

Measuring National Well-being - Review of domains and measures, 2013

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Abstract

This article is published as part of the ONS Measuring National Well-being Programme. The programme aims to produce accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation - how the UK as a whole is doing. It outlines the latest review of domains and measures of national well-being and is part of the ongoing refinement of measures.

Introduction

The aim of the MNW programme is to, 'develop and publish an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics which help people to monitor national well-being'. Critical to achieving this aim is the development of an agreed set of domains and measures. The initial list of domains and measures was developed based on responses to the National Debate, which took place between November 2010 and April 2011; existing research and international initiatives.

The measures were the subject of a public consultation which ran between October 2011 and January 2012. A summary and discussion of responses received was published in July 2012 in the paper, 'Measuring National Well-being: Report on consultation responses on proposed domains and measures'¹. No significant changes were made to the set of measures at that time.

This review of domains and measures honours a commitment made in November 2012 in 'Measuring National Well-being: Life in the UK, 2012'² that ONS would 'review and further refine domains and measures of well-being and the criteria used to select them'. Feedback is invited on the changes made and a further refined set will be published in the Autumn. Please send feedback to: nationalwell-being@ons.gsi.gov.uk (for more information see '[Next steps](#)')

The review has largely focused on revisiting the public consultation which ran between October 2011 and January 2012 as well as any feedback received since, for example, emails received by the Programme. ONS also took into account the large proportion of respondents who answered 'no' to the question asked in each domain, 'should any of the measures in this domain be removed' (around 80% to 90%). Informal discussions have also been held with relevant Government departments to ensure any proposed changes are in keeping with policy priorities.

The outcome of the review of measures is described domain by domain on the following pages. An interactive 'wheel of measures' and an expanded set of interactive graphs are available showing the latest data for each domain². Data including time series for each measure (where available) are also provided in the data section of this publication.

Notes

1. [Report on consultation responses on proposed domains and measures \(524.4 Kb Pdf\)](#)
2. [National Well-being](#)

Key points

- Five measures have been added to reflect: arts and culture, participation in sport, access to services, satisfaction with accommodation and household recycling.
- Three measures have been removed namely satisfaction with leisure time, trust in parliament and air pollutants PM₁₀.
- The 'Individual well-being' domain has been renamed 'Personal well-being'
- The need for measures to be 'available for the UK' is classified as 'aspirational', to prevent important components of well-being being excluded on the basis of data availability.

Review of criteria

A proposal was made in the July 2012 report¹ to review and where appropriate, refresh the criteria used to select measures of national well-being.

The existing criteria are available in the National Statistician's report² on the findings from the national debate. Most of the criteria have been retained. As part of the review, criteria have been classified as 'aspirational' or 'essential'.

Essential

Measures of national well-being must be:

- Statistically robust.
- Have a time series and likely to be available in the future.
- Based on broad support (New) and be policy relevant.
- Nationally representative (New).
- Timely (New).

Aspirational

Where possible, measures of national well-being should be:

- Available for the UK.

- Capable of disaggregation for geographical areas and specific sub groups, for example, age, sex, socio-economic status, ethnicity, household type or other population group.
- Internationally comparable.

The most notable change compared with the original criteria is classifying 'available for the UK' as aspirational. The original need to ensure that measures reflect the UK meant that important contributors to well-being, for example, measures relating to arts and culture were excluded as there is no single UK measure. Classing the UK criterion as aspirational provides a more balanced approach. Every effort will still be made to include UK measures. Where this is not possible, flexibility exists to ensure that measures widely considered important for inclusion in the set of measures of national well-being can still be adopted.

Where data are not available for the UK within a single source, a 'nationally representative' data set should be chosen for the headline measure. This has been added to the 'essential criteria' to ensure that measures selected have sufficient coverage of the population to be used as a proxy for the UK. In most if not all cases, this is likely to be an England data set and equivalent data from the devolved administrations will be sign posted where available.

Disaggregation of data to sub-groups has also been defined as 'aspirational'. This again reflects a general lack of data to meet this need, rather than a shift in importance. The MNW programme remains committed to exploring well-being data for both sub-groups and sub-UK geographies and will continue work in this area. International comparability has been classed as aspirational to reflect the need to balance domestic priorities with international comparability when considering new measures.

In the essential criteria list, the 'policy relevant' criteria has been expanded to reflect the programme's ongoing engagement with a broad range of stakeholders in order to determine 'what matters'. In order to meet the Programme aim for the measures to be 'accepted', there needs to be wide support for the measures chosen so they report on a broadly shared understanding of well-being - including those which are policy relevant.

A final addition to the 'essential' criteria is that data should be 'timely'. This means that data should be collected and reported regularly to ensure measures are providing up-to-date information. The frequency for data updates should be appropriate to the measure concerned.

Original criteria relating to measures being a 'small set' and 'covering scope of domain without overlapping' have been removed. The need to have a manageable and non-overlapping set of measures remains important, but these are ambitions for the overall set rather than criteria which should be applied to individual measures.

Notes

1. [Report on consultation responses on proposed domains and measures \(524.4 Kb Pdf\)](#)
2. [Measuring what matters: National Statistician's reflections on the national debate on measuring National Well-being \(1.16 Mb Pdf\)](#)

Review of domains

The consultation showed that there was general support for all the domain names. Some concern was raised over the ease with which 'Governance' could be understood. Consideration was given to renaming this domain, 'democratic engagement' to more clearly describe the measures within it. However, following international interest in developing 'Governance' as a fourth pillar of well-being, alongside society, the economy and the environment, the name 'Governance' will be retained and revisited at a later date when the international picture is clearer.

Concern has also been raised at the use of 'individual well-being' as a domain name. Feedback was received during the consultation and in more recent focus groups which looked at what 'subjective well-being' meant to people and how the data should be presented. Candidates in the focus groups were presented with alternative names for subjective well-being, including 'individual well-being' and 'personal well-being'. 'Personal well-being' was chosen as being the most easily understood. For this reason, the individual well-being domain has been renamed 'personal well-being'.

Review of measures

The review of measures has largely focused on revisiting the public consultation which ran between October 2011 and January 2012 as well as any feedback received since, for example, emails received by the Programme. Informal discussions have also been held with relevant Government departments to ensure any proposed changes are in keeping with policy priorities.

Personal well-being

Summary

- No changes have been made to measures in this domain.
- ONS have committed to the inclusion of a measure of mental well-being from the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWbS). Work is underway to include this measure in the Autumn 2013 release.

Overview

At the time of consultation, the individual well-being domain comprised only one measure – life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was used as a placeholder for the four measures shown in Table 1 which were added following the release of the first annual dataset of subjective well-being data in July 2012. The inclusion of these additional measures also reflected consultation responses which suggested more measures be included within the domain.

A measure of mental well-being was also proposed during the consultation, either instead of or as well as the 'percentage with some evidence of probable psychological disturbance or mental ill health' measure which is taken from the 12 item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Following further discussion with the programme's Technical Advisory Group, it was agreed that a measure of mental well-being based on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWbS) should be added to the personal well-being domain in order to provide a more holistic view of subjective well-being. This would be in addition to the GHQ-12 measure in the health domain. Discussions on this and other aspects of the WEMWbS measure are ongoing, with the aim to include a suitable measure in the next update of domains and measures scheduled for Autumn 2013.

Table 1: Personal well-being measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Percentage with medium/high rating of satisfaction with their lives overall	UK	Annual Population Survey, ONS	No change
Percentage with medium/high rating of how worthwhile the things they do are	UK	Annual Population Survey, ONS	No change
Percentage who rated their happiness yesterday as medium/high	UK	Annual Population Survey, ONS	No change
Percentage who rated how anxious they were yesterday as medium/low	UK	Annual Population Survey, ONS	No change

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Our relationships

Summary

- The 'percentage who said they had someone they could really count on in a crisis' has been replaced with an alternative measure of social support from the Understanding Society, UK Household Longitudinal survey.
- The source for 'percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their social life' has been changed to the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS).

Overview

The main change in this domain is the replacement of the measure 'percentage who said they had someone they could really count on in a crisis', which provides an indication of social support network. This original question has not been carried forward from the original source, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), to the Understanding Society UK Household Longitudinal survey (UKHLS)¹. Therefore the measure has been replaced by, 'the percentage of people that have a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem'- see Table 2. The measure combines three questions asked on Understanding Society, the UKHLS. In the same way, the question relating to the 'percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their social life' was not carried forward from the BHPS to the Understanding Society UKHLS. The EQLS is proposed as a suitable alternative source.

Responses to the consultation included proposals for measures on religion/belief and on working relationships. Measures on religion and belief are not included here for reasons reported previously 2. A measure of satisfaction with work colleagues or workplace relationships was considered but it was decided that as not everyone in the UK has a job, it should not be included as a headline measure.

Table 2: Our relationships measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Average rating of satisfaction with family life	UK	European Quality of Life Survey, Eurofound	No change
Average rating of satisfaction with social life	UK	European Quality of Life Survey, Eurofound	Replacement - source changed
Percentage of people that have a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	Replacement

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Notes

1. For more information about the UKHLS see [Understanding Society](#)
2. [Report on consultation responses on proposed domains and measures \(524.4 Kb Pdf\)](#)

Health

Summary

- No changes have been made to measures within this domain.

Overview

The consultation proposed measures on lifestyles (e.g. physical fitness, outdoor activities and sport). The proposals echoed comments made in relation to the '[What we do](#)' domain, where a sports participation measure has now been added.

Table 3: Health measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Healthy life expectancy at birth by sex	UK	ONS	No change
Percentage who reported a long term illness and a disability	UK	Labour Force Survey, ONS	No change
Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their health	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change
Percentage with some evidence indicating probable psychological disturbance or mental ill health	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change

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What we do**Summary**

- The measure, 'Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their use of leisure time' has been removed.
- Two new measures have been added to reflect arts and culture; and sport.

Overview

Four of the existing measures in this domain have been retained (see Table 4). The measure, 'Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their use of leisure time' has been removed as this question is not asked on the Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), which replaces the previous source, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). It is also considered to overlap with the 'satisfaction with amount of leisure time' measure.

The most commonly requested additions during the consultation were measures to reflect arts, culture and sport. ONS had previously excluded these measures due to lack of UK data for these topics. However, ONS have been convinced by the weight of evidence in favour of including measures to reflect these areas. In addition, as part of this review, the criteria for selecting measures has been amended to ensure that whilst measures for the UK are preferable, measures which are 'nationally representative' will be accepted, with UK coverage being aspirational.

Consideration was given as to whether the measure should separate arts and culture or combine them and whether a combined measure would prove too broad a measure to be meaningful. Another consideration was whether the measure should cover engagement or participation. The final proposal of the 'percentage of people who have engaged with, or participated in, arts or cultural activity at least three times in the last year' taken from the Taking Part Survey was based on advice from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). The measure excludes 'reading for pleasure' as this was thought to have covered most people. Measures of arts and culture used by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are signposted in the data section of this publication.

It was also acknowledged that the measures of well-being were incomplete without some measure of sports participation. The proposed measure is the percentage of respondents who had done 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity sport at least once a week in the last four weeks of being interviewed (note that recreational walking and cycling is excluded). The measure selected was based upon the advice of the DCMS and Sport England. The Taking Part Survey (DCMS) was considered as a source but it was decided to use the Active People Survey (Sport England) as this has a larger sample size. Measures of sport used by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are signposted in the data spreadsheet.

Table 4: What we do measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Unemployment rate	UK	Labour Force Survey, ONS	No change
Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their job	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change
Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their amount of leisure time	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change
Percentage who volunteered more than once a year	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change
Percentage of people who have engaged with, or participated in, arts or cultural activity at least 3 times in the last year	England ¹	Taking Part Survey, Department for Culture, Media and Sport	New
Adult participation in 30 minutes of moderate intensity sport ²	England ¹	Active People Survey, Sport England	New
Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their use of leisure time	UK	British Household Panel Survey	Removed

Table notes:

1. Similar devolved administration data available for this measure - see data section of this publication.
2. At least four sessions in the previous 28 days.

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Where we live

Summary

- The measure, 'percentage that feel very or fairly safe walking alone after dark' (England and Wales) has been amended to highlight data for men and women, as opposed to an overall total.
- 'Percentage of those who were very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation' has been added to reflect the need for a housing measure in the 'Where we live' domain.
- A measure of access to key services has been added to reflect consultation responses.

Overview

Feedback was received during the consultation on the 'percentage who felt very or fairly safe walking alone after dark'. Comments related to the inclusion only of the measure relating to 'after dark'; the potential influence the media, as opposed to levels of crime itself, in determining people's answers; and of the difference between data for men and women which was masked by providing an overall total. Alternative measures of perception of crime were explored, including what people felt about levels of crime nationally and in their local area. However, it was felt that a measure which related to personal behaviour and crime was important to include. The existing measure has therefore been retained with the differences between men and women more clearly highlighted (see Table 5).

The measure 'Percentage of those who were very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation' has been added to reflect the need for a housing measure in the 'Where we live' domain. The measure was selected following a review of responses to the consultation, available data and discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Data for groups such as private renters and owner occupiers are provided in the underlying data spreadsheet, providing scope for further analysis. Further analysis might include: understanding the differences between groups and changes over time by looking at the root causes for differing levels of satisfaction, spanning issues of affordability, homelessness, overcrowding, and decent homes.

An accessibility measure has also been added. Increasing car use has provided greater opportunity for people to travel and access the services they require. However 1 in 4 households do not have access to a car. These people rely on other forms of transport such as public transport, walking, lifts from friends etc. The reliance on such 'networks', which may be limited, can lead to social exclusion and may affect a person's sense of well-being.

Table 5: Where we live measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Crimes against the person (per 1,000 adults)	England and Wales ¹	Crime Survey for England and Wales, ONS	No change
Percentage of men and women that feel very or fairly safe walking alone after dark	England and Wales	Crime Survey for England and Wales, ONS	Changed from all persons to men and women
Percentage who accessed the natural environment at least once a week in the last 12 months	England ¹	Natural England	No change
Percentage who agreed or agreed strongly that they felt they belonged to their neighbourhood	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change
Households with good transport access to key services or work ²	England ³	Accessibility Statistics, Department for Transport	New
Percentage of those who were very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation	England ³	English Housing Survey, full household sample, Department for Communities and Local Government	New

Table notes:

1. Similar devolved administration data available for this measure - see data section of this publication.
2. This indicator relates the car ownership rate to the average public transport time to seven key services. The indicator is indexed (as a score of 100) to the England average for 2010.
3. No similar data for other devolved administrations were found.

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Personal finance**Summary**

- No changes have been made to measures within this domain

Table 6: Personal finance measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Percentage of individuals living in households with less than 60 per cent of median income after housing costs	UK	The Family Resources Survey, Department for Work and Pensions	No change
Median wealth per household, including pension wealth	Great Britain	Wealth and Assets Survey, ONS	No change
Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with the income of their household	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change
Percentage who report finding it quite or very difficult to get by financially	UK	Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study	No change

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Education and skills**Summary**

- No changes have been made to measures within this domain.

Overview

The importance of continued and life-long learning was highlighted in the consultation for its role in enhancing personal development and employability which in turn may affect a person's well-being. Further research to find a single viable measure that would encapsulate all aspects of life-long learning was carried out. ONS will continue to investigate potential measures for inclusion in future domain analyses.

Table 7: Education and skills measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Human capital - the value of individuals' skills, knowledge and competences in the labour market	UK	ONS	No change
Percentage with five or more GCSE grades A* – C (including English and Mathematics)	UK	Department for Education; Welsh Government; Scottish Government; Northern Ireland Department of Education	No change
Percentage of UK residents aged 16–64 with no qualifications	UK	Labour Force Survey, ONS	No change

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The economy**Summary**

- No changes have been made to measures within this domain.

Table 8: The economy measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Real household actual income per head	UK	National Accounts, ONS	No change
Real net national income per head	UK	National Accounts, ONS	No change
UK public sector net debt as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product	UK	National Accounts, ONS	No change
Inflation rate (as measured by the CPI)	UK	ONS	No change

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Governance**Summary**

- The measure 'percentage of those who have trust in national Parliament' has been removed as it was considered similar to the measure 'Percentage of those who have trust in national Government'.

Table 9: Governance measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Percentage of registered voters who voted	UK	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance	No change
Percentage of those who have trust in national Government	UK	Eurobarometer	No change
Percentage of those who have trust in national Parliament	UK	Eurobarometer	Removed

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The natural environment**Summary**

- The measure, 'Air pollutants - PM₁₀' has been removed.
- A measure of household recycling has been added.

Overview

Recycling was the most commonly cited proposed addition to the Natural Environment domain during the consultation. After discussions with Defra, ONS decided that the measure - 'percentage of household waste that is recycled' would be added to this domain. It is a readily available well known indicator giving an indication of the priority households are now giving to protecting the natural environment. It also shows how we are making best use of the natural resources and minimising the use of land fill sites. Recycled waste also includes waste that is composted or reused. As the measure is England only, similar data for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are provided in the data section of this publication.

The measure of air pollutant PM₁₀ has been removed as it is not widely understood and air emissions are already covered in the measure to be retained on green house gas (GHG) emissions. This measure shows the contribution the UK is making in reducing world GHG emissions. Global green house gas emissions are a major concern to the population with its links to climate change.

This is linked to the measure of energy consumed from renewable sources which has also been retained.

Concerns were raised over the usefulness of 'extent of protected areas' measure and whether a measure which better reflects how environmental quality is changing would be better. A more suitable approach may be to consider a measure of land use and discussions will continue as to whether there is an appropriate measure.

Finally, ONS were encouraged to consider the weather and natural disasters and the effect they had on people's well-being. Currently there are no suitable measures for this area or means of assessing progress but this will be kept under review.

Table 10: The natural environment measures

Measures	Geography	Source	Revision summary
Total green house gas emissions	UK	Department of Energy and Climate Change	No change
The extent of protected areas in the UK	UK	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	No change
Energy consumed within the UK from renewable sources	UK	ONS	No change
Percentage of household waste that is recycled (including composted and reused)	England ¹	The Department for Communities and Local Government	New
Air pollutants - PM ₁₀	UK	ONS	Removed

Table notes:

1. Similar devolved administration data available for this measure - see data section of this publication.

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Next steps

ONS seek and welcome feedback about the changes outlined in this article, in particular:

- Changes made to the criteria used to select the measures.
- The change in domain name from 'individual well-being' to 'personal well-being'.
- The measures which have been added.
- The measures which have been removed.
- Any suggestions for further variants on the measures which could be more appropriate.

ONS will consider feedback received and the measures will be further refined and republished in Autumn 2013.

Please send feedback to the following email or postal address:

Email: nationalwell-being@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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About the ONS Measuring National Well-being Programme

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This article is published as part of the ONS Measuring National Well-being Programme.

The programme aims to produce accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation - how the UK as a whole is doing.

Measuring National Well-being is about looking at 'GDP and beyond'. It includes headline indicators in areas such as health, relationships, job satisfaction, economic security, education, environmental conditions and measures of 'subjective well-being' (individuals' assessment of their own well-being).

Find out more on the [Measuring National Well-being](#) website pages.

Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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