

## Wellbeing Public Dialogues

*What you have told us and  
what we're going to do*



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# 1. FOREWORD

## Dr. Paul Litchfield, Chair

### What Works Centre for Wellbeing



It is easy to get caught up in the philosophical arguments about what wellbeing means and the varying views on how best it should be measured.

The multi-disciplinary nature of the evidence base, with contributions from the social sciences, life sciences and humanities, is a great strength but it can also sow the seeds of confusion.

That is why I feel the public dialogues outlined in this document are so important – they serve to keep us grounded and to focus on what really matters to our fellow citizens.

Some of the findings reinforce what we expected – there is more to life than just money!

However the emphasis and the nuances of some of the other results were not perhaps what one would have predicted.

The importance of having a sense of purpose and of being valued came through strongly in all the consultations. Those messages are ones we need to hear especially in an age of rapid technological advances and of unprecedented change in the demographics of our communities. It is all too easy when things are moving at pace for sections of society to become isolated, marginalised and then dehumanised.

Placing wellbeing at the heart of public policy and focusing on the things that really matter to people is not only the civilised way to behave it also helps avoid the fractures in society that can so easily lead to conflict and anarchy.

The creation of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing gives us an opportunity to adjust priorities and perhaps even to reframe the debate about how we organise our work, our leisure and our communities.

The way that we gather and then formulate that evidence is as important as the data itself.

Putting ordinary people at the heart of what we do will help us stay true to our principles and give us the purpose of delivering something that can improve the lives of our fellow human beings.

This document is a valuable start and one I hope we can build on in the years to come.

Dr Paul Litchfield





### 3. Wellbeing Public Dialogues

Wellbeing is about people. Fundamental to this is asking people how they feel and taking that into account. So our starting point is listening to what people say is important to their wellbeing and why. We ran a series of six public dialogues around the UK - in Falkirk, Belfast, South Tyneside, Bristol, London and Cardiff - on our three initial evidence themes to understand what matters to people to inform the development of the Centre and its delivery plan.

We spoke to a wide range of people who had different experiences of the topics being discussed. The diverse range of participants has helped us to understand that there are some fundamentals that matter to everyone and some things where people diverge in what they're looking for in a good life. Here we present a summary of views, more detail is available in the individual reports for each topic.

Some of what we heard might sound simple and straightforward but it's the simplicity that means that they can get overlooked when organisations act or we design policy. Alongside the things we all might recognise as important parts of our lives there are also some surprising findings.

#### **This is what the public told us.**

##### **On wellbeing**

As members of the public, we understand wellbeing as confidence, a sense of self-worth and a good quality of life. We use quality of life, wellbeing, happiness and flourishing interchangeably. There are nuances to our experiences but how we speak about these concepts is very similar.

##### **At the heart of wellbeing**

- 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, achievement, inspiration, feeling valued, fun, learning, opportunity, control, agency and choice

We want to be asked, and talk about, our wellbeing. We think we are responsible for our own wellbeing and supporting others in their wellbeing. We want to see options that enable people to decide for themselves. By understanding how our activity affects our wellbeing, and why that matters, we can create the conditions for us all to thrive.

#### **Role of a What Works Centre for Wellbeing**

- advocate for the importance of wellbeing
- be a link between communities, policy makers, business and individuals
- identify and disseminate best practice
- work with organisations across the UK to make sure people have access to, and use, information on

## Community

### *support, belonging, safety*

As members of the public we understand community wellbeing as the links between people living in an area with family, friends, school and work providing the backbone. Community resilience is a sense of pride and belonging to a place with positive interaction between people who help each other, are supportive, respectful and have friendly relationships.

### Basic needs for good quality of life

We need to feel safe and have *enough* money for our home, a job and good quality, affordable food. We need reliable, unthreatening public transport, a well maintained environment with open spaces, healthcare, education for all ages and affordable local childcare.



### Our connections with others are fundamental to all wellbeing

Love, friendship and respect give us confidence. We want a friendly, welcoming environment and places with a sense of atmosphere and identity that includes togetherness, purpose and hope from a common goal. We want fun from things we choose to do together including catching up with family and friends over meals.

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*People sometimes are just so nice. I would actually be overwhelmed with how nice - because I've been through tragedy and gosh, I think back and I would have never have gotten through it only for the people in the community who really helped us as a family. They honestly - it's overwhelming, like how good and kind people are—Belfast*

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*In difficult times, instead of saying you're different appreciate everyone's differences. I live in X and when it's Eid my Muslim neighbours bring round food and when it's Christmas we give them a box of chocolates and vice versa so it's nice to be able to celebrate and learn about each other's cultures as opposed to being segregated. That will help you stand together in tougher times. - Bristol*

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*There's a park by the pub that's lovely. You go on a summer's day and it's packed with people having picnics, just going for the day. And there's a cafe there, that's really important to meet people. -Belfast*

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## Practical and emotional support especially when negotiating key life stages.

Practical support means developing life skills whereas emotional support means having someone to help us manage negative emotional states including worry, boredom, stress, anxiety, isolation, uncertainty and pressure. We want to feel valued, useful, cared about and have a sense that we actually matter. Having more than one social group is helpful and this includes both place-based communities and communities of interest. The role of technology was both positive and negative.

## We want effective communication so we are heard, have a voice and stand for something

We want effective two way communication with others including government. We are confused and sometimes distrustful about community leadership and find we often lack the right way to voice our concerns. We are concerned about being unable to find the information we need when we need it.

## We want to feel inspired, pride and part of something bigger

We want to give back, feel useful through volunteering and be part of something bigger. Shared positive experiences are important to us and build different aspects of community wellbeing through connections and a sense of value and worth. Examples are national events that bring the nation together, big local events that signal pride, show that a place and its people are valued and bring visitors and local street parties. We are inspired by role models of local successful people showing values that are admired such as working class success or inter-faith marriage.

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*I think that it's crucial for a good quality of life that you have a healthy and balanced diet so you can actually go and do the things you want to do.- Belfast*

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*It's not just feeling valued, its feeling as if you've got something to give back. Its an active thing, being useful is something you can do yourself -Bristol*

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*Social media is creating a new space for communities that wasn't there. Some of the games people play online, the hours they put into those games and the friends they make through them, it really is a community on its own. And it's a community where you can be whatever you want and you can express yourself how you want. - Belfast*

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*Building sustainable communities means respecting nature, it's where you get your food from, it's where you get your art from, and you water all of this -Belfast*

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## Culture and sport

### *fun, enjoyment, friendship and belonging*

Dialogues about culture sport and wellbeing are joyous and inspiring to be involved in. Cultural and sporting activities are felt to be at the heart of quality of life, part of our way of life and core to social interactions.

We learn, we take notice, we get active, we connect and we give. Most of all we develop our interests and with it our initiative and confidence.

### Cultural and sporting activities are fun

Talking about cultural and sporting activities reminds us of intensely emotional moments, feeling 'fantastic', 'elated', 'brilliant' and 'fascinated', and being 'surrounded by people that are happy'. We have a choice to take part or not. They provide an escape, connect us with others, help us develop skills.



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*I sort of took part in the Great North Run, but I wasn't running. I was helping a friend with the catering at the finish line. I cheered on the last few runners once everyone else had left. I now have the goal to run it myself one year, so much so that I've given up smoking. -South Tyneside*

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*Sport and culture, they build confidence. Once you're engaging with people, you can be very withdrawn, but as you get into a group you build confidence. - London*

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*Time for yourself. I do a lot of things with people, but I do like to go walking by myself. I would rather walk alone than with someone else. It clears my mind and makes me aware of things around me. When I am by myself I am sort of able to look around me. It distracts me and helps me to clear my mind and think things through. - London*

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## Culture is understood very broadly and beyond traditional arts and music

As well as traditional cultural activities, culture includes food, travel, festivals and religion. We like learning about others and meeting like minded people. In culture we include shopping, fashion, beauty, tv and nightlife also involving drinking alcohol and taking drugs.

These are activities we do together for enjoyment that is a shared experience that enables connection and conversation.

## Spectating, participating and volunteering are all equally valued.

We are awed and inspired by watching skill and effort. The Paralympics in particular was very inspiring. Live music and football are also exhilarating. Volunteering is also taking part and creates a sense of community.

## Helps us through difficult times

We value taking time out both on our own and with others. These activities help us by building confidence and a sense of achievement, providing a release from stress and a focus for our feelings.



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*I was particularly thinking about gardening, so for me it's the ability to take time out and be on my own. it's not about connecting, it's about freedom from having to connect - South Tyneside*

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*When my marriage split up it was a very hard time for me. In a TV show I was watching one of the parents is also going through a breakup. It really encouraged me because through it I could come to believe that it was ok that I might be a single parent and that I can do anything. it was an inspiration. -South Tyneside*

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*When I was a teenager I went through a really bad patch. I didn't know what I wanted, confusion. And I turned to cultural and sporting activities, I realised what I wanted for my future. That helped me and actually changed my life. It helped me resolve confusion over who I was, where I was. I am gay by the way and for me it was very hard in a society where, I had a girlfriend, I was going to marry her. Through swimming, in sports and through travelling, it put me on the right path to change. -London*

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## Work & Learning

*security, interest, achievement and challenge*

As members of the public, we think that having a job is better than no job, and we need to be safe at work and meet basic comforts such as heating and access to toilet facilities. The main value of work for many is financial security, stability and feeling safe. At its best work and learning can bring achievement and opportunity.

### Work and learning offers achievement, satisfaction, appreciation, pride

From our work and learning we get a sense of achievement, structure, pride and progress. We get a sense of satisfaction, agency and opportunity. We feel useful. At its best, we feel appreciated, valued and encouraged.

We don't want a dead-end job, or to feel like a disposable commodity. These types of experiences help to reduce stress and anxiety, increase self-worth and increase enjoyment, happiness and fulfillment.

### We have a complicated relationship with money and make trade offs

We are confused about money, status and value. We want enough money. 'Enough' means that we can provide for our family comfortably - with room for treats, that we are confident about our position, and can plan and save for the future without panic and worry. For some, pay also reflects how much we are valued and what status we have. Some recognise other benefits or balance with other things. Qualifications and skills can bring security too and some actively seek flexibility in their work. No one size fits all. We make trade offs at different stages of our lives.

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*Financial rewards are the most quantifiable way of realising how much you are appreciated -Cardiff*

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*In my work I have long shifts and it's a really hard and stressful job. Even having a wee debrief with everybody, a catch up is really good. Not everyone gets on all the time, that's never going to happen, but if you're a smaller group that is quite strong it's a thing that needs to be done.*  
*-Falkirk*

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*I need to enjoy my job. Doing something that I love even if the reward is not as great financially. -Cardiff*

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## Transition points need support

At key points in our life we move out of our comfort zone, sometimes by choice, sometimes not, but this reduces our available time, energy, 'headspace' and confidence.

We are more resilient at these busy times when we have positive attitudes, friends and family, adequate support, positive team spirit and management. We recognise, at least in retrospect, that negative events can provide opportunity for learning and growth, and they tend not to be as bad or long lasting as we expect when we experience them.

Example transitions are: from training to first job; home to university; becoming a parent; returning from leave; retirement; redundancy; bereavement; employment to self-employed; and mid-career transitions.

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*I know for me that I left college a good few years ago. All of my jobs were temporary and I've just become permanent in the last month or so. That is a massive thing for me, now I can plan and save for a house and go on holiday - Falkirk*

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## Work and learning can bring a sense of fulfillment, belonging, shared interest and experience

Work and Learning are shared experiences and create a sense of belonging. Diversity brings innovation and creativity. Learning - both formal and informal - at its best gives us a sense of hope, opportunity and growth in addition to time away to focus on something away from daily work and life.

We challenge ourselves and keep improving and it is enjoyable. The excitement, passion and enthusiasm of teachers and colleagues creates a shared interest and keep us inspired.

Positive feedback, sensitivity to need, and showing interest means we're being heard, and flexibility gives some control. We get support from friends, team members and our employers, especially if they see us as individuals, value us and understand our needs.

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*I like to keep learning. It keeps my mind fresh, even if it's nothing to do with anything useful. -Cardiff*

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*The opportunity to advance is not just financially, but the sense of hope for your future. It's about personal growth. -Cardiff*

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## 4. Voice of the user

In the last year we have spoken with over 4,000 people and organisations through online consultation, interviews, workshops, meetings and the public dialogues.

This includes central, local and devolved governments, sector specific organisations, charities, social enterprises, employers, managers, unions, professional bodies, academics, researchers and international experts.

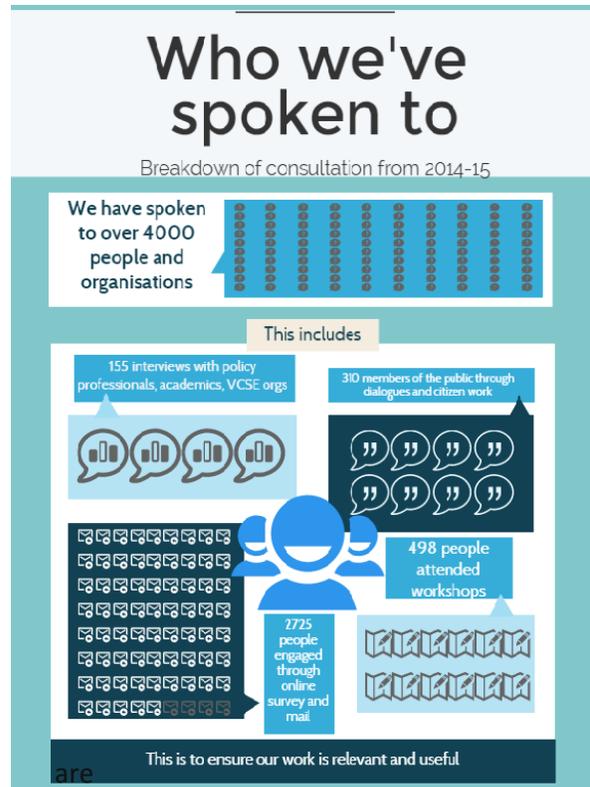
This is what those working in the field told us.

### Across the UK

Wellbeing is a broad field in which many audiences interested. Different disciplines and sectors approach wellbeing from a range of angles. There are different approaches to embedding wellbeing in policy in different parts of the country and appetite to learn from what others are doing across the UK. The UK produces a range of evidence on wellbeing and a different evidence culture exists in different sectors.

The UK is considered a world leader on wellbeing measurement and there is significant international interest in wellbeing. There is strong evidence at a macro level, for example on the relationship between democracy and wellbeing, and at the micro level on individual interventions. What's missing is good evidence at the middle level where most policy takes place.

There is strong understanding of the problems at a local level and businesses are convinced of the need to act on wellbeing. Organisations want to know what they should do and where they should put their resources for best impact. Decision makers are awash with information but struggling with time. They want information that is usable, concise, accessible, building on existing effective networks.



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*facilitating the sharing of evidence across the jurisdictions of the UK and internationally*

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*"I occasionally go back to the source material, but there is so much research"*

*"the packaging is really important and the plain English"*

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## Role of a What Works Centre for Wellbeing

### You want:

- An independent, impartial convener for wellbeing work in the UK bringing together different disciplines and professions in a way that is accessible, welcoming and inclusive to all sectors.
- Robust, concise information focused on practical, useful action that is cheap and simple to apply.

### You want to prioritise:

- Agreeing methodology working towards a framework that is common for all sectors to use to evaluate outcomes of wellbeing interventions.
- More comparable evidence on what does and doesn't work including cost and impact and support to produce and use evidence.
- Effective translation of information by keeping it simple including case studies

### We can:

#### Help with evidence

- Make evaluating wellbeing impact and data analysis more robust and easier to do
- Give structure and guidance on monitoring and evaluation at policy and practitioner level
- Understand how wellbeing measures interrelate with one another and how they relate to other outcomes relevant to different interests
- Be able to distinguish between fashionable and effective ideas and ones that are relevant for our area

#### Advocate for Wellbeing

- Make the case for wellbeing as a goal of policy and practice and a way to co-ordinate action across different policy areas
- Reach the media, politicians and the public with the evidence on wellbeing
- Support promising ideas and evidence for preventative activity, wider determinants of health and other outcomes and early intervention.

#### Lead collaboratively

- Support a common language on wellbeing
- Be citizen-focused
- Work with existing networks
- Professionalise wellbeing by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and how to scale approaches

## Evidence

Those working on wellbeing said many types of evidence are useful and context matters. Given the potential for the current evidence base to be weak, we should draw on published and grey literature (quantitative and qualitative), produced by a diverse group of stakeholders including professionals, practitioners, service delivery organisations, and the participants themselves. We have developed an approach to our evidence reviews which supports this.

## Work and Learning

In all the areas, people working in the field want to understand the relationship between wellbeing and other outcomes that they are interested in and how to define wellbeing in that context. In work and learning this includes how does wellbeing relate to productivity, resilience, self-efficacy and health.

There are lots of elements to good work and learning and different contexts. Fairness, good management and relationships with people are work were all highlighted as important aspects of wellbeing at work. Job security, progression, pay and flexibility form part of job quality. Access to learning, including flexibility, the quality of the learning and both tangible and intangible learning outcomes are relevant to learning. There is a lot of interest in support around transitions into and out of both work and learning and how they relate to wellbeing.

## Culture and Sport

The team used a Delphi approach to inform their evidence programme priorities in the delivery plan and the detailed findings will follow. The headline feedback is that the reviews need to identify which interventions work and the processes by which they work . We need to include reviews of interventions in a group setting led by a professional, volunteer or peer and activities you can do on your own.

You want us to focus on different environments, contexts and social groups including: adults; young adults; adults with a mental health problem; and families. The key dimensions of wellbeing in culture and sport are: confidence & self-esteem, coping & resilience, belonging & social identity

The following were identified as important:

- Lived experiences of wellbeing
- Culture and sports based interventions for promoting wellbeing being appropriate to the lifestyle of participants and in promoting mental health and wellbeing
- A best evidence approach, including both quantitative and qualitative evidence standards and a strategy for non-academic literature.

## Community - people, power & place

Many people in this consultation agreed wellbeing means 'functioning well in life', 'being able to stay positive and resilient to life's changes' or 'a state of full health in mind and body'. Stakeholders understood community wellbeing as primarily being about social capital - strong networks of relationships and support within a community.

Important aspects of community wellbeing are trust, a sense of belonging and connection, the environment we live in, shared objectives and having one's voice heard. We have published the full report of this consultation.

The findings from the community sounding boards in west London, Grimsby and Liverpool echoed the findings from the public dialogues in other parts of the UK.

Feeling safe and financially secure, a clean & tidy environment, parks, cultural, sport and local facilities also play a key role in communities. People valued friendship and kindness in others, contact with family and friends, faith, and the history, heritage and pride we feel in a place.

## What we are doing

Our delivery plan sets out what we will do in our initial evidence programme over the next two and half years. It reflects the feedback from the public dialogues and from those that work in the relevant fields. We have chosen areas that are not covered by other What Works Centres or by current, or recent, research that we are aware of and where we believe there will be sufficient primary evidence and data to do reviews and analysis.

We have identified some themes from the dialogues and consultation that we aren't able to cover in our initial evidence programmes. We will support research projects in additional areas where it will be relevant and we are working with funders and partners to develop additional evidence programmes. We want to grow the primary evidence base and are supporting the development of trials to fill evidence gaps. We have basic evaluation guidance available now that we will develop.

Our teams are primarily doing systematic and scoping reviews and secondary analysis to understand relative wellbeing impact and the processes by which impact occurs. We will continue to develop the Centre and our work in an open and collaborative way.

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*My neighbour is a very good person. I have been sick and he comes around and helps me. He is married now with a child. I don't know how they cope in that tiny flat. But if I call him he will manage to help me.*

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## 5. Delivery Plan

### Year 1 June 2015/16

#### Community

- Scoping reviews on Housing, social relations, co-production, 5 ways to wellbeing interventions
- Indicators for community wellbeing & measurement handbook
- Theory of change for community wellbeing

#### Culture & sport

- Systematic review and secondary data analysis of adult participation music and singing and effects on wellbeing
- National Forum Scotland

#### Work & Learning

Systematic reviews and secondary analysis on:

- Job quality and wellbeing
- Adult learning outcomes and wellbeing
- Worklessness and exits from worklessness and wellbeing

#### Methodology & overall wellbeing

- Common currency and measures
- Wellbeing across the life course model
- Methods guide and review of using science knowledge
- Development mini conference

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### Year 2 June 2016/17

#### Community

- Conceptual review of definitions and measures
- Guidelines on how to assess wellbeing for Local Authorities and the VCSE sector
- Secondary analysis on wellbeing inequalities in Local Authorities, how changes in local conditions affect wellbeing, and whose wellbeing is affected by changes in local conditions

#### Culture & Sport

Systematic reviews and secondary data analysis of wellbeing outcomes on:

- Sport and dance for young people 14-25 years
- Visual arts for adults 15+ years with a mental health condition
- National forum Wales

#### Work & Learning

Systematic reviews and secondary analysis on:

- Social climate & organisational communities at work
- Management practices and wellbeing
- Adult learning processes, quality and wellbeing
- Adult learning outcomes and wellbeing
- Work transitions and wellbeing
- Exits from work and wellbeing

#### Methodology & Lifecourse Analysis

- Cost effectiveness methods for interventions
- World Happiness Report and OECD conference
- Book on causes/effects of wellbeing through the lifecourse
- Workshops on using cohort data for wellbeing analysis, economic evaluation and wellbeing, and measuring wellbeing cause & effects

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### Year 3 June 2017/18

#### Community

- Systematic reviews Housing, social relations, co-production and 5 ways to wellbeing interventions
- Summaries and Expert hearings applying findings

#### Culture & Sport

Systematic reviews and secondary data analysis of :

- Wellbeing outcomes of sport and recreation across the family lifecourse
- Wellbeing outcomes of co-produced culture and sport, community and work and learning interventions
- National Forums in Northern Ireland and England

#### Work & Learning

Continued secondary analysis on:

- Management and wellbeing
- Access to learning and wellbeing
- Exits from work and wellbeing

#### Methodology & Lifecourse Analysis

Secondary analysis and working papers including:

- Is mental health changing across generations?
- Local/national events impact on young people's wellbeing
- Measuring children's wellbeing in RCT context
- Workshops on use of cohort data for wellbeing analysis and economic evaluation & wellbeing

## Related information on [whatworkswellbeing.org](http://whatworkswellbeing.org) :

- Public Dialogue reports
  - Community
  - Culture & Sport
  - Work & Learning
  - Cross-Cutting Themes
- Community Evidence Voice of the User report
- Wellbeing in Policy and Practice online course

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