We now know more about well-being in the UK than ever before. In autumn 2012, the Office for National Statistics began to make available the data from the largest national survey in the world to ask questions on subjective well-being – the Annual Population Survey. This data has immense potential for organisations looking to improve well-being in the country.

A new font of information

In November 2010, the Prime Minister David Cameron gave the green light to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to embark on a new Programme to measure national well-being in the UK. As part of this Measuring National Well-Being programme, the ONS carried out a large consultation process to identify what people understand by well-being in the UK, and has produced reports on a range of well-being issues including human capital and children’s well-being.

In April 2011, they added four subjective well-being questions to the Annual Population Survey (APS), covering over 160,000 respondents across the UK:

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

Compiled results for the first year (April 2011 – March 2012) were reported by the ONS in July this year, noting differences in well-being between ages, ethnicities, and regions amongst other factors. But, it was not until this autumn that analysts were able to get their hands on the raw data, and begin to try and unpick the well-being patterns in the UK. Is, for example, the lower well-being of certain ethnicities an artefact of differences in their material conditions, or is there something else, more subtle, at play? How might the data from the four questions be combined?

On the 20th November, the ONS published a major report Measuring National Well-Being: Life in the UK bringing together all their efforts on the measurement of well-being as a whole, not just subjective well-being. Some of their relevant findings include:

- Healthy Life Expectancy has risen in the UK from 60.7 years in 2000-02 to 63.5 years in 2008-10 for men, and from 62.4 years in 2000-02 to 65.7 years in 2008-10 for women.
- One third of people (33%) reported not being satisfied with their social lives, rising to 42% amongst those aged 35 to 44.
• 8% of people reported not feeling that they belonged to their neighbourhood.

In parallel, nef have published *Well-Being Patterns Uncovered* to specifically explore the patterns in the country for the four subjective well-being questions in the APS. In this issue of Well-Being Matters, we highlight some of the stories from these reports.

**Ethnic disadvantage**

Our report notes the clear finding that many ethnic minorities have lower well-being than white people in the UK. 38% of Arab people and 36% of Black people score badly on at least one of the four measures in the APS survey, compared to 29% of White people.

The reports also confirm that the low well-being of Black, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian and Arab people in the UK is not just a product of differences in the ‘objective’ conditions that the survey covers, such as employment status and home ownership. For example, Figure 1 shows that even controlling for these factors, Bangladeshi people have a level of overall well-being 0.3 points below White people on a scale of 0-10: almost as big as the difference in well-being between married people and single people.

These results highlight that many ethnic minorities still face difficulties in the UK, and that many of these are not captured in traditional data such as employment status and deprivation measures. The APS does not include data on household income, but other surveys that do (such as the Understanding Society Survey)ii demonstrate that differences in household income don’t explain many of these well-being deficits either.

![Figure 1. Differences in overall well-being of ethnic minority groups compared to White group, before and after controlling for individual characteristics.](image)
**Overworked and underworked**

The data from the APS suggest that unemployment, underemployment, but also overemployment are having a detrimental impact on people’s well-being in the UK. As in many other studies, unemployed people report some of the lowest levels of well-being (0.60 points less than those in employment). But evidence is also beginning to emerge that those working very long hours also suffer from low well-being. Controlling for other factors, the overall well-being of people working 55 hours a week or over was 0.10 points lower than people working more ‘typical’ hours (between 28 and 55 hours). The difference in terms of anxiety (shown in Figure 2) was bigger: 0.33.

Interestingly, the negative effects of working long hours were about twice as strong for women compared to men. Also, negative effects were not found on all measures of well-being. For example, people working longer hours, up to a point, actually felt slightly more often that what they do in life is worthwhile.

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**Figure 2. Average levels of anxiety yesterday for full-time workers vs. hours worked per week**

![Graph showing average anxiety levels over working hours](image-url)
A new map of well-being in Britain

With 160,000 respondents, analysts at the ONS and elsewhere have been able to use the APS to map the well-being of the UK to a new level of detail – with robust samples at the county and unitary authority level. To produce an overall measure, the nef report combines the four questions in the survey in two ways: the percentage reporting high well-being on all four measures (shown in Figure 3), and the percentage reporting low well-being on at least one measure. In terms of the former, the parts of the country where the fewest people report high levels of well-being are Inner London, Luton, and Reading (all in white in Figure 3). In terms of the latter, the parts of the country where the most people reported low well-being were Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, and South Ayrshire.

The data also allows analysts to control for local deprivation (using the Index of Multiple Deprivation) to see which areas have higher or lower well-being than would be expected given their objective conditions (e.g. in terms of the income or crime levels in a neighbourhood). For example, the Scottish Islands, Dundee and the Isle of Anglesey all had much higher well-being than would be expected – i.e. they all have higher well-being than other areas with similar levels of deprivation. Thurrock, Bedford and Warwickshire all had much lower well-being than would be expected given their levels of deprivation.

What the government is doing

Many government departments are thinking about how they can use well-being data, including the Department for Health, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Transport. At the launch event organised by the ONS on the 20th November, several departments talked about what they’ve been doing:

- The Cabinet Office has been speaking to people across Government to get them to think about how well-being analysis can influence policy. They commissioned NatCen to carry out an evaluation of a pilot of the National Citizen Service
(www.natcen.ac.uk/media/898405/ncs-evaluation-interim-report.pdf), and have conducted much analysis themselves.

- The Department of Transport are developing a framework for evaluating the well-being impacts of transport infrastructure and policy, and included it in their Transport Analysis Guidance.
- Communities and Local Government have produced a resource for mapping well-being across the UK, based on the ONS data (http://opendatacommunities.org/data).

As for measurement, the ONS is continuing to refine the well-being questions they are using. Importantly, when data is collected for future years, they will be able to report in changes over time, which will really bring this data to life. Which parts of the country and which population groups will see their well-being go down the most, and which will see their well-being go up?

**What you can do**

The organisations that form part of the Big Lottery Fund Well-Being and Changing Spaces Programmes have a head-start in getting to grips with well-being. Here are some of the ways the new data could be of use:

- **Identify areas of need**: Organisations with geographical reach can use the survey to identify target populations. According to the data, places like Thurrock, Bedford and Warwickshire have a greater need for well-being interventions than would be expected given ‘objective’ data on deprivation.
- **Highlight need to funders and for advocacy**: Where organisations are working in parts of the country or with population groups that have particularly low well-being, this information can be used to bolster funding bids, and to highlight the situation of particular groups.
- **Tailor benchmarks for comparison**: Organisations working in particular parts of the country or with particular population groups can take advantage of specific benchmarks with which to compare the levels of well-being of their beneficiaries, rather than just use the population average.
- **Learn from what works**: What is it that makes places like Dundee and the Isle of Anglesey have much higher well-being than expected? Are there lessons that can be learned and transferred to other parts of the country?
Other well-being news

- Last year, New Philanthropy Capital launched their *Well-being measure*, an online tool for service providers to use to measure the well-being of young people between 11 and 16 years old. The tool is being piloted by several organisations including Children in Need ([www.well-beingmeasure.com](http://www.well-beingmeasure.com)).
- **nef** Consulting have launched a new tool for measuring well-being amongst employees ([www.happinessatworksurvey.com](http://www.happinessatworksurvey.com)). The survey the tool uses builds upon **nef**’s dynamic model of well-being.
- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) held their 4th World Forum on the measurement of progress and well-being in New Delhi in October ([www.oecd.org/site/worldforumindia](http://www.oecd.org/site/worldforumindia)).
- The Carnegie UK Trust published a new report *Shifting the Dial: From well being measures to policy practice* in October, exploring examples of where well-being measures were being used in policy making around the world ([www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2012/shifting-the-dial--from-wellbeing-measures-to-poli](http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2012/shifting-the-dial--from-wellbeing-measures-to-poli)).
- In October, the Legatum Commission on Wellbeing Policy, chaired by Former Cabinet Secretary Lord Gus O'Donnell, was set up to explore how well-being research can have practical policy implications.
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Well-Being Economics has just appointed MP David Lammy as its new chair, to replace Jo Swinson MP (who has recently become Minister for Employment Relations and Consumer Affairs).
- The Guardian’s Breadline Britain reported a sharp drop in healthy eating across the UK between 2010 and 2012, particularly amongst poorer households. Fruit and vegetable consumption fell everywhere except in Scotland ([http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/nov/18/breadline-britain-nutritional-recession-austerity](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/nov/18/breadline-britain-nutritional-recession-austerity)).

Further information

For further information about any of the issues raised in this briefing, or for any general queries regarding the National Well-being Evaluation please contact Clare Cummings at CLES Consulting on 0161 236 7036 and clarecummings@cles.org.uk or Saamah Abdallah nef (the new economics foundation) on 020 7820 6300 and well-being@neweconomics.org

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ii [http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/)