

Subjective wellbeing is a key component of our measurement framework for national wellbeing. It is not only an important outcome of policy in its own right but there is significant evidence it is instrumental to achieving other outcomes – health, productivity, educational attainment etc. Furthermore subjective wellbeing is driven by a wide range of factors and there is a strong likelihood that policy interventions and services will impact wellbeing whether intended to or not. It therefore makes sense to add a few relevant questions into evaluations to capture the impact on people’s lives. The “ONS4”: life satisfaction, sense of worth of activities, happiness and anxiety are now Official Statistics and are commonly used for comparability. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is also an important measure within the national framework. The emerging results from trials which have included these questions indicate that they are malleable to intervention and that they are useful instruments for capturing policy and service outcomes. Additional benefits include:

- ✓ Life Satisfaction can help **monetise impact** to support **impact and economic evaluations**
- ✓ Subjective wellbeing measures provide a **common currency** which helps compare different interventions against each other and against local and national benchmarks
- ✓ These are **efficient measures** - a small number of questions which take a short time to complete relative to the benefits of inclusion
- ✓ It can potentially increase interest in your policy or service by **resonating with wider audiences** e.g. Health and Wellbeing Boards and Directors of Public Health, government departments etc.

Background

In 2010 the Prime Minister launched the Measuring National Wellbeing programme and committed to reflecting wellbeing and quality of life in our decision making. Since then much progress has been made on the definition and measurement of national wellbeing. An important aspect of our national approach is to ask people to rate their own progress – their subjective wellbeing. This can act as a counterbalance to the objective indicators of progress we have historically tended to place most emphasis on. Objective indicators only provide half the picture. Alone, we might consider it a success that:

- Isolation is decreasing while high levels of loneliness persist,
- Crime is falling as fear of crime is rising,
- Healthy life expectancy is increasing while satisfaction with health reducing

Summary measures of personal wellbeing, such as life satisfaction, anxiety and sense of worth are particularly important. They capture how individuals are feeling about their lives. There is evidence that they are predictive of reduced mortality and that they are instrumental to other outcomes that we value such as employment, productivity and educational attainment. In fact subjective wellbeing

questions have been well studied and are associated with a wide range of drivers which in turn are influenced by a broad range of policies and services.

A consequence of this is that there is a strong likelihood that a proposed policy intervention, and the way in which it is implemented, will impact people's wellbeing whether it is intended to or not. This, in itself, is a good case for including measures such as the ONS4 or WEMWBS in evaluations¹ - but what are the other benefits?

The Benefits

The benefits of measuring wellbeing in your policy or service evaluation include:

- ✓ **Capture Impact;** evidence from trials indicates that subjective wellbeing questions are malleable and capture the social impact of interventions. For example, using the ONS4 it was found that there was a 9 percentage point reduction in anxiety among 16 year olds who undertook National Citizen Service² compared to a control group, and 5 percentage point increase in sense of 'worthwhile'. The anxiety benefits were sustained a year later. WEMWBS was used to evaluate the impact of early interventions around parenting³ and the mean WEMWBS score for parents changed before and after demonstrating a large, positive and significant effect on wellbeing.
- ✓ **Compare interventions;** the measures provide a common currency of social impact across diverse projects and services, helping to compare and contrast the impact of different interventions on individual lives.
- ✓ **Benchmark;** results at a project level can be compared with ONS national or local area population results, and wellbeing data from a host of policy surveys. Care has to be taken to compare surveys that have been administered in the same way – e.g. via telephone, the internet or face to face.
- ✓ **Economic Evaluation;** if you include a life satisfaction question you may well be able to 'monetise' the impact of your intervention using the Wellbeing Valuation Approach detailed in the HMT Green Book discussion paper⁴.
- ✓ **Short and Quick to Ask;** the preamble plus ONS life satisfaction questions takes half a minute (including responses), and the full set of four questions takes 75 seconds to both ask and answer. This is efficient compared with other survey instruments which typically require more questions and more survey time to be asked. You can capture three dimensions of subjective wellbeing with the ONS4 – evaluative, eudemonic (sense of meaning and purpose) and experiential (positive and negative emotions).
- ✓ **Widen the application of your findings to other audiences e.g. health and wellbeing boards;** inclusion should add to the knowledge base of 'What Works' to improve wellbeing and ensure your project resonates with a wider audience at a national and local level.

¹ See the Magenta Book for cross-government, cross-disciplinary guidance on what to consider when designing an evaluation - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/national-citizen-service>

³ Further details on the use of WEMWBS and the evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinders can be found at <http://www.healthscotland.com/scotlands-health/population/Measuring-positive-mental-health.aspx>

⁴ HM Treasury discussion paper <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/valuation-techniques-for-social-cost-benefit-analysis>

How to add Wellbeing in?

The ONS4 subjective wellbeing questions are presented at Annex A and have been tested for children aged 11-15yrs as well as adults 16+yrs. If space is limited then a few of these questions could be added that are most relevant to the intervention being tested. A few pointers to help prioritise include:

1. **Life Satisfaction**; is the most widely used and comparable measure, is malleable and opens up the possibility of economic assessments; probably the highest priority question if space is constrained.
2. **Anxiety**; has been seen to be particularly sensitive to a range of interventions and life events and as such is worth including as a priority if there is space available.
3. **Worthwhile**; is particularly useful for capturing the impact of activities such as volunteering and work.
4. **Happiness**; if measured can also be combined with anxiety to calculate affect balance (happiness minus anxiety)

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale⁵ can also be added in either its short form (7 questions) or longer form (14 questions). This instrument has also proved malleable in trials and is an important index included in the National Wellbeing framework. Ideally both ONS4 and WEMWBS should be used alongside each other maximising the potential to compare, to benchmark and to support economic evaluations. WEMWEBS could be more suited than the ONS4 to evaluating interventions in a health or clinical setting given its design and wider spread use in the NHS and also in Scotland.

The World Health Organization Wellbeing Index (WHO-5)⁶ is also used internationally and might be considered when international comparisons are important as it has been translated into many languages. It has been shown to be a reliable measure of emotional functioning and can help to screen for depression. Administering the WHO-5 Well-being Index typically takes 2-3 minutes.

There are other wider wellbeing questions and indicators that can be considered for evaluations. For example, if an intervention is focussed on a specific policy area such as housing, health or employment, it might also be worth adding in a tailored subjective wellbeing question for that area e.g. housing satisfaction, job satisfaction etc.

The national statistics wellbeing questions have now been administered in many different ways – face to face, telephone and internet based self-completion.

Pointers and Tips

- ✓ There are survey administration effects – results differ depending on the survey method used and it is necessary to account for this in analysis. It is advisable to use consistent modes where possible for comparability e.g. between treatment and control groups.
- ✓ There are question order effects. For the ONS questions ask them in the order in Annex A and it is better to ask the anxiety question last.

⁵ <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Documents/Wellbeing%20self-assessment.htm>

⁶ WHO-5 Well-being Index Questionnaire - http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/NR/rdonlyres/ACF049D6-C94D-49B2-B34C-96A7C5DA463B/0/WHO5_English.pdf

- ✓ If possible ask the wellbeing questions early on in the questionnaire after the basic questions on demographics. This allows time for rapport to be built up between the interviewer and the respondent by the time the subjective well-being questions are asked without allowing later questions, such as those on employment, to influence responses.
- ✓ Use consistent wording and pre-amble to the questions between surveys.

Annex A – The “ONS4” Subjective Wellbeing Questions

These can be implemented in face to face, telephone or web based questionnaires:

Question Preamble

Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of nought to 10, where nought is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'.

Questions

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

Interviewer instruction: where nought is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'

2. Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Interviewer instruction: where nought is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'

3. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

Interviewer instruction: where nought is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'

4. On a scale where nought is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Annex B – The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

Each of the 14 item responses in WEMWBS are scored from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time) and a total scale score is calculated by summing the 14 individual item scores. The minimum score is 14 and the maximum is 70. The short form scale consists of 7 items – see Table 2.

Statements	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling interested in other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've had energy to spare	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling good about myself	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling confident	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling loved	1	2	3	4	5
I've been interested in new things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling cheerful	1	2	3	4	5

Table 1 The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale – 14 items

Statements	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5

Table 2 The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale – 7 items