

PROPOSAL FOR A WELLBEING INDICATORS FRAMEWORK

Possible headline indicator for consideration

There may be a need for a 'headline indicator' of wellbeing which summarises the state of wellbeing overall. One possibility would be a measure, often referred to as global subjective wellbeing, which is based on the survey question "*All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?*"

There are several possibilities for an indicator derived from this question:

- Mean score (0-10)
- % people with a score above a certain value
- % people with a score below a certain value

However it may be the case that a specific indicator covering a key factor for wellbeing could be considered as a headline measure.

Objective versus subjective measures

Most existing sustainable development indicators are objective measures, e.g. percentage of children in low income households. However some subjective measures e.g. fear of crime, also feature as indicators. Both types of indicator may be relevant to wellbeing, but a key question is whether in order to gain a better understanding of wellbeing there should be a bias towards subjective measures, as potentially they better reflect how things may affect a person's wellbeing. Whether objective or subjective measures are adopted consideration will need to be given to the formulation of the indicators in terms of the focus being on the people affected positively or negatively, e.g. % satisfied or % dissatisfied.

Personal characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and disability, are shown to affect wellbeing (Dolan et al, 2006)¹ and so indicators may need to be disaggregated by such attributes, where the data allow.

Indicator Framework

The following pages set out a potential framework of domains for wellbeing. The domains and factors have been developed from the wellbeing research.

¹ www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/WellbeingProject2.pdf - This review of evidence focuses on large datasets where there was an opportunity to isolate the impact of one factor upon wellbeing by controlling for other factors. Most of the evidence relates to subjective wellbeing measures (i.e. how people think and feel about their lives)

Domains	Factors	Description / policy relevance	Evidence for link to wellbeing
Health	Mental health Physical health	Mental and physical health are strongly related to each other and are already well-established in policy terms (DH).	There is strong evidence for wellbeing being affected by mental and physical health.
How we spend our time	Community involvement Leisure time Work	Relevant policy areas may include community involvement (DCLG) and participation in culture / sport (DCMS).	There is evidence for a positive impact on wellbeing through community involvement, and being active.
Standard of living	Income	May include poverty reduction (DWP) but also linked with other domains.	There is evidence for income affecting wellbeing up to a point, after which the relationship weakens. There is stronger evidence that relative income, compared with peers, can affect wellbeing.
Achievement in life	Education Adult skill base	Educational attainment and life-long learning are clear policy domains (DfES)	In Dolan's review, the impact of education is difficult to determine as it is mediated by or affects so many other variables. However achievement in life is not just determined by education and can be about having a sense of achievement, which does affect wellbeing.
Attitudes and beliefs	Fear of crime and safety Perception of anti-social behaviour Religious beliefs Feelings of control and attitudes toward the future Attitudes toward the environment	This does not fit neatly with specific policy areas, however, it could include perceptions of safety and the indicators based on data being collected in the Defra behaviours and attitudes survey.	There is evidence for affects of religious beliefs, trust, and attitudes to our circumstances on wellbeing.

Domains	Factors	Description / policy relevance	Evidence for link to wellbeing
Relationships	<p>Marriage</p> <p>Social networks and support</p> <p>Community and neighbourliness</p>	<p>This domain does not fit closely with an established policy area but it is clearly one of the most important determinants of wellbeing from the academic literature. Other aspects of community not covered in “how we spend our time” may fit here.</p>	<p>Dolan et al found evidence of a positive impact of a stable intimate relationship or marriage, and of having a strong social network.</p> <p>Some data to provide further evidence is being collected on this domain in Defra’s behaviours and attitudes survey.</p>
Environment	<p>Pollution</p> <p>Countryside and green space</p> <p>Housing</p> <p>Transport</p>	<p>Natural and built environment and accessibility (Defra, DCLG, DfT)</p>	<p>Evidence is limited for environmental impacts on wellbeing, but mainly because there have been few studies, and they have struggled to uncouple the impact of poor natural environments from income. Dolan et al quote some recent studies on pollution and noise that show an association with wellbeing.</p> <p>There is some evidence of lower wellbeing in densely populated areas, and from commuting more.</p> <p>Additional data being collected in the Defra survey of behaviours and attitudes will allow further evaluation of wellbeing in relation to the environment.</p>