise to help [develop a new wellbeing framework for rural settings](#). These resources can be used by policy makers to help understand what supports and maintains wellbeing in different types of places and use evidence in practice. The work was a finalist in the 2022 Innovations in Public Health Awards, nominated in the Translating Evidence into Practice category.



The Centre has helped many of us to access information that has been pivotal for the work we do locally.

Community Development stakeholder



High-quality support and responsive, tailored advice helped me achieve my objectives.

Cohort member



Brilliant, insightful and eye-opening.

Cohort member

What's next?

To continue to build a strong and relevant evidence base it is imperative that wellbeing metrics be included in evaluations as standard. Groundwork for this has been laid.

We also need living reviews updated with new evidence as it becomes available, and to ensure this data is transparently shared to democratise access and reduce barriers to usage.

We want to see evaluations of Five Ways to Wellbeing application in practice, to investigate how individual actions work together to influence wellbeing, and to understand the framework's value as a communications tool. This could be applied to other contexts, to identify what combination of actions or mechanisms works for wellbeing.

Further improving the UK's data infrastructure is also necessary. For example, measuring wellbeing in schools and linking that data to

the national pupil database so we can find out more cheaply and effectively what really works. Scaling up funding and delivery for programmes that achieve meaningful outcomes will support this.

Wellbeing indicators are now available at national and local authority level. If we are to truly address inequalities:

- This pioneering approach needs to be applied to regional, community and neighbourhood levels.
- Further metrics must be developed for groups that aren't currently captured adequately in national surveys or where we lack confidence that current measures are appropriate. For example, for people with neurodiversity or disability.
- Building the evidence base on eudaimonic wellbeing and measures of hope for the future needs prioritising.

Priorities for future research:

- Extend life satisfaction review evidence to include natural experiments which observe changes in life satisfaction as a result of policy change.
- Further develop methodology for translation between different metrics of life satisfaction.
- Investigate family as a unit of wellbeing, by finding and developing measures and indicators, reviewing effective interventions and assessing inequalities.

Read more detail on our [Areas of Research Interest](#) for this focus area.

Place and community

The places we live, work and socialise – and the people we encounter and connect with there – have an impact on our wellbeing both directly and indirectly.

Our aim is that **community wellbeing** is measured consistently, comparably and appropriately, not just as the sum of individual wellbeing, and that **wellbeing inequalities** within and between communities are reduced.

Since 2014, we have **commissioned, delivered** and **supported** a wide range of activities to explore wellbeing through the lens of place and community, working to develop the knowledge base and help turn evidence into action.

We focused on:

- Developing conceptual definitions, frameworks and methodologies for community wellbeing and its key components of place, people and power, and applying those in different contexts.
- Identifying local factors and infrastructure that determine community wellbeing and evaluating the impacts of community-based interventions in improving community spaces and enabling people to fulfil their potential, creating a theory of change model for building community wellbeing.
- Exploring the role of social networks and participation, and the role of power, agency and control.
- Building the evidence on civic leadership and civil society.
- Understanding the positive impacts of community wellbeing on other outcomes.
- Addressing the evidence gaps about measures and indicators, identifying existing measures used in the UK.
- Looking at the evidence from academic research through to front line experience, highlighting what local systems can do.
- Investigating the wellbeing impacts of shared experiences through creativity, sports, heritage, and arts and culture and the mechanisms that support them, helping to set the foundations for future practice and learning.
- Mobilising voluntary organisations to evaluate impact through a wellbeing lens.
- Collaborating with local VCSE organisations to develop theories of change and implement wellbeing strategies and recommendations.
- Pioneering the use of existing local authority data on quality of life.



In 2018, the Centre was awarded a multi-year grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to support evidence-informed action in civil society. This funding partnership allowed us to support charities to use evidence by increasing access and building capacity through free advice surgeries and the production of a specific online guide for the measurement of wellbeing, and more broadly finding and sharing what works to improve wellbeing.

Both funders and charities value evidence that describes how interventions are being delivered in practice and how they help to bring about changes for individuals and communities. Charities, in particular, often need support to gather robust and consistent loneliness data so that: beneficiary needs can be better understood, services can be evaluated and targeted effectively, and the case can be made for investment.

Through our **evidence synthesis** and **knowledge mobilisation** we have given civil-society learning a longer life and wider reach, building in-sector and cross-sector capacity to improve practice and understanding.



I've drawn on your work in so many ways...
I've really valued how accessible you've made complex information.

VCSE sector stakeholder



Thanks to National Lottery players, we're proud to have supported the work of What Works Centre for Wellbeing since 2014. We have seen the value of the Centre's work for research, and its contribution to the evidence base and support for the sector, encouraging consistency in the measurement of wellbeing.

The Centre's work has informed our thinking around wellbeing and particularly has helped shape some of our funding interventions. As we move into the delivery of our new strategy, the wealth of evidence gathered by the Centre will continue to inform our approach. We've been grateful for the consistently high-quality work and the generosity of the Centre in sharing their time.

David Knott, CEO, National Lottery Community Fund



What Works Centre for Wellbeing is a North Star to those of us passionate about the power of music in improving wellbeing. We have been inspired since our first involvement in its Stakeholder Group in 2014/15.

Plymouth Music Zone

Core 'what works' reviews in this area are:

1. [What works to build social capital?](#) - a rapid review of three key social capital outcomes: neighbourhood belonging, social support and community cohesion.
2. [What works for volunteer wellbeing?](#) - a rapid review exploring how volunteering can help support volunteer wellbeing, to inform the design and delivery of volunteering opportunities and programmes.
3. [What works for community agency and control?](#) - a rapid review that identified common features that influence collective agency and control at the community level and impact community wellbeing.
4. [What works to improve wellbeing within communities?](#) - to understand how community-level interventions impact different people and groups within the same place. This was supported by qualitative research.

We now have a greater knowledge of what matters for community wellbeing.

For more details about our work in this area, see our deep-dive blog on [place and community 2014-2024](#).



SPOTLIGHT: Collating the evidence on wellbeing impacts of community infrastructure

We worked with Leeds Beckett University to explore how changes to community infrastructure impact community wellbeing and social relations. The research included studies from 1997 to 2016, focusing on changes to places and spaces at a neighbourhood level. This included streets, parks, community centres, schools, libraries, transport, and public health organisations. The resulting 2018 Places and spaces report provided **promising evidence** of positive impacts across eight themes.

Building on the systematic review, we worked to identify robust methods to collate, review and synthesise practice-based **case study evidence**. We also carried out a [pilot synthesis](#) on practice-based community wellbeing case studies focusing on community-based projects, initiatives, services or programmes that aimed to improve social relations and community wellbeing through better community infrastructure.

To understand how the evidence base had subsequently **developed**, we commissioned the same team to [revisit the review](#) in 2022. This exercise saw an additional five years of evidence (51 studies) from 2017-2022 identified, considered and embedded, with the number of studies in this evidence base having doubled in five years.

The 'refresh' significantly **strengthened our evidence statements**, provided greater differentiation between types of interventions and their impact on wellbeing and social relations, and offered a more detailed and nuanced analysis to explain 'what works'. We can more confidently say, for instance, that community hubs and community development have positive impacts on social cohesion, individual and community wellbeing. This process highlighted that there is scope to do similar for other evidence reviews, and is **a step towards 'living' reviews**.

The updated insights were used by the National Lottery Community Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund, National Infrastructure Commission and Quality of Life Foundation, among others.



What's next?

The wellbeing evidence base is continually growing as more projects include wellbeing measurement. We need living reviews, updated with new evidence as it becomes available, as piloted in our places and spaces refresh. These insights can then inform future design and delivery of effective programmes, projects and policy.

Programmers, funders and commissioners must embed consistent wellbeing evaluation and support practitioners to help enact this, further improving the evidence base and allowing for better comparison. Government funders can upload evaluations to the [evaluation registry](#) to increase visibility and access.

Researchers and economists can explore wellbeing impact for populations or contexts where there is less evidence, such as for young offenders, and investigate the impact of the pandemic, and how changes to virtual or hybrid community places and spaces impact our social relations and community wellbeing. The larger and stronger this evidence base becomes, the more confident we can be in identifying what works.

Promising developments in the sector for this work to continue are the forthcoming ESRC [Centre for community participation and connectedness](#), Local Government Association's [community wellbeing board](#) and [community wealth fund](#) in England.

Priorities for future research:

- Build understanding of what works for social capital at all levels, including peer and social support, by strengthening concepts and measures, and including a broader understanding of civic action and leadership beyond formal volunteering.
- Evaluate the impact of regeneration policies for both new and existing residents, including how individual and community outcomes interact to change the trajectories of people and places.
- Explore the role of infrastructure such as transport and other on personal and community wellbeing and its drivers.

Read more detail on our [Areas of Research Interest](#) for this focus area.

Loneliness and connection

The quality of our relationships and friendships at home, at work and in our communities matters. If we feel lonely most or all of the time, it can have a serious impact on our wellbeing.

Our overall aim has been to take a **life course approach** to alleviating loneliness and improving social connections in the UK.

Over the last decade, **major strides** have been made, with a shift from focus on older age to all age, reflecting the changing evidence base.

We have focused on:

- Developing the conceptual understanding of loneliness, and its distinction from social isolation.
- Identifying evidence gaps and data needs.
- Growing the evidence base on causes, outcomes and interventions concerning young and middle-aged people.
- Exploring associations between social isolation, loneliness and subjective wellbeing across our lives and between generations.
- Investigating how structural influences and drivers contribute to emotional and physical isolation, and the unequal distribution of loneliness in a place.
- Providing a digital learning and exchange space for loneliness professionals across the public, private, academic and charity sectors to connect, support and collaborate, in partnership with the Campaign to End Loneliness.
- Translating insights through convening events such as annual International Loneliness Conferences, delivered by the Campaign to End Loneliness.
- Convening and guiding decision-makers through the cross-party APPG on Tackling Loneliness and Connected Communities.



I have found the Tackling Loneliness Hub immensely useful in a very short space of time. Nice to have a go-to place for networking and research, with peer support too

Hub member

Our activity was underpinned by our initial engagement work, which highlighted social connectedness and tackling loneliness are vital to wellbeing.

We have built the collective understanding of who is affected by loneliness and social isolation and how, and how to tackle it. We have **progressed** from knowing it's important for wellbeing and identifying some possible interventions, to having much more research, analysis, and **confidence** about what works.

Core 'what works' reviews:

1. [What works to tackle loneliness?](#) - a review of reviews which identified several mechanisms for reducing loneliness
2. [What works to boost social relations?](#) - a scoping review of interventions, actions, and policies intended to facilitate social connections
3. [What works to build relationships across differences in a place?](#) - exploring structural factors that contribute to loneliness in London

Our work shaped the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness in 2017, resulting in the UK's first dedicated Minister for Loneliness being appointed in 2018 and the publication of the world's first national [strategy for tackling loneliness](#). The strategy was an important mark of recognition of loneliness as a key issue and determinant of health. It resulted in a significant shift, with government departments investing in initiatives, such as the Department for Transport funding a £5m pilot programme exploring ways of addressing loneliness through transport projects.

For a more extensive exploration of our analysis, learnings and resources in this focus area, read our deep-dive blog on [loneliness and connection 2014-2024](#). You can also read the Campaign's [impact report](#), which explores its legacy in more detail.



It has been a pleasure to work with the Campaign to End Loneliness and What Works Centre for Wellbeing over the years as important partner organisations and see the immense contribution they have made to the sector.

The Jo Cox Foundation



Their support for the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission, in particular, was exemplary and the expertise and good sense they brought to the preparation of that ground-breaking report were invaluable. Their work helped frame the argument, which was accepted by the government, that tackling loneliness requires both a cross-sector and an inter-departmental approach

Kim Leadbeater MBE MP

SPOTLIGHT: Growing the loneliness evidence base

Essential to tackling loneliness and promoting social connection is **consolidating the rapidly growing evidence base, increasing the quality** of emerging research, and understanding and **applying findings** to inform policy and programme design.

Five years on from the 2018 Tackling Loneliness review, we collaborated with the Campaign to End Loneliness, to grow the loneliness evidence base and **bring together research and practice**, funded by DCMS Tackling Loneliness Team. It built on our previous work to refine the concept of loneliness, identify gaps in the evidence base, and develop tools to improve the evaluation of interventions.

In strand one, we searched for **evidence on the effectiveness of loneliness alleviation** by conducting a rapid systematic review, synthesising existing quantitative data. Alongside this, we used stakeholder engagement to **map current delivery and evaluation practices** in the field. The primary qualitative research involved interviews, focus groups, an online survey, and two round table discussions with professionals involved in delivering, funding or researching interventions.

Overall, we found strong quantitative evidence for multiple effective approaches to alleviating loneliness in the short-term, and qualitative evidence on the potential enabling factors and causal pathways in loneliness alleviation. It also highlighted that, while there is some similarity, **the global evaluation literature does not necessarily reflect current UK tackling loneliness practice**.

To help our audiences understand and use the two strands of work together, we created an overview report and hosted an online launch event on the Tackling Loneliness Hub. This allowed us to **convene engaged stakeholders from civil society, research and the public sector**. It had an 83% attendance rate, with 94% of attendees reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied with the event. The high engagement and re-sharing by key sector stakeholders, such as Healthy Working Wales, London Arts and Health and Mental Health Hampshire, further underlines the value of bringing practice and research together.



What's next?

There is more to do to build upon this evidence base, create new tools to measure, understand and articulate impact, and refine our understanding of who is affected by loneliness, how and how it can be addressed.

Organisations, such as charities, need support to gather robust and consistent loneliness data so that needs can be better understood, services can be evaluated and targeted effectively, and the case can be made for investment. Practitioners also need to feel that the effort that's put into evaluation is making a difference. This is what we aim to do in finding, bringing together and sharing that learning; ideally we would do this in real-time as a 'living review'.

Commissioners and research funders can commission primary research to address knowledge gaps for specific intervention types and populations, such as individuals at different life stages, ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. They can also co-produce evaluations of tackling loneliness interventions with delivery organisations and practitioners. To broaden visibility, explore the potential of linking data from evaluation of Tackling Loneliness interventions to national healthcare and other datasets.

We also must consider loneliness alongside wider community or social capital work, for example when considering places, health, social connection or mental health, and address practice or implementation gaps related to psychological interventions.

Researchers must identify the breadth of practices across sectors, including examples of work that is not officially recognised as loneliness intervention work, and develop methodology in reference to practice. Recommended loneliness measures must be reviewed to reassess their suitability for evaluating interventions.

To ensure that the voice and experiences of communities in the UK is heard in the World Health Organisation Commission on Social Connection, the next two years are vital. Opportunities for sharing and learning must be maximised, across government and connecting research to policy.



The loss of a “home” for loneliness expertise, combining understanding of the evidence, policy and the practitioner landscape, is a real concern. [...] However, there is also potential for a new, more distributed model of leadership to emerge in the next phase of the work to address loneliness.

Exploring the Legacy of the Campaign to End Loneliness (2024), p. 41

Supporting the many organisations – including charities and community groups, local businesses and statutory bodies – working to address loneliness in places, across systems and within combined authorities continues to be a priority. For example, through training delivery and the continuation of the Tackling Loneliness Hub as a place of shared learning, building capacity, capability and collaboration.

Given the funding challenges, there is potential for building a case for investment by the health system. To thrive these efforts will need funding and commitment across the long term.

The Campaign to End Loneliness will pass to Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Loneliness Studies to ensure the digital assets remain available and accessible to the sector. The Centre for Loneliness Studies are also actively engaging other organisations on the issue and working collaboratively to keep focus and momentum.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) intends to maintain the Tackling Loneliness Hub, and will tender for a new provider. Stakeholder organisations continue to share the joint Call to Action on Loneliness setting out an agenda for the next Government.



Priorities for future research:

- Identify contexts and mechanisms for reducing loneliness in the UK, especially for: children and young people, people in middle age, ethnic minority groups, disabled people, and LGBTQ+ people.
- Seek to understand the role of friendship, peer relationships, and social and emotional skills learning in and beyond childhood.
- Explore the potential of linking data from evaluation of tackling loneliness interventions to national healthcare and other datasets.

Read more detail on our [Areas of Research Interest](#) for this focus area.

Working age and workplace

Taking a whole-life approach to wellbeing is core to building resilience, and progressing and thriving as a nation.

As other organisations in the What Works Network concentrate on early years or those in later life, we have **specialised in 'working age'**, as well as aligning the evidence across the whole of life. This is because life satisfaction peaks at ages 23 and 68, and is at its lowest during working life.

Working age has been a priority area from our inception, with our Work and Adult Learning programme partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Department for Work and Pensions, funded by ESRC. Our aim has been to improve the wellbeing of working age adults and reduce wellbeing inequalities.

We focused on:

- Collating the evidence on the efficacy of different activities and programmes that can be used in workplaces to improve wellbeing.
- Investigating how any given intervention is implemented to help it achieve the intended wellbeing outcomes, to support effective implementation.
- Growing the collective understanding of work transitions and their effect on wellbeing, wellbeing at work, workplace culture, and the role of learning.
- Analysing existing wellbeing data, such as UK labour market data and the Civil Service People Survey to generate insights on the relationships between jobs and wellbeing.
- Understanding the role of organisational leadership for workplace wellbeing and how this is delivered in practice.
- Looking at the drivers of wellbeing throughout the course of our lives to investigate what works to support wellbeing for specific populations, such as students, frontline charity workers and those with terminal illness.



What the Centre does is so helpful to those seeking a trustworthy and honest evidence-based way to improve wellbeing.

Business sector
stakeholder

- Researching the link between higher education and wellbeing, to support students to thrive during their studies and establish the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing, leading to the development of a [Student Mental Health Evidence Hub](#).
- Developing a framework and suite of accompanying resources to help organisations understand and evaluate domains of wellbeing as they apply in the workplace.
- Exploring the practical challenges of implementing national job quality measurement in the UK, and presenting a measurement framework for tracking progress towards the outcome of good work for all.
- Guiding employers to use wellbeing insights to inform investment in effective systems changes, including whether they meet the cost-effectiveness threshold.
- Developing sector-specific guidance, learning interventions, and practical toolkits.
- Delivering accessible training.
- Partnering with organisations to develop and enact wellbeing strategies, and embed evaluation frameworks and reporting guidelines.
- Amplifying voices and sharing partners' work
- Convening industry leaders, professionals and experts to discuss key topics through our Business Leader's Council.



Through our work, we have **established strong evidence** that [unemployment is damaging for wellbeing](#), particularly for young people, and that people do not adapt in the long-term. We have also **identified** the importance of good working conditions, learning opportunities, work being enjoyable and inspiring, and jobs reflecting needs and skills. We now know that what we do, and our associated health and ability to do it, matters for our **sense of purpose**.

Core 'what works' reviews:

1. [What works to improve job quality, workplace wellbeing and performance?](#) - reviewing the evidence to understand what needs to happen alongside job redesign to allow organisations to improve wellbeing and performance.
2. [What works for effective wellbeing training at work?](#) - a systematic review exploring the available evidence on learning at work.
3. [What works to implement health and wellbeing in the workplace?](#) - a rapid review looking at the enablers of success for implementing interventions.
4. [What works to improve student mental health and wellbeing?](#) - review mapping which interventions work in higher education and adult learning.

Our work informed the Thriving at Work Review, which went on to shape the UK Government's voluntary reporting framework for [reporting on disability, mental health and wellbeing in the workplace](#), developed to support organisations and drive greater transparency. When we started this implementation work in 2017/18, only about 30-40% of organisations reported having a wellbeing strategy. That has grown to 65% of organisations across multiple sectors including health, education, policing, law, banking, convenience stores, construction, shipping, and farming.

We also put evidence into action through our own internal policies, prioritising the wellbeing of our own staff by measuring and reporting quarterly, and using this to guide our provision of support.

For further details of our analysis, learnings and resources in this focus area, read our deep-dive blog on [working age and workplace wellbeing 2014-2024](#).



SPOTLIGHT: Work and terminal illness

To **address a gap in research** looking at working age people's experiences of terminal illness, and identify where research and practice need to go next, we worked collaboratively with Marie Curie and CIPD.

Over three years, we **mapped evidence and practice** through a scoping review and survey of HR professionals. To build our understanding, we then brought together a cohort of people professionals from across the education, charity, and private sectors to share learning in practice. Participants welcomed the range of topics covered, access to experts in having supportive conversations and the opportunity to hear first hand from people working with terminal illness.

The policies developed by participating organisations will cover over 50,000 employees and the research has already led to changes in Marie Curie's own policies, as well as **legislative change at a national policy level**.

Further learning was captured in **collaboratively-produced peer guidance**, launched at an online event with key practitioners and stakeholders in November 2023. Users of the guide to workplace policies and practice were invited to send feedback to help us improve and refine insights.



[The guide] feels a warm and supportive document to read and inspired me to transfer this compassion and understanding into my workplace.

User feedback



To date, the guidance has been viewed almost 800 times and downloaded over 300 times, demonstrating its use as a **go-to resource** in this space. In addition, we continued dissemination activity for our research findings by delivering a keynote at Association of Local Authority Medical Officers annual conference 2023, webinars for Society of Occupational Medicine and Hospice UK, and sessions at the CIPD and Marie Curie research conferences in February 2024. The guide is recommended reading for all signatories of the [TUC's Dying to Work Charter](#), which covers over a million workers.

In partnership with the Local Government Association we delivered a webinar to over 100 Local Authority HR Leads. This activity was supported by a social campaign re-sharing assets as part of Dying Matters awareness week. The value of the work to date has been recognised by the sector, **winning the inaugural Marie Curie Clair Fisher Research Impact Award**.

This programme of work illustrates our mission in action from end-to-end: to find, share and grow the evidence, and convene, guide and mobilise people to use it. It acts as **a blueprint for other evidence intermediaries** on how to collate, translate and implement wellbeing knowledge in a learning system.



The panel were impressed that the project has already had significant impact through engagement with a wide variety of organisations, some of them very large in size [...and] will lead to further impact and positive change. The project addresses a widespread issue that will affect all organisations.

Dr Sam Royston, Executive Director
for Research and Policy at
Marie Curie



What's next?

We want wellbeing to be at the heart of how we shape jobs, organisations and working practices across all sectors to support future employment, individual wellbeing and the economy.

While action on wellbeing at work has increased at pace, the evidence base has not always done this, despite it being very possible to conduct research in this space.

We would like to see a 'what works toolkit' of workplace interventions to support employers, based on the key drivers of wellbeing at work, that can be updated as new evidence becomes available and used in practice.

The robustness, consistency and availability of causal evidence on effectiveness of workplace interventions can be increased through large-scale trials, rather than reliance on case studies.

While there has been some improvement on data and measures through the updated Office of National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey, job quality is an area where we need better national and local data. Better evidence-informed job quality measures in national and local data are needed to understand what really matters in working life. Our analyses of workplace wellbeing data has been a key part of building knowledge in this area.

We also need to establish greater evidence around work, the impact of transitional life events such as marriage, divorce, parenthood, having a serious/life-limiting illness, bereavement, retirement, and how we buffer shocks.

Priorities for future research:

- Deepen our understanding of organisational wellbeing policies and interventions and their impact on productivity, performance, retention, growth, customer satisfaction, sickness absence, and employee engagement.
- Grow the evidence base on what makes effective people management for personal wellbeing and organisational outcomes, including contexts and mechanisms.
- Investigate the impact of different working patterns on employee wellbeing, organisational and national policy outcomes.

Read more detail on our [Areas of Research Interest](#) for this focus area.

As an employer:

- Know your people and know your context: use our workplace wellbeing question bank to design a high-quality workplace survey, and then report your results in line with the UK national voluntary reporting framework.
- Explore our workplace wellbeing resources and discover the benefits of workplace learning.
- Take an integrated approach to developing a wellbeing strategy.
- Consider both what you do – does it meet identified needs and is it cost effective? – and how you deliver
- Recognise the importance of base metrics for what drives wellbeing at work, performance and job satisfaction and value the wellbeing impacts of your projects and programmes.
- Use wellbeing insights to help address concerns around retention, productivity and EDI.

We look forward to seeing progress on developing a more nuanced understanding of student wellbeing and lifelong learning. For example, TASO is testing the impact of interventions run by higher education providers to support student wellbeing in a new project, launched in April 2024.



Sharing our learning

By transparently reflecting on the challenges we have faced, alongside our impact and achievements, we hope to guide future players in the wellbeing space as the sector continues to iterate and innovate.

A number of the considerations are the flipside to our defining strengths.

Bridging expertise

As knowledge brokers who work with a diverse array of stakeholders, we have been required to be expert at all the different stages of the evidence process, aligning evidence with real-world experiences and practical applications. We connect audience groups, sectors and topics. While this has positioned us uniquely as adaptable and responsive conveners, it has, at times, stretched our resources thinly.

Advice:

If something's working, support it - push the open door.
Understand the role of expertise in the landscape.

Audience-focused approach

Wellbeing can be thought of as “everything to everyone”. Catering to such a broad range of audiences comes with a huge challenge about how to prioritise resources and when to draw boundaries.

Advice:

Stay in the sweet spot, delivering findings and evidence that are robust as well as being close to your audiences, their needs, speaking their language and making it useful for them.

To work effectively at a neighbourhood level, prioritise working in partnership with organisations already embedded to enable resources and impact to go further.



Being pioneers

By staying attuned to emerging needs, drawing from a wide understanding of wellbeing and regularly reviewing evidence systematically we have endeavoured to be ahead of the curve, signposting topics, questions and pathways for consideration. While this is often met positively, actors have not always been quite ready to make the necessary commitment to advancing the field.

Advice:

We have been strongest and most effective when we have stuck to our core role and purpose.

Generosity

We have taken a supportive role, enabling others. By employing an indirect influence approach, and working as a public good, there have been times when our contributions have not always been obvious and have been difficult to attribute. We have prioritised generosity of sharing and collaboration ahead of brand recognition, perhaps to the detriment of evidencing our impact to secure funding.

Advice:

Balance working in service with cultivating visibility.

Independence

Being driven by wellbeing and evidence and otherwise free from affiliations with specific sectors, agendas, political parties, or academia has enhanced our reputation as a trusted and credible partner and source of information.

Our nonpartisan stance has limited our ability to address political issues strongly or directly, perhaps to the detriment of our mission. Our independence also means there is no single dedicated, consistent advocate or funding source. The mechanisms through which our funding was granted has been short- to medium-term, impacting the scope and delivery of our work. Effective evidence generation and implementation requires longer term 'core' funding of ideally five year arrangements to cover self-directed activities, cross-network collaborations, and operational costs, in addition to project-based work.

We hope the [Evaluation Task Force's new strategy](#) will help improve the range and understanding of sustainable funding routes, providing greater financial stability to Centres for the future.

Advice:

Take a strategic and transparent approach to funding.

What people say

“The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has played an inestimable role in advancing the wellbeing agenda both in the UK, and beyond. Nancy and her team have developed insights which, against the backdrop of a burgeoning mental health crisis, have played an increasingly important role in educating leaders across multiple sectors of the importance of wellbeing. Their work in the policy sphere in particular has been trailblazing: ensuring that the question of how people can lead better lives is considered alongside more traditional measures of growth. While devastated by the closure of the Centre, I am sure that the numerous tools and resources developed by What Works Centre for Wellbeing experts over the past decade will ensure that its positive impact continues to be felt for many years to come

Sarah Cunningham, Managing Director of the
World Wellbeing Movement

“What Works Centre for Wellbeing produces outstanding work that has transformed our understanding and valuing of wellbeing during the last decade.

Andy Bell, Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health

“What Works Centre for Wellbeing has done an excellent job of putting wellbeing on the map for us all, showing why it matters, how it ‘presents’, how we can measure and understand it, and what works in improving wellbeing. It’s important and highly effective work. Bravo!

Jane Lewis, Managing Director, Centre for Evidence and Impact

“The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has been an invaluable partner in our mission to enhance the impact of arts and culture on society. Their evidence-based approach not only validates the transformative power of the arts and culture in promoting individual and community wellbeing but has also influenced our ten-year strategy to ensure maximum benefit for all. Through their expertise over the years, we’re not just ensuring art and culture flourishes; we’re fostering happier, healthier communities

Andrew Mowlah, Director, Research, Arts Council England

“The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has, over close to a decade now, forged a valuable channel for delivering wellbeing insights to the heart of UK policymaking. I have no doubt in my mind that, through their tireless work, Nancy and team have saved and improved countless lives. The loss of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing is a real blow to those of us who are working towards a future where wellbeing considerations are the primary focus in both government and business, but I have no doubt that the substantial foundations that the Centre have laid will enable equally impactful future work.

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, Director,
Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford.

Executive Director's note

“ It has been an incredible privilege to have led the Centre since its inception. I am immensely proud of the breadth and depth of what we have achieved in service of wellbeing and in partnership with government, business, research and the VCSE sector.



We have been pioneering; a source of generous knowledge sharing, operating with and between evidence producers and decision makers.

We have made it possible to use wellbeing evidence robustly, consistently and with confidence through increasing access to, use and generation of relevant and reliable evidence.

Reflecting on the last decade, I am particularly struck by the pace at which we have worked to find, share and grow wellbeing evidence and convene, guide and mobilise those who can and want to to use it effectively. Since 2014, we have published content at least weekly, producing a total of 567 blogs that cover a diversity of wellbeing topics and platform a range of voices and experiences from research, policy and practice.

By sharing the expertise we have gained, I hope we can continue to help shape how strategies are produced and recommendations are actioned, long after our closure. We bring this expertise together through our extensive library of digital resources, in this report, and our Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) and highlighted Practice in Need of Evidence (PINE). I encourage you to keep learning.

Together we know more than we did ten years ago, which means we can do better. Through building a learning system that is robust, independent, practical, open and iterative, we have helped move closer to a future where the wellbeing of people and communities in the UK improves year-on-year and wellbeing inequalities are reduced.

And while the importance of wellbeing is now increasingly recognised in policy, public life, and across businesses, there is still more to be done. We must keep sight of the goal of collective action, that is improving wellbeing as a national - and indeed international - outcome, so that people can thrive now and in the future.

Thank you to all our funders, partners, collaborators, friends and supporters for making the last ten years of progress possible. We hope you will take on the mantle.

We must keep sight of improving wellbeing as a national - and international - outcome, so that people can thrive.

Nancy Hey

