

Harmonised Concepts and Questions for Social Data Sources  

---

Interim Harmonised Principle

Personal Well-being

## About this document

This document has been written in order to inform users about development of the ONS survey questions on personal well-being. The four questions that were introduced on the APS in April 2011 are experimental in nature and could be subject to revision going forward in light of further user engagement, further testing and development and international demands for harmonised questions. Long term plans are to have a set of questions that provide consistent estimates over time. In the shorter term this needs to be balanced with getting the best estimates possible, ensuring they meet policy needs and take account of the harmonisation work that is being undertaken around the world.

## This is Version 1.1 published in May 2015

This document was updated to Version 1.1 to correct minor formatting errors and to change the word 'Standard' to 'Principle'

## Previous versions:

### Version 1.0 published in January 2014.

Please note this version is an interim principle created to reflect the current desire to collect and use information on personal well-being. A fully ratified set of questions will be available in the longer term.

## Contact Information

If you would like further information on the personal well-being questions or have any questions, please contact:

Email: [personal.well-being@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:personal.well-being@ons.gsi.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01633 455674

Mail: Dawn Snape  
Personal Well-being  
Measuring National Well-being Programme  
Office for National Statistics  
Room 2.164  
Government Buildings  
Cardiff Road  
Newport  
South Wales  
NP10 8XG

For more information about Harmonisation or to join our mailing list, please visit our website at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/harmonisation/harmonisation-programme/index.html>

If you would like further information or have any questions, please contact:



Email: [harmonisation@ons.gov.uk](mailto:harmonisation@ons.gov.uk)



Telephone: 01329 444017



Mail: Harmonisation Team  
Office for National Statistics  
Room 1400  
Segensworth Road  
Titchfield  
Fareham  
PO15 5R

## Introduction

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) introduced questions on personal well-being on the Annual Population Survey (APS) in April 2011. The questions have remained unchanged on the APS since they were first introduced. All question testing that has been carried out on personal well-being questions has been done using a separate survey – the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) – to preserve consistency of measures on the APS.

One of the main benefits of collecting information on personal well-being is that it is based on people's views of their own individual well-being. In the past, assumptions were made about how objective conditions, such as people's health and income, might influence their individual well-being. Personal well-being measures, on the other hand, take account of what matters to people by allowing them to decide what is important when they respond to questions.

## Personal well-being (PWB) questions as they currently appear on the ONS Annual Population Survey:

### PERSONAL WELL-BEING

#### 68. Satis

UK

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'.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

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

Scale from 0 to 10

**Asked if: PersProx<sup>1</sup> = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+<sup>2</sup>**

#### 69. Worth

UK

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'*

Scale from 0 to 10

**Asked if: PersProx = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+**

#### 70. Happy

UK

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

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

Scale from 0 to 10

**Asked if: PersProx = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+**

## 71. Anxious

UK

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

Scale from 0 to 10

**Asked if: PersProx = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+**

1. PersProx = IN PERSON: responses should be answered in person by the respondent. Proxy responses (on behalf of someone else in the household) will not be accepted
2. DVAge = 16+ = Questions asked to those aged 16 and over only

### Question Placement

It is recommended that the four personal well-being questions are placed after the key demographic questions in line with the way the questions are administered on the APS. The positioning of the four questions was decided following ONS qualitative work and extensive discussions within ONS.

Positioning the four questions after the key demographics allows rapport to be developed between the interviewer and the respondent, as well as ensuring the main survey questions do not impact on response to the personal well-being questions. For further details on question placement, please refer to the Personal Well-being Survey User Guide.

### Survey Modes

To date, ONS have tested the four personal well-being questions using a range of modes of administration, including self-completion (CAPI) and interviewer-led face to face and telephone survey methods.

The Annual Population Survey is mixed mode and data is collected either by telephone interview or face-to-face in the respondent's home. Different collection modes can affect responses and personal well-being estimates are no exception. For example in the Annual Population Survey it appears that on average people responding face-to-face with an interviewer in their home gave lower ratings to those responding via the telephone.

This issue is particularly important for the APS as all interviews in Scotland north of the Caledonian Canal are administered by telephone only, rather than through a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews, as is the case in other areas of the UK. Please see the latest statistical bulletin 'Personal Well-being Across the UK, 2012/13' for the most recent data for different survey modes on the APS.

A regression analysis which looked at the variation in well-being outcomes by specific characteristics and circumstances of individuals whilst holding other characteristics equal was also carried out in spring 2013. The findings of this analysis show that people interviewed face to face give lower well-being ratings on average than people interviewed by telephone. However, the size effects are small. Further details on this regression analysis are available in the report 'Measuring National Well-being - What matters most to Personal Well-being?'

Previous research has found that on average lower scores to well-being questions are received if the interview is carried out via self-completion rather than administered by an interviewer, particularly for female respondents (Pudney 2010). Testing on the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) has shown that there was little difference in the mean ratings between the interviewer led and self-completion interviews. Further details on this testing are available in the report 'Initial Investigation into Subjective Well-being from the Opinions Survey'

The following working paper produced for the National Statistician's Technical Advisory Group on Measuring National Well-being also provides further evidence on the impact of responses under different interview conditions: Ralph, K., Palmer, K. and Olney, J. (2011), '[Subjective well-being: a qualitative investigation of subjective well-being questions](#)' (344.6 Kb Pdf), Working Paper for the Technical Advisory Group on 29 March 2012.

#### References:

- I. Pudney S (2010) ' An experimental analysis of the impact of survey design on measures and models of subjective wellbeing' ISER Working Paper Series: 2010-20 Institute for Social and Economic Research. <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/iser/2010-20>

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

The Personal Well-being Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) which will be updated as required can be found in the link below:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/social-and-welfare-methodology/subjective-wellbeing-survey-user-guide/subjective-well-being-frequently-asked-questions--faq-s-.html>

### **Surveys Using the Four ONS Personal Well-being Questions**

An overview of surveys in the UK that use the four ONS personal well-being questions as of September 2013, can be found in the link below:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/social-and-welfare-methodology/subjective-wellbeing-survey-user-guide/index.html>

### **Personal Well-being Survey User Guide**

A download of the 'Personal Well-being User Guide: 2012/13 Dataset' and previous versions of the user guide for use with different datasets can be found in the link below:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/social-and-welfare-methodology/subjective-wellbeing-survey-user-guide/index.html>

### **Are the Current Four Personal Well-being Questions Likely to Change?**

The four questions that were introduced on the APS in April 2011 are experimental in nature and could be subject to revision going forward in light of further user engagement, further testing and development and international demands for harmonised questions. Long term plans are to have a set of questions that provide consistent estimates over time. In the shorter term this needs to be balanced with getting the best estimates possible, ensuring they meet policy needs and take account of the harmonisation work that is being undertaken around the world.

The questions have remained unchanged on the APS since they were first introduced and all question testing has been carried out using the OPN survey to preserve consistency of measures on the APS.

### **Personal Well-being Publications**

'Personal Well-being Across the UK, 2012/13' (data from 2012/13 dataset)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/personal-well-being-across-the-uk--2012-13/index.html>

'Personal Well-being in the UK, 2012/13' (data from 2012/13 dataset)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/personal-well-being-in-the-uk--2012-13/index.html>

'What matters most to Personal Well-being?' (regression analysis, 2011/12 dataset)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/what-matters-most-to-personal-well-being-in-the-uk-/index.html>

'Differences in Well-being by Ethnicity'

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-subjective-wellbeing-in-the-uk/differences-in-well-being-by-ethnicity/index.html>

'First Annual ONS Experimental Subjective Well-being Results' (data from 2011/12 dataset)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-subjective-wellbeing-in-the-uk/first-annual-ons-experimental-subjective-well-being-results/index.html>

'Analysis of Experimental Subjective Well-being Data from the Annual Population Survey, April to September 2011' (data from 2011/12 dataset - 1st 6 months)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-subjective-wellbeing-in-the-uk/analysis-of-experimental-subjective-well-being-data-from-the-annual-population-survey--april---september-2011/index.html>

'Initial Investigation into Subjective Well-being from the Opinions Survey'

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-subjective-wellbeing-in-the-uk/investigation-of-subjective-well-being-data-from-the-ons-opinions-survey/index.html>

### **Quality and Methodology information**

A download of the information paper covering quality and methodology information for the 'First Annual ONS Experimental Subjective Well-being Results' can be found in the link below

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/quality-information/people-and-places/index.html>