

Statistical bulletin

# Personal well-being in the UK: July 2017 to June 2018

Estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety at the UK and country level.



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To be announced

## Notice

### 4 February 2019

This release has now been merged and comes under the heading of [Personal and economic well-being in the UK](#).

To increase the value of our work to decision-makers and in keeping with our aspiration to "[leave no one behind](#)", this new combined release aims to provide a fuller picture of well-being in the UK by looking at people's experiences from different perspectives, to better understand who is struggling and who is thriving.

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# 1 . Main points

Between the years ending June 2017 and June 2018:

- The average life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety ratings showed no overall change in the UK; however, fewer people reported low happiness ratings and more people reported very low anxiety ratings.
- The proportion of people reporting very low anxiety ratings in England increased; this could be driving the improvement seen in the UK for those reporting very low levels of anxiety.
- Compared with the UK, a larger proportion of people in Wales reported “poor” personal well-being ratings across all measures.
- Compared with both the UK and the other countries, people in Northern Ireland continued to report better average ratings across all personal well-being measures.
- There were no overall changes in Scotland across the measures of personal well-being.

Between the years ending June 2012 and June 2018, for all measures of personal well-being in the UK:

- The proportion of people reporting “poor” ratings decreased.
- The proportion of those reporting “very good” ratings increased.
- “Very good” ratings rose faster than “poor” ratings”, suggesting that the improvement for those people struggling the most has been slower over time.

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

### Measuring National Well-being programme

The four personal well-being questions are included as measures for the wider Measuring National Well-being (MNW) programme. This programme began in November 2010 with the aim of developing and publishing an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics, which help people understand and monitor well-being. The statistics in this bulletin are displayed on our [well-being dashboard](#), which reports how the UK is doing for the different areas of life that people in the UK said matter most to their well-being.

Please see the [Quality and methodology](#) section for more information.

### What factors contribute to personal well-being in the different UK countries?

Research shows that many factors influence our quality of life and well-being. Previous analysis published in the article, [What matters most to personal well-being?](#), highlighted that, at national level, how people view their health is the most important factor related to personal well-being, followed by employment status and relationship status.

Also, a wide range of local conditions can affect people's well-being. In [our previous publication](#), we illustrated how using a well-being lens may help us look differently at local economic growth strategies and encourage decision-makers to consider what good policies for well-being might look like in their area. We hope to have provided a more holistic picture of how different aspects of each local area, both in terms of people and place, may combine to produce higher or lower well-being among local residents.

This bulletin changes the focus to consider some factors that may influence how people rate their well-being in the different UK countries. We have looked to provide some context to the personal well-being ratings in the UK in [Section 7](#). It should be noted that the personal well-being estimates included in this release are based on the most recent available data (July 2017 to June 2018), while the data for the context indicators are often from different sources with varying timeliness. However, the indicators chosen include data recent enough to provide potential links to the latest personal well-being scores across the UK. It is also important to note that we looked at indicators at a national level that may not reflect differences at a more local level for each country of the UK.

## Your feedback and our next publications

In February 2018, we launched a survey to gather user feedback about our personal well-being outputs. [A summary report outlining the main findings](#) was published in September 2018. If you would like to provide any feedback on this bulletin or any opinions for our work going forward, please contact us at [qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk](mailto:qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk) or complete this ongoing [feedback survey](#).

## 3 . Average ratings of personal well-being show no change from the previous year

The average (mean) ratings across the four measures of personal well-being in the year ending June 2018 were:

- 7.7 out of 10 for life satisfaction
- 7.9 out of 10 for feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile
- 7.5 out of 10 for happiness yesterday
- 2.9 out of 10 for anxiety yesterday

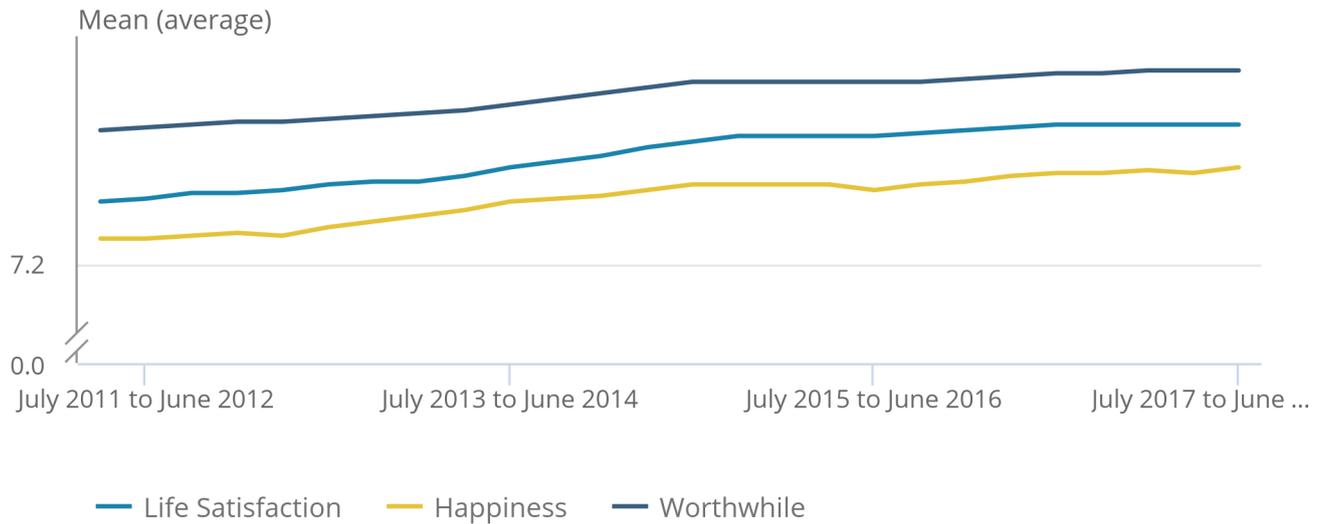
Comparing the years ending June 2017 and June 2018, there were no significant changes for any of the measures of personal well-being in the UK.

**Figure 1a: Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending June 2018**

UK

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UK



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

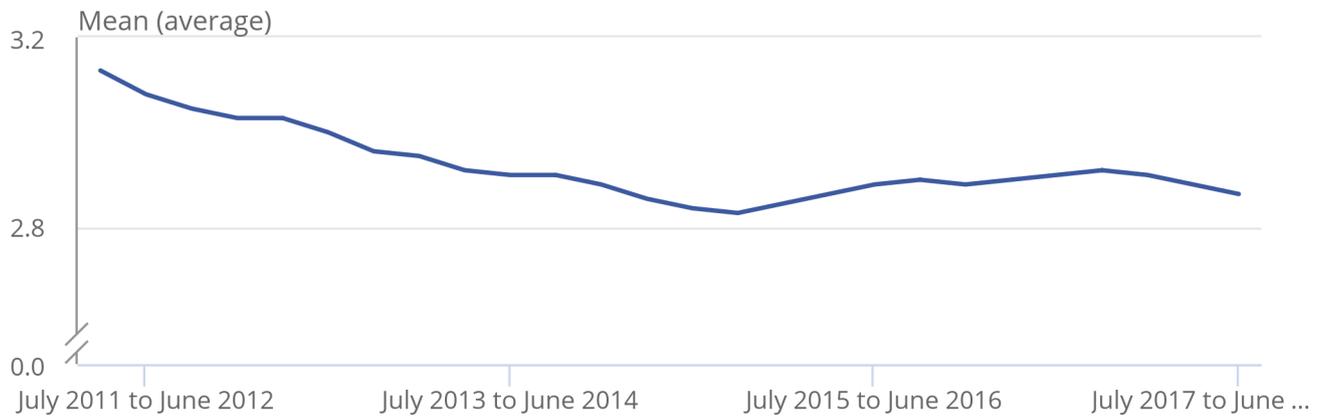
1. Chart axis does not start at 0.

Figure 1b: Average anxiety ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending June 2018

UK

Figure 1b: Average anxiety ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending June 2018

UK



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Chart axis does not start at 0.

## 4 . Fewer people report low happiness ratings, while more people report very low anxiety ratings in the UK

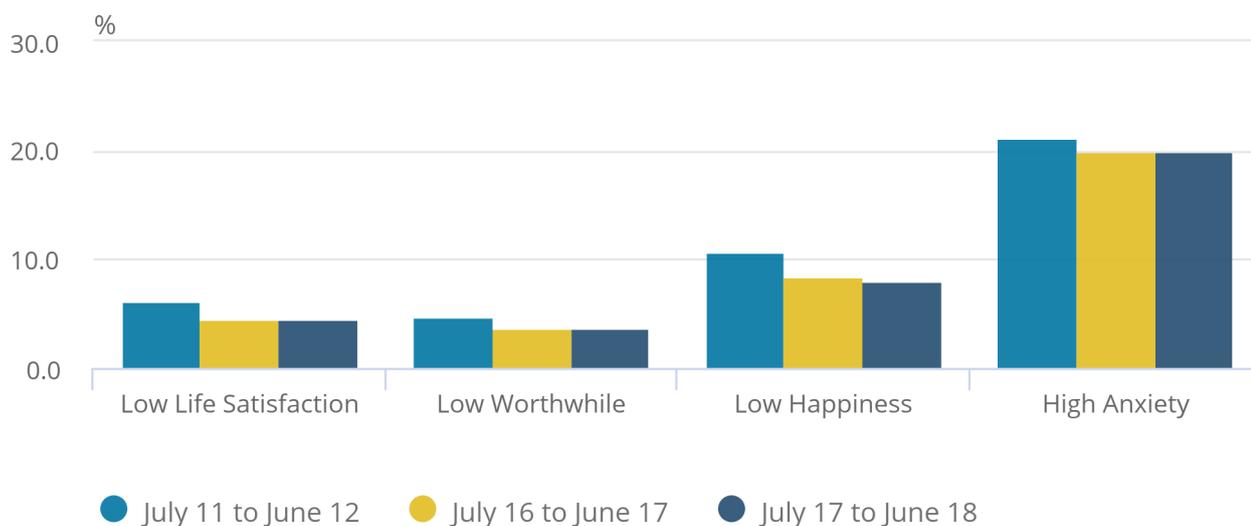
In addition to looking at average ratings, potential inequalities in personal well-being have also been monitored by comparing those rating each aspect of their well-being at a very high or very low level within the UK.

Between the years ending June 2017 and 2018, the proportion of respondents in the UK who reported low levels of happiness decreased from 8.48% to 8.08%, as shown in Figure 2a. Also, the proportion of people who reported very low ratings of anxiety increased from 40.09% to 40.98% in the UK over the same period (Figure 2b). This could be driven by England where there was also an increase for those reporting very low anxiety scores.

In relation to the change over the last six years, the proportion of people reporting “poor” well-being (that is, low levels for life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, and high anxiety) decreased for all measures (Figure 2a). Also, the proportion of those reporting “very good” well-being (that is, very high levels for life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, and very low anxiety) increased for all measures since the year ending July 2012 (Figure 2b). However, the increases at the positive end of the scale are larger than the decreases at the negative end, suggesting that the improvement for those people struggling the most has been slower over time.

**Figure 2a: Proportion of people reporting "poor" ratings of personal well-being across the UK, years ending June 2012, June 2017 and June 2018**

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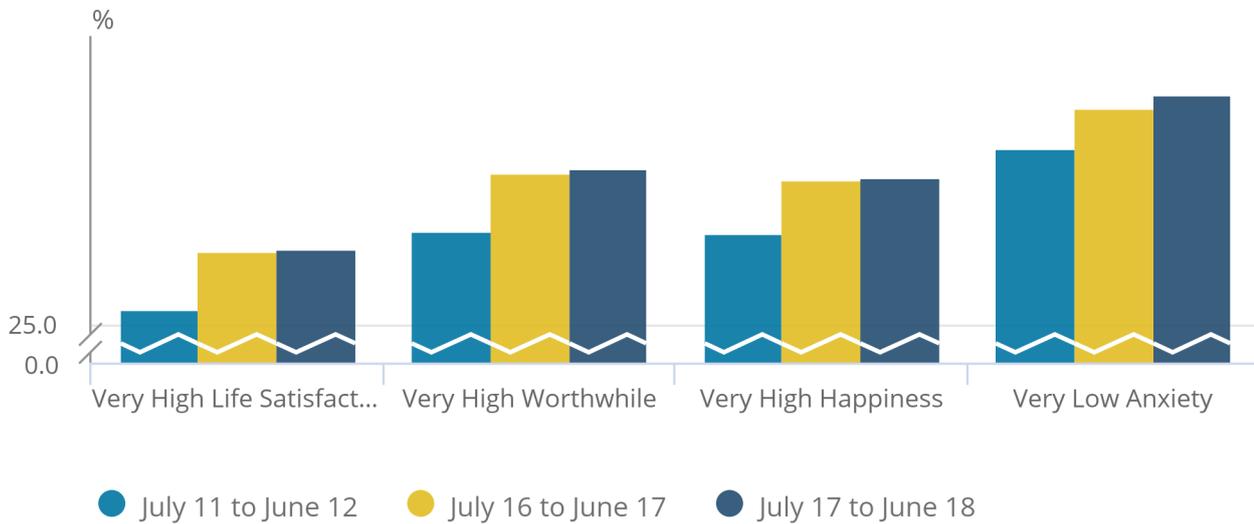
Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Statistically significant differences have been determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.
2. “Poor” well-being refers to those providing life satisfaction, worthwhile, and happiness ratings of 0 to 4 on an 11-point scale, and anxiety ratings of 6 to 10.

**Figure 2b: Proportion of people reporting "very good" ratings of personal well-being in the UK, years ending June 2012, June 2017 and June 2018**

Figure 2b: Proportion of people reporting "very good" ratings of personal well-being in the UK, years ending June 2012, June 2017 and June 2018



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Chart axis does not start at 0.
2. Statistically significant differences have been determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.
3. 'Very good' well-being refers to those providing a rating of 0-1 for anxiety and 9-10 for happiness, life satisfaction and worthwhile.

## 5 . How do people rate their personal well-being in the different countries of the UK?

Between the years ending June 2017 and June 2018, there were no significant changes for the average ratings of the four measures of personal well-being across the countries of the UK. This is a similar pattern to what we have seen for the UK overall.

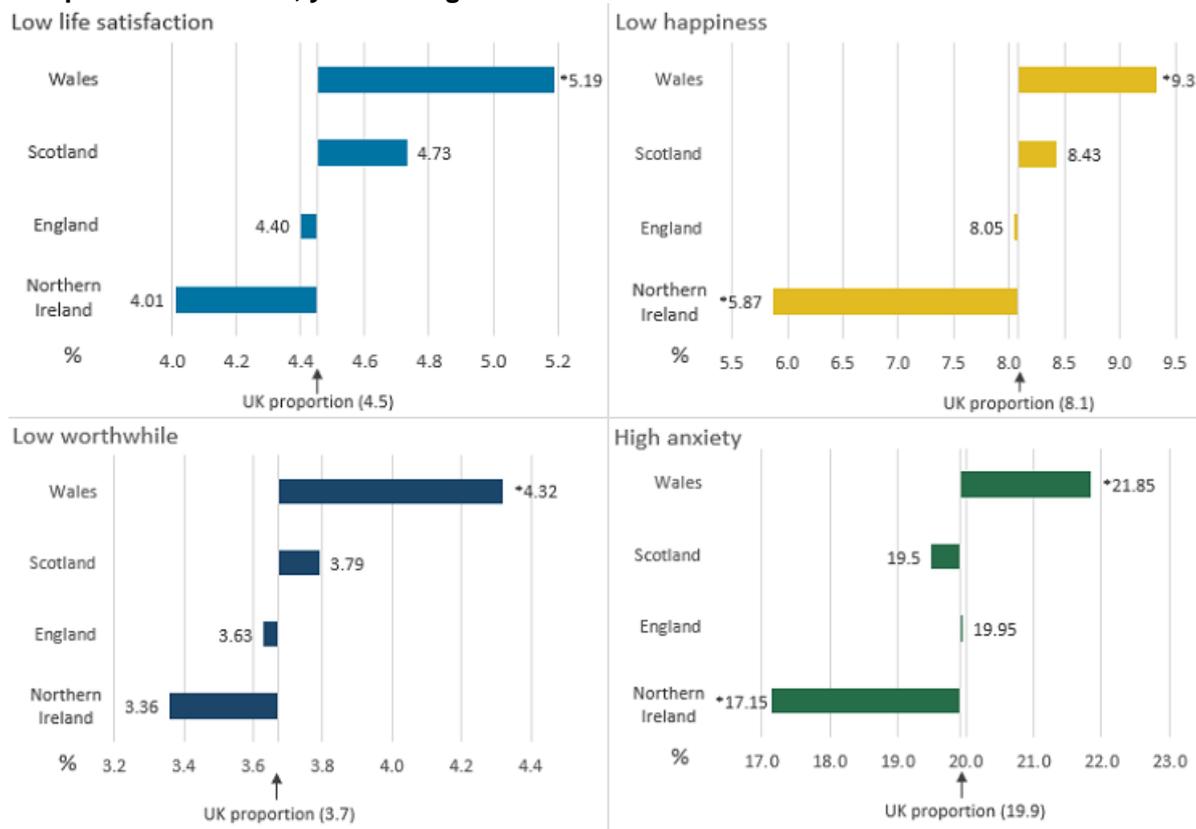
Northern Ireland, however, continued to report the highest average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, and the lowest anxiety ratings, when compared with the UK and the other constituent countries of the UK.

In the year ending June 2018, a larger proportion of people in Wales reported low scores (0 to 4 on an 11-point scale) for all three positive measures of personal well-being compared with the UK. Wales also had more people reporting high anxiety (6 to 10 on an 11-point scale), compared with the UK (Figure 3a). However, this is not a consistent trend over time; between the years ending June 2012 and June 2018, this is the first time that Wales reported a larger proportion of people reporting “poor” well-being ratings for all three positive measures of personal well-being, and a larger proportion reporting high anxiety.

The opposite was true for Northern Ireland, where a larger proportion of people reported very high ratings for the three positive measures of personal well-being compared with the UK, as shown in Figure 3b. This is a consistent trend since the year ending June 2013. In the year ending June 2018, a larger proportion of people in Northern Ireland also reported very low levels of anxiety when compared with the average for the UK.

In the year ending June 2018, both England and Scotland generally presented proportions closer to the UK average for both “poor” and “very good” ratings of personal well-being (Figures 3a and 3b).

**Figure 3a: Proportion of people reporting "poor" personal well-being ratings for countries of the UK compared with the UK, year ending June 2018**

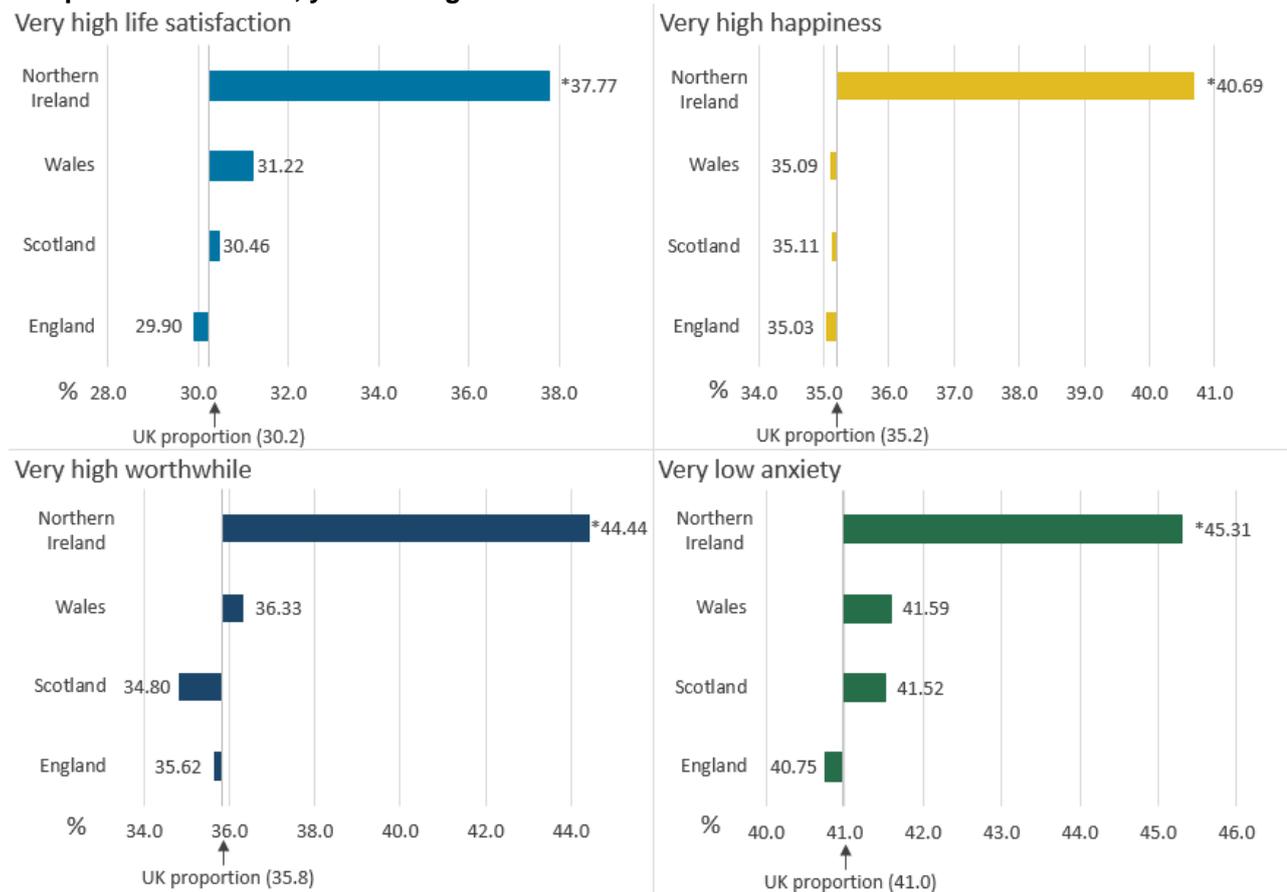


Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Estimates that are significantly different to the UK proportion are denoted with an asterisk (\*).
2. Statistically significant differences have been determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.
3. 'Poor' well-being refers to those providing life satisfaction, worthwhile, and happiness ratings of 0 to 4 on an 11-point scale, and anxiety ratings of 6-10.

**Figure 3b: Proportion of people reporting "very good" personal well-being ratings for countries of the UK compared with the UK, year ending June 2018**



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Estimates that are significantly different to the UK proportion are denoted with an asterisk (\*).
2. Statistically significant differences have been determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.
3. 'Very good' well-being refers to those providing a rating of 0-1 for anxiety and 9-10 for happiness, life satisfaction and worthwhile.

## 6 . What may influence these results?

For the latest reporting period, there was no overall change for any of the measures of personal well-being and, compared with previous years, it seems that the rate of change is beginning to level off.

Considering the negative end of the scale for personal well-being, we have seen that the proportion of respondents in the UK who reported low levels of happiness decreased, and the proportion reporting very low ratings of anxiety increased. These positive changes across the UK may be influenced by the improvement of certain economic indicators such as the unemployment rate. [Labour market figures](#) covering the period April to June 2018 showed that the unemployment rate was at its lowest level since December 1974 to February 1975, at 4%. Also, average weekly earnings for employees in Great Britain in nominal terms (that is, not adjusted for price inflation) increased by 2.7% (excluding bonuses) compared with a year earlier.

Additionally, [Ipsos MORI research](#) from May 2018 suggested that the British public are becoming more confident in the UK economy with the majority of the nation (51%) rating the economic situation as "good".

Considering the [wider well-being measures](#), we have also seen improvements over time in other [factors that are strongly associated with personal well-being](#), such as good health and being in positive relationships. For example, in 2015 to 2016, fewer people reported being in unhappy relationships and more people in the UK reported being “mostly or completely” satisfied with their general health, compared with the previous period.

## How are the countries of the UK fairing?

Northern Ireland presents a very positive picture in terms of personal well-being. Research has shown that [strong social connections do positively impact an individual's well-being](#). Figures show that Northern Ireland reports a stronger sense of community compared with the UK. In 2014 to 2015, when respondents were asked to rate their [sense of belonging to their neighbourhood](#), 68.8% of people in the UK “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they did feel that they belonged to their neighbourhood, compared with 78.7% in Northern Ireland.

When considering average levels of personal well-being, Wales did not differ much from the UK. However, a larger proportion of people in Wales reported “poor” personal well-being ratings compared with the UK. Research from the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) shows that Wales scores poorly in the measures of jobs and income compared with the UK. In the year ending April 2018, the [median full-time weekly wage](#) for Wales was the second lowest across the UK, with only the North East of England falling below it.

Similarly, the [annual gross disposable household income](#) for Wales in 2016 of £15,835 was considerably less than the UK average of £19,432. Also, considering people’s subjective view of their income, the rate at which respondents in Wales reported being “mostly or completely” [satisfied with their income](#) in 2015 to 2016 (42.1%) fell lower than the UK average of 45.6%. [Previous research](#) highlighted the impact that income can have on personal well-being, with those in households of higher incomes reporting higher life satisfaction and happiness, and lower anxiety ratings, holding other factors fixed.

The article, [Understanding well-being inequalities: Who has the poorest personal well-being?](#), showed that people with poorest personal well-being were most likely to rent their home. From August 2017 to 2018, [house prices](#) across Wales increased at a rate of 6.2%, which is much higher than the slow growth (2.1%) of [median full-time gross weekly earnings](#) between April 2017 and April 2018. This may have an impact for first-time buyers in Wales and their decision to rent instead of buying a home.

The factors mentioned previously may provide possible links, to reasons why larger proportions of people had “poor” personal well-being in Wales. The most recent [Well-being of Wales](#) publication reported how Wales is performing against the [Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015](#) and highlighted areas where Wales may need to improve, but also acknowledged where Wales is improving. For example, the report stated that life expectancy has been increasing over the long-term in Wales but, in recent years, those increases have shown signs of slowing and even stopped. Also, the amount of time spent in good health has been increasing but inequalities remain across different groups.

In relation to people’s sense of community and belonging, in general, most people are satisfied with where they live, although almost one in five people feel lonely. In the last year, overall labour market performance in Wales has continued to be strong, with gaps in employment and inactivity rates between Wales and the UK remaining low in historical terms. However, the trend in household income in Wales, relative to the UK as a whole, has been slightly downward in recent years. For example, the latest figures show that average disposable income per person in Wales is around 80% of the overall UK value.

## 7 . Next steps

A wide range of users are interested in our personal well-being outputs and a [recent user feedback survey](#) has highlighted priorities for them. There are clear areas of interest from our users, such as more information on lower geographies and more analysis on factors associated with personal well-being.

In coming months, we will be reaching out to local and regional users to deliver more information about well-being and inequalities. Also, as there is a need for understanding the relationship between personal well-being and economic well-being, we will examine this as part of our next release in January 2019. The aim will be to provide a fuller picture of well-being in the UK by looking at insights into people’s lives to better support those who are struggling and those who are thriving in different aspects of life.

## 8 . Quality and methodology

The [Personal well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information report](#) contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

### How we measure personal well-being

Since 2011, we have asked personal well-being questions to adults aged 16 years and over in the UK to better understand how they feel about their lives. This release presents headline results for the year ending June 2018, along with changes over the last six years. It provides data at the UK and country level. The four personal well-being questions are:

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

People are asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”. We produce estimates of the mean ratings for all four personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions (as shown in Table 1).

**Table 1: Labelling of thresholds**

Life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness scores		Anxiety scores	
Response on an 11 point scale	Label	Response on an 11 point scale	Label
0 to 4	Low	0 to 1	Very low
5 to 6	Medium	2 to 3	Low
7 to 8	High	4 to 5	Medium
9 to 10	Very high	6 to 10	High

Source: Office for National Statistics

Please note that:

- any changes mentioned in this publication are “statistically significant”
- the statistical significance of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals
- comparisons have been based on unrounded data

We are able to compare with the same period last year (July 2016 to June 2017) to identify any changes that may have occurred. However, we are not able to reliably compare with the preceding period (April 2017 to March 2018) as they include overlapping time periods that contain the same data.

For more information on personal well-being, please see:

- [Personal well-being user guide](#)
- [Harmonised principles of personal-well-being](#)