

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is ‘how we’re doing’ as individuals, communities and as a nation and how sustainable it is for the future. Wellbeing economics is used to describe social welfare or social value in government appraisal.

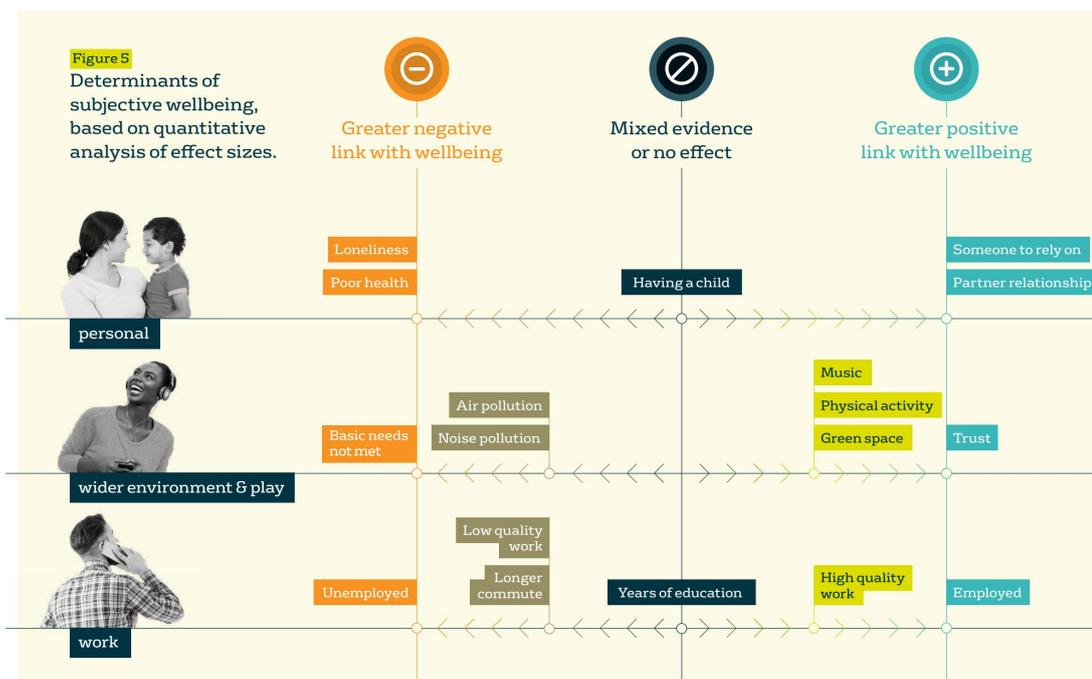
- It’s how we experience life as a whole,
- How external conditions affect our lives, and
- How we function in society.

What matters for wellbeing?

Everything in our lives can affect our wellbeing, but some important factors are our **health, relationships** and social **support, income, work**, the **things we do**, the **environment** around us, and our **communities**. The balance of **pleasure** and **purpose** in our lives affects our wellbeing, as well as whether we feel we have **a say** in the things that matter to us.

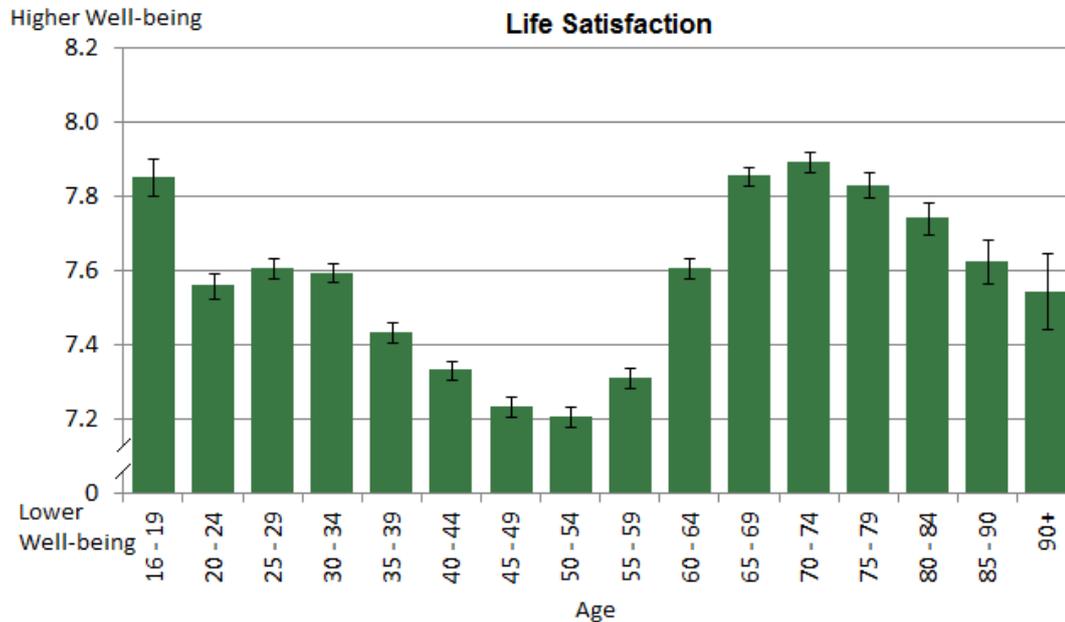
Changes in wellbeing are created through a combination and **interaction** of our **external conditions** (income, employment, environment) and our **personal resources** (health, optimism, resilience, trust) to allow us to function well in the world and experience positive feelings.

What affects wellbeing is **different for everyone**. So, no matter how many positive things we have in our lives, if we don’t feel or experience our lives going well, we can’t describe them as truly going well.



Source: [Wellbeing Evidence at the Heart of Policy](#) (2020)

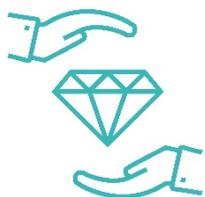
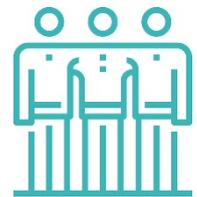
Wellbeing changes over our lives



Key ingredient – relationships

Relationships are key for the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and nations:

- Having a partner is as good for you as being made unemployed is bad for you
- Having social support and someone to rely on is a big factor in explaining the variation between countries
- Strong networks build resilience, and protect people and communities from the effects of shocks



Key ingredients – trust

- People who feel less trust in others feel lonely more often
- Living in a high-trust environment can protect against effects of unemployment, discrimination and ill health

Who has the lowest wellbeing?

Around 4.4% of people in the UK have low life satisfaction = around 2.3m people and around 10.4m have high anxiety.

Around 1% of people in the UK, over half a million people, have low wellbeing. People with the lowest personal wellbeing had the following characteristics

- self-reported very bad or bad health
- be economically inactive with a long-term illness or disability
- be middle-aged



- be single, separated, widowed or divorced
- be renters
- have no or basic education

Focus on Loneliness

Loneliness is an unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is **a gap between the number and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.**

Loneliness is subjective and experienced.

Loneliness is different from social isolation. **Social isolation is objective** and based on the number of people in our social networks. Socially isolated people may have few or no social ties. This difference is important because people may be surrounded by other people but still experience loneliness, or may have few social ties but not feel lonely.

- 1 in 20 adults in the UK report feeling lonely “often” or “always” (**young people and women** more likely).
- People in **poor health** or who have conditions they describe as “limiting” are at particular risk of feeling lonely more often.
- **Carers** are 37% more likely to report loneliness than non-carers.
- **Renters** feel lonely more often than homeowners, and people who **live alone** are at greater risk of feeling lonely more often.

How does the UK measure wellbeing?

We have a national wellbeing framework which looks at 41 indicators covering ten domains of people’s lives: relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, economy, education and skills, governance, environment and personal assessments of wellbeing.

This last domain includes **subjective measures** of wellbeing which **ask people directly how they feel their lives are going.**

The Office for National Statistics reports on national wellbeing on a quarterly basis, and provides data at local authority level every three years.



Community wellbeing is greater than the sum of the individual wellbeing of all the people living in an area

But what is that extra 'something' that makes community wellbeing?

We can understand community wellbeing as a 'middle-scale' measure of wellbeing that sits between individual and national wellbeing.



Individual wellbeing

What is it?

How we subjectively feel about our life, and objectively whether our human needs are being met.

How can we measure it?

Objective data, such as education level and employment status. Subjective data, like life satisfaction and anxiety levels.

Community wellbeing

What is it?

Includes (and impacts) individual wellbeing, but is more than just aggregating individual wellbeing in an area.

How can we measure it?

Individual assessments of community scale factors; group data collection; individual stories or case studies of community institutions; group discussions; local media; social media; local policy documents; local cultural fora.

National wellbeing

What is it?

Includes (and impacts) individual and community wellbeing, and covers some national-level indicators not captured at local or individual scale.

How can we measure it?

Data from the Office for National Statistics, national indices, international benchmarks

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a set of evidence-based actions which promote people's wellbeing. Whilst not claiming to be the biggest determinants of wellbeing, it's a set of simple things individuals can do in their everyday lives. They were developed by the [New Economics Foundation](#) and based on the findings of the 2008 [Government Office for Science Foresight report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing](#) that aimed to develop a long term vision for maximising wellbeing in the UK.

Five ways to wellbeing

Connect...
Connect with the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active...
Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Swimming makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Take notice...
Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Breathe in the fresh air. Notice the changing seasons. Savor the moment, whether you're walking to work, eating lunch or taking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you see. Being reflective on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

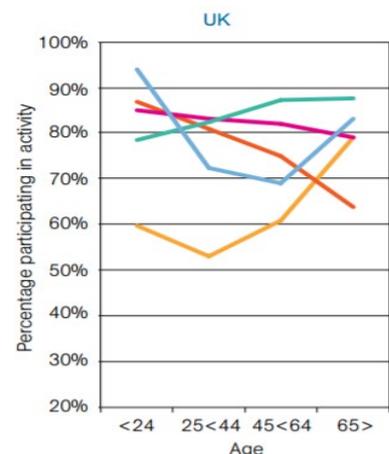
Keep learning...
Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a broken tool. Get a challenge or how to cook your favorite food. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

Give...
Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and create connections with the people around you.

Key

- Take notice
- Keep learning
- Be active
- Give
- Connect

Figure 19: Participation in five ways by age category for the UK



Some key measures for wellbeing

measure.whatworkswellbeing.org

1. National Personal Wellbeing Measures (ONS4)

Overall individual wellbeing, good feelings, purpose and mental health. Can be benchmarked against national data (to local authority level) from Office for National Statistics:

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



2. Social relationships, trust and belonging: Can be benchmarked against national data using the Community Life Survey (DCMS)

- If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me
- How strongly do you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?
- Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people.

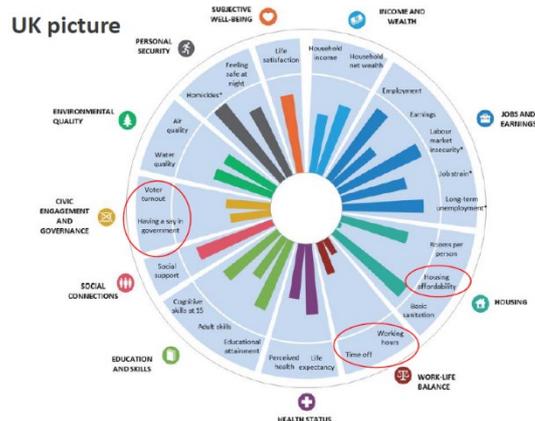
3. Mental Wellbeing: Shorter Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

A 7-item scale measuring feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing. Developed to be used in evaluations of programmes. Can be answered by children from the age of 13.

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs>

- I've been feeling optimistic about the future
- I've been feeling useful
- I've been feeling relaxed
- I've been dealing with problems well
- I've been thinking clearly
- I've been feeling close to other people
- I've been able to make up my own mind about things

4. International: OECD Better Life Index



<p>1</p>	<p>What is your goal?</p>	<p>Define wellbeing as the goal</p> <p>"How we are doing as people, communities and a nation, now and in the future" (Office for National Statistics, UK)</p> <p>Wellbeing is a way to understand what is needed - and how we can all work together - to improve our lives in a complex world. It brings together everything that is important to us and our communities including economic, social, environmental, democratic and personal outcomes and avoids focusing on specific areas at the expense of others.</p>																																														
<p>2</p>	<p>How do you contribute to improving wellbeing?</p>	<p>Understand what affects wellbeing</p> <p>The science of wellbeing is developing. We have a better understanding now about what affects wellbeing, thanks to research. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing presents headline summaries of the relationship between each of the main domains and wellbeing. These can inform decisions about the type of intervention you choose; where it happens; who it is for; and how it is run.</p> <p>Map your spheres of influence</p> <p>Map against the multiple dimensions of wellbeing and their determinants. There are many different ways to map the constituent parts of wellbeing and their determinants. These include, for example, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals or the 10 Office for National Statistics (UK) domains. To map the responsibilities and spheres of influence of your work against these different domains, we have organised these domains and determinants into a spreadsheet.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">QUALITY OF OUR LIVES EXPERIENCES AND ENVIRONMENT</th> <th>Responsibility/sphere of influence: Direct/Indirect</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Health</td> <td>Mental health Physical health</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Income, wealth and economy</td> <td>Income, wealth GDP, growth, poverty ratios</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education</td> <td>Education level Skills level and learning</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>What we do</td> <td>Employment status Job quality Time use (outside of work) Spirituality/faith system</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Natural environment</td> <td>Natural environment</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Where we live</td> <td>Housing Transport/access Crime/safety Culture/heritage</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Social relations</td> <td>Relationships and support Social integration</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">EXTENT TO WHICH OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS ARE MET</th> <th>Responsibility/sphere of influence: Direct/Indirect</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Self direction and Autonomy</td> <td>Sense of control, autonomy</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Achieving</td> <td>Competence/Engagement Environmental Mastery</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Esteem</td> <td>Self attitude Reputation</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Relatedness</td> <td>Belongingness Love and acceptance Trust</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Purpose</td> <td>Worthwhile</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Positive/negative emotions</td> <td>Happiness Anxiety</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	QUALITY OF OUR LIVES EXPERIENCES AND ENVIRONMENT		Responsibility/sphere of influence: Direct/Indirect	Health	Mental health Physical health		Income, wealth and economy	Income, wealth GDP, growth, poverty ratios		Education	Education level Skills level and learning		What we do	Employment status Job quality Time use (outside of work) Spirituality/faith system		Natural environment	Natural environment		Where we live	Housing Transport/access Crime/safety Culture/heritage		Social relations	Relationships and support Social integration		EXTENT TO WHICH OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS ARE MET		Responsibility/sphere of influence: Direct/Indirect	Self direction and Autonomy	Sense of control, autonomy		Achieving	Competence/Engagement Environmental Mastery		Esteem	Self attitude Reputation		Relatedness	Belongingness Love and acceptance Trust		Purpose	Worthwhile		Positive/negative emotions	Happiness Anxiety	
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<p>3</p>	<p>What are you <u>currently</u> doing with regards to wellbeing?</p>	<p>Understand what is currently being done</p> <p>Mapping existing policies, programmes or interventions in the areas that have been identified as of influence can help identify gaps. Revisiting existing policies and adjusting may make it possible to usefully include wellbeing. This is an effective way to further the 'happiness agenda'</p>																																														
<p>4</p>	<p>What <u>can</u> you do to improve wellbeing?</p>	<p>'Design in' wellbeing</p> <p>Consider not only the domains that you have direct influence over, but also the psychological needs of individuals. These can be enhanced through the design of any policy or intervention.</p>																																														
<p>5</p>	<p>What do you <u>want</u> to do to improve wellbeing?</p>	<p>Understand what to prioritise</p> <p>Evaluate how your current policies, programmes, or interventions are impacting wellbeing. But also look at national and international data on relevant wellbeing domains. You can then integrate this with priorities of your organisation or department. This will help you prioritise and understand where to act and how, whether it's about creating a new programme or improving a pre-existing one.</p>																																														
<p>6</p>	<p>How do you expect change to happen across multiple domains at the same time?</p>	<p>Model it</p> <p>...taking into account the various different transmission mechanisms, with costs and benefits occurring in different places.</p>																																														
<p>7</p>	<p>Measure, review, learn and evaluate</p>	<p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will benefit? (consider equity) How does this impact stakeholders and partners? Time horizon (and sustainability) of benefits Costs and opportunity costs Spillover effects (indirect effects) 																																														