

Measuring Subjective Well-being

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Office for National Statistics

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Introduction

At the launch of the Measuring National Well-being national debate, Jil Matheson announced that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) were planning to collect subjective well-being data as part of the Measuring National Well-being Programme. Alongside the national debate, which was undertaken to help “pick out the key areas which matter most for national well-being” the ONS started, in April 2011, to measure what is termed ‘subjective well-being’ i.e. asking individuals to provide their own assessment of their own well-being.

This paper discusses:

- some of the international developments in this area
- the definition of subjective well-being and its importance
- the rationale behind the choice of the four ONS subjective well-being questions
- some methodological considerations
- the ONS testing and development plan for the subjective well-being questions
- the use of subjective well-being in policy
- considerations when presenting subjective well-being data
- next steps in this area

The importance of measuring subjective well-being has gained momentum internationally. The report of the Commission for the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (CMEPSP) stated that *“it is possible to collect meaningful and reliable data on subjective as well as objective well-being. Subjective well-being encompasses different aspects (cognitive evaluations of one’s life, happiness, satisfaction, positive emotions such as joy and pride, and negative emotions such as pain and worry)...[subjective well-being] should be included in larger-scale surveys undertaken by official statistical offices.”* (CMEPSP, 2009)

In recognition of the lack of a large scale official UK survey measuring subjective well-being, and as an important component of national well-being, four subjective well-being questions were included on ONS’s largest household survey, the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) from April 2011. The first annual datasets for the subjective well-being questions will be available in July 2012; some information will be published on an interim basis before that. Although these questions were drawn from established research, the data from these questions will initially be classed as ‘experimental’ to allow for user feedback at an early stage and potential refinement and development as required. After further user consultation and potential refinement and development, the subjective well-being statistics will be submitted to the UK Statistics Authority for assessment to become National Statistics.

Alongside asking these four questions, further testing and development is being undertaken. This includes further cognitive testing work and use of the ONS monthly Opinions Survey (OPN). This will also enable ONS to investigate aspects of well-being which were shown to be important to people in the national debate, such as a sense of purpose and fulfilment, relationships with family and friends, leisure time, job satisfaction and sense of community. ONS plan to publish some first results from the OPN in November 2011.

Subjective well-being is just one component of national well-being. ONS believes that capturing both objective and subjective measures is important when making any assessment of the well-being of the nation. Feedback from the national debate suggested that although subjective well-being measurement is important for assessing national well-being, there seemed in the main to be agreement that alone it did not provide all the information needed to make a full assessment of the nation's well-being. This is perhaps not surprising given that most people considered national well-being to be an inherently multi-dimensional concept.

Four in five (79 per cent) of respondents to the consultation questionnaire considered that the 'life satisfaction' of the population should be measured to determine national well-being and how life is changing in the UK. This was considered as one of the most helpful ways of measuring national well-being (being seen as almost equally as important as health statistics (80 per cent)). A number of other types of more objective information were also thought to help, for example, employment/unemployment (74 per cent), education levels (65 per cent), income distributions (62 per cent) life expectancy (55 per cent) and crime figures (51 per cent).

International developments in collecting subjective well-being data

The UK is not alone in measuring subjective well-being; internationally there has been strong interest. Many European countries have set up programmes to improve the measurement of quality of life including introducing subjective well-being measures. Further a-field, the USA administers an annual 'time-use' survey (ATUS) which measures the amount of time selected citizens spend on certain activities in their lives. In 2010 supplemental subjective well-being questions were asked, respondents were asked to rate their mood/feelings relating to three activities that they had reported undertaking allowing for subjective well-being data to be directly linked with activity. Canada has been collecting subjective well-being data for some time as part of its 'Canada's performance' report. Statistics Canada run the General Social Survey which aims to gather data on social trends in order to monitor changes in the living conditions and well-being of Canadians over time. The survey has been conducted three times, in 1996, 2002 and 2007, collecting information on topics such as well-being, family composition, retirement decisions and plans, care giving and care receiving experiences, social networks and housing.

One of the challenges that the international statistical system faces is to produce cross national measures of well-being on a harmonised basis to allow for comparisons between different countries. This is particularly the case for subjective well-being measures. The Organisation for Economic Progress Cooperation and development (OECD) has a global project on 'measuring the progress of society' and as part of this, they recognise the need for the collection of subjective well-being data in order to measure progress. The OECD are producing guidance to help statistical organisations develop subjective well-being questions. ONS are working closely with the OECD regarding the development of these guidelines.

The European Commission have set up the 'GDP and Beyond' project in order to better measure quality of life and well-being. Part of this project involves the creation of an ad-hoc module collecting data on well-being which will include subjective well-being data. This module will be included in the EU-SILC (income and living conditions) survey in 2013. The module will be delivered in all 26 EU member states, and will therefore allow for European comparison of subjective well-being data.

What is subjective well-being?

Subjective well-being concerns peoples' self-reported assessment of their own well-being. Survey questions of this nature aim to capture an individual's well-being by measuring how people think and feel, for example, by asking about their life satisfaction, happiness, and psychological well-being. Subjective well-being questions are not just subjective because the questions are self-reported, objective questions can also be self-reported if the information required is factual, such as employment status or household income (Hicks, 2011). What makes the questions subjective is that the questions ask respondents to rate their feelings rather than recall factual information. This approach is in contrast to the more traditional approach which uses objective indicators such as level of educational attainment, health, and employment to determine well-being (ONS, 2010).

In general, objective measures of well-being focus on either objective-list or preference satisfaction accounts. Objective list accounts of well-being focus on the satisfaction of basic human needs and rights as being a crucial pre-requisite before people can 'flourish' and live well (Dolan, 2011). Preference satisfaction accounts focus on the fact that people's well-being is increased the more that individuals can satisfy their preferences. From this perspective GDP is often used as a proxy for well-being, as increased income can bring about increased choice. The resulting policies from these two perspectives involve either improving objective circumstances such as education or health (Sen, 1999) or increasing the choices people have by raising average incomes (Harsanyi, 1982).

Although objective measures are still very important, unlike subjective measures, objective measures do not take account of human perception. It is argued that human perception is fundamental to understanding an individual's well-being, as the only person who knows whether a person is feeling well is that person themselves (Layard, 2005). The New Economics Foundation (nef) support this view, a report produced by nef during the national debate period stated that "*the best way to measure whether someone feels happy or satisfied is to ask them*" (nef, 2011: p15). Another argument for measuring subjective well-being is that paternalism can be avoided, as it asks individuals about their views about their own well-being and allows them to make their own assessment of this, rather than simply a check list of external circumstances which assume that certain things improve or detract from an individual's well-being (ONS, 2010). Research has shown that subjective well-being measures correlate well with objective indicators of well-being such as income, employment status, marital status, health and major life events (Dolan et al., 2008).

Approaches to measuring subjective well-being

Three broad approaches have been identified when measuring subjective well-being; 'evaluative', 'experience', and 'eudemonic'.

The evaluative approach requires respondents to make an information appraisal or cognitive reflection of their life (Diener, 1994). Respondents can be asked to provide an assessment of their overall life satisfaction or certain aspects of their life such as satisfaction with their health, job, relationships. An alternative evaluation question is known as the Cantril ladder of life in which respondents rate their current life on a ladder scale for which 0 is 'the worst possible life for you' and 10 is 'the best possible life for you'. Other measures include general happiness measures that are not specific to a particular point in time. The evaluation approach to measuring well-being has been the most prevalent both in national and international surveys, these type of questions have

also been seen by policy makers as useful sources of information for some time (Donovan and Halpern, 2002).

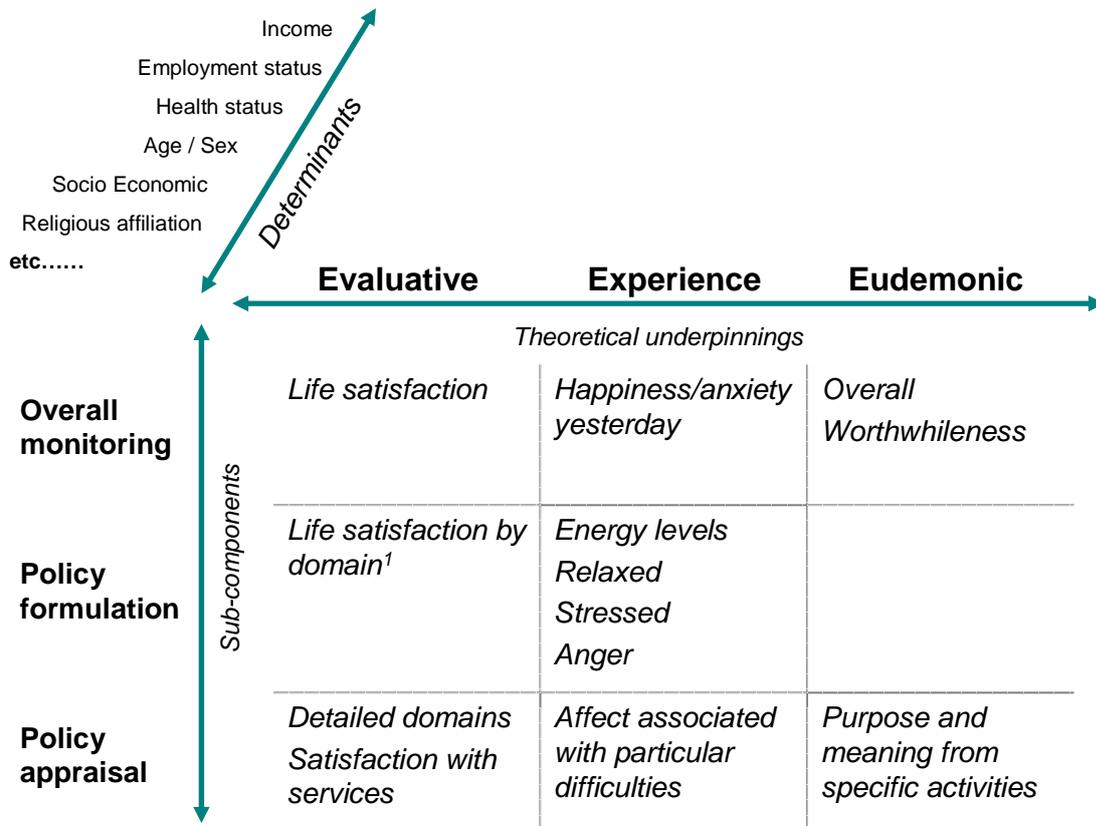
Experience (or affect) measures aim to provide an assessment of the emotional quality of an individual's experience in terms of the frequency, intensity and type of affect or emotion at any given moment, for example, happiness, sadness, anxiety or excitement. This can be collected via diary based methods such as through the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM) and the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) where respondents report feelings at different times of the day while carrying out different activities. It is also possible for this information to be collected via more general social survey questions through asking respondents questions about their feelings over a short reference period, for example, 'Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?' (Dolan, 2010; Hicks, 2011). Experience measures can pick up both positive emotions, such as happiness, joy or contentment, and negative ones, such as anxiety, worry, pain, or anger.

The eudemonic approach is based on the theory that people have underlying psychological needs for their lives to have meaning, to have a sense of control over their lives and to have connections with other people (Ryff, 1989). This approach to subjective well-being is also sometimes described as the 'functioning' or 'psychological' approach to well-being. Eudemonic measures look to capture a range of factors that can be considered important, but are not necessarily reflected in evaluative or experience measures and can include autonomy, control, competence, engagement, good personal relationships, a sense of meaning, purpose and achievement. These types of measures are also sometimes known as measures of 'flourishing'.

ONS approach to measuring subjective well-being

The ONS approach to measuring subjective well-being is a balanced approach, taking into account the different ways that subjective well-being can be measured. **Figure 1** shows a framework for measuring subjective well-being. ONS has adapted this from the recommendations that Professor's Dolan (LSE), Professor Lord Layard (LSE) and Dr Robert Metcalfe (University of Oxford) made to ONS as well as from a framework that is being considered by OECD. Questions are grouped according to type of subjective well-being measure (evaluative, experience and eudemonic) and depending on the level of detail that they provide and how they could relate to different purposes of public policy. The most general measures can be used for overall monitoring. More detailed domain and affect questions could be used for policy formulation. Finally policy appraisal is likely to use the most detailed measures which are specific to particular activities and services (Dolan et al., 2011).

Figure 1 **Conceptual framework for measuring subjective well-being**



1. Domains could include: personal relationships, physical health, mental well-being, work situation, financial situation, area where you live, time you have to do the things you like doing, well-being of your children (if any), societal well-being. Framework adapted and developed from Dolan, Layard and Metcalfe (2011) and Smith (2011) OECD unpublished.

It is also important that we aim to understand what is associated with or determines people’s subjective well-being responses. Looking at how different more objective measures are related to overall life-satisfaction, positive and negative affect and eudemonic measures will provide valuable information on what determines people’s levels of subjective well-being. As the subjective well-being measures are now on the ONS IHS this will allow further research to be undertaken using a very large sample size, exploring further the determinants of subjective well-being. During the debate nef emphasised the need to collect subjective well-being data alongside data on what they term the ‘drivers’ of well-being in order that the relationships can be explored (nef, 2011).

Choice of subjective well-being questions for the IHS

Before developing the subjective well-being questions that are now being asked in the IHS, ONS undertook work to look at questions in existing surveys both in the UK and abroad (ONS. 2010). ONS also sought academic advice from Prof. Paul Dolan (LSE), Prof. Lord Richard Layard (LSE) and Dr Robert Metcalfe (Oxford University) for the development of questions, as well as Prof Felicia Huppert (Cambridge University) who provided advice on eudemonic measures. The subject was also discussed at the National Statistician’s Advisory Forumⁱ and the Technical Advisory Groupⁱⁱ which led to some changes to proposals that were originally being considered by ONS.

These groups consist of a range of experts including representatives from the OECD, Eurostat (the statistical office for the European Union), other government departments, think tanks, academics, and related market research experts.

From April 2011, ONS included four subjective well-being questions covering evaluative, eudemonic and experience measures of well-being on the IHS. The IHS is a composite survey combining questions asked on a number of ONS social surveys to produce a dataset of 'core' variables. The aim of the IHS is to produce high-level estimates for particular themes to a higher precision and lower geographic level than current ONS social surveys.

The four questions are as follows:

- overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? (experience)
- overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? (positive affect)
- overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (negative affect)
- overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? (Eudemonic)

(All questions use a 0 – 10 scale. A copy of the questionnaire showing the four questions can be found in Annex A.)

When adding subjective well-being questions to the IHS, ONS was mindful of response burden and also the primary purpose of the constituent surveys. It was for this reason that it was decided that the IHS would be the right vehicle to carry a small set of overall monitoring questions rather than the domain specific and detailed questions. Although only a small set of questions have been added, the wide array of existing variables already collected will provide a rich and large dataset for analysis (aiming for an achieved sample of 200,000 directly questioned adults (aged 16 and over) responding each year). As mentioned in the introduction, the first annual experimental IHS dataset will be available in July 2012, although some information will be published on an interim basis before that.

The IHS carries a wide range of objective variables including: sex, age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, national identity, country of birth, religious affiliation, smoking, health, income, employment status (employment, unemployment and inactivity) and qualification levels. Analysing the determinants of subjective well-being will be part of the analytical work that ONS will undertake as part of the Measuring National Well-being programme.

Evaluative

ONS decided to include a life satisfaction question on the IHS to reflect the evaluative approach which is widely used and established both within the UK and internationally. Similar questions have been asked on many other surveys (for example, the World Values Survey, European Social Survey, British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), and DEFRA's Public Attitudes and Behaviours towards the Environment Omnibus Survey).

Across different surveys in the UK and internationally there are instances when evaluative measures do not have an explicit time frame of assessment. The use of time frame constraint is an important difference as some respondents may find it difficult to evaluate their life satisfaction when no specific time frame is provided in the question (ONS, 2010; Dolan at al., 2011). Without a time

frame the immediate context in which the question is being asked may also have more of an influence on responses. ONS made the decision to use the term 'nowadays' in the life satisfaction question. This has been used in other surveys and, although this leaves the respondent to make a judgement about how to interpret the time frame, it does limit the reference period to more recent times rather than thinking about the whole of a person's life.

As mentioned earlier, an alternative evaluative measure is the Cantril ladder of life question which has been argued is less affected by people's emotional state and therefore advocated by some experts. However, the question is very lengthy and requires the respondent to think conceptually and therefore is likely to be cognitively burdensome for respondents, this led ONS to the decision not to include this question in the IHS in April 2011.

Experience or affect

In terms of an experience measure ONS concluded that it was necessary to include not only a positive but also negative 'affect' question in the IHS. This decision was made after receiving comments from experts on the Measuring National Well-being Advisory Forum and Technical Advisory Group where the importance of including not just a positive affect question but also a negative affect question was raised. ONS also decided to use the time frame of 'yesterday' in order to approximate to the DRM time use approach. The adjective 'happiness' has been chosen as it is commonly used for positive affect questions and has been used both in the DRM and Gallup-Health Ways data. 'Anxious' is widely used as an indicator of poor mental well-being, for example it is used in the European Social Survey and in the EQ-5D well-being measure (Dolan 2011). However, ONS is aware that other adjectives could be used. ONS will test alternative wording, for example, enjoyment, contentment, stress, worry, anger, tiredness and sadness in the ONS monthly OPN and through cognitive testing.

As a contribution to the debate on how to measure well-being ONS received a Memorandum from Deaton, Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz and Stone 'Recommendations to the ONS for Measuring Well-being'. The authors argue that ONS should include extra questions on negative affect including feelings of pain, stress, anger, tiredness, and sadness on the IHS core. The authors stated that ONS should concentrate on collecting data on measuring aspects of 'misery and distress' for two reasons. Firstly, that these measures appear to be more sensitive than positive emotions; the authors give the example that negative emotions decline on weekends compared with weekdays for those who work full-time, whereas positive emotions tend to increase less on weekends compared to the absence of negative emotions. Secondly, that these are the measures that public policy is most able to influence. Although ONS recognise the value of asking negative affect questions, the space constraints on the IHS and the desire to take a balanced approach to the measurement of subjective well-being led the ONS to only include one negative affect question. Additionally, all the negative emotion adjectives that the authors suggest are to be run and tested in the OPN survey in August 2011.

Regarding including questions on the monthly OPN the authors stated that the sample size of 1,000 a month would be too small for use in policy; they recommended instead that the OPN would be better used as a testing vehicle to test alternative subjective well-being questions or to investigate correlates of subjective well-being. ONS has listened to this advice and we plan to use the OPN as a testing vehicle to investigate a range of different methodological aspects relating to

subjective well-being questions as well as it being seen as a means to collect more detailed subjective well-being information.

Eudemonic

For an overall eudemonic measure for use on the IHS ONS chose one that provides information on how much meaning and purpose people get from the things that they do in their lives. Developing an overall question for this approach to measuring well-being was more challenging because often a larger set of questions are used to pick up the different dimensions of this approach to measuring subjective well-being. The question that ONS chose for the IHS is adapted from the European Social Survey (ESS) which asks about what people 'do in their lives that is valuable and worthwhile'. The question has been reworded to fit with a 0-10 scale, and a similar question was tested on the December 2010 OPN. ONS decided not to include the words 'valuable and worthwhile' but to instead use just 'worthwhile' as advice from cognitive testing experts from within ONS and some members of the Technical Advisory Forum suggested that respondents could see these concepts as distinct rather than complementing. The ONS received advice on the precise wording from Felicia Huppert from Cambridge University, an expert in eudemonic or flourishing measures.

Nef recommended an approach to measuring well-being based on their 'dynamic model'. The model uses the concept of 'flourishing', nef state that a flourishing life should include *'good relationships, autonomy, competence, and a sense of purposes, as well as feelings of happiness and satisfaction.'* (nef, 2011). Nef recommend that the ONS subjective well-being questions should not place too much emphasis on happiness and life satisfaction at the expense of functioning (eudemonic measures) and satisfaction of needs. Nef provide the example of the effect of having children on subjective well-being data. Becoming a parent has often been found to correlate with lower scores of life satisfaction and happiness, yet having children is also often linked to improved scores for the eudemonic or functioning questions which measure meaning and purpose. These findings are lost if only satisfaction and happiness are the focus (nef, 2011).

Nef also suggested that further questions about personal relationships and one regarding level of autonomy should also be included in the IHS. Specifically they suggested a question on loneliness as an affect question and another around the amount of control people feel over their lives. However, alternative advice received suggested that loneliness is an emotion that has specific cause, sadness caused by lack of personal relationships, and therefore would not appear to be a 'pure' negative affect question. Additionally, asking about how lonely someone feels in a household interview could be potentially more sensitive than the other well-being questions because the respondent may well be asked the question whilst in the presence of other household members and may be reluctant to admit that they are lonely. The resulting data could therefore be biased. Before introducing such a question ONS would want to be sure that it did not have a negative impact on the respondent or on the quality of data that would be provided. Also we would need to be clear about the theoretical underpinning of such an approach and also to think carefully about the best question wording if it were decided that this should be added. The control question that was also proposed is also likely to be cognitively demanding and requires testing to see how easily it could be answered. For these reasons ONS decided not to include these questions on the IHS from April 2011. These types of question were asked in the July 2011 OPN and alongside this ONS will undertake further cognitive testing of questions.

Other measurement scales

There are a range of approaches to the measurement of subjective well-being and ONS wanted to take a balanced approach to the measurement that captured the main approaches. During the national debate participants made ONS aware of a range of other already established measurement scales, for example the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), the EuroQol-5D (EQ5D), World Health Organisation Quality of Life instrument (WHOQOL-BREF) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) were all mentioned along with other scales. These scales tend to be more specific, relating mainly to physical health and mental and psychological aspects of individual well-being.

Some methodological considerations

There are various methodological considerations to take into account when assessing the quality of subjective well-being estimates. These include, amongst others, the effect of the mode of interview, question order and context effects, response scales and the general context in which the questions are asked in.

Mode of interview

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). Further to this, the use of showcards can also aid respondents, but also introduce further mode effects between different modes of interviewing (for example, telephone and household interviews) where they can be used in one but not the other.

Question order and context effects

Responses to evaluative questions can be determined in part by the respondent's current mood and by the immediate context. This was demonstrated by Stract, Martin and Schwarz (1987) who found that reported satisfaction with life was significantly higher for a group of participants who found a coin prior to completing the questionnaire. Reported satisfaction or happiness has also been shown to be affected by earlier questions in a survey, for example, Stract et al., (1987) administered a survey to students in the U.S. which asked a life satisfaction question and also a question regarding the students 'dating' habits. When the life satisfaction question was asked before the dating question the answers were uncorrelated ($r = -0.1$) suggesting that dating habits were not an important determinant of the students well-being. However, when the order of the two questions were reversed, the correlation increased ($r = +.62$) suggesting that dating is a very important determinant of life satisfaction. This example demonstrates how the context in which a subjective well-being question is asked such as the preceding questions can greatly influence the given response.

However, the idiosyncratic effects of recent events, (illustrated by the coin example), are likely to average out in representative population samples (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006) and this is likely to be particularly the case with a large scale sample such as the IHS (OECD, 2007).

Feedback from some members of the Advisory Forum highlighted the likely impact on estimates of the placement of the questions in surveys, for example, placing after questions relating to health or the labour market may impact the answers that respondents make. Prior to April 2011, ONS carried out small scale cognitive testing of the placement of the subjective well-being questions in

the IHS. As a result it was decided that the placement of the overall monitoring questions would be fairly early on in the questionnaire after the basic questions on household and individual demographics. This allows time for rapport to be built up between the interviewer and the respondent by the time the subjective well-being questions are asked without allowing later questions, such as those on employment, to influence response to the subjective well-being questions.

The importance of the ordering of the subjective well-being questions themselves also needs to be taken into consideration when designing subjective well-being question modules. Any changes year to year could affect the ability to examine changes in subjective well-being over time, as some of the observed change could be due to ordering effect. Currently, within the IHS the question on life satisfaction is followed by the worthwhile question which is then followed up with the negative effect question (see Annex A).

Question wording

We also know that in any survey question the wording of the question can have an impact on the answer that is received from respondents. Subjective well-being questions are no exception and from feedback during the debate it would appear that this is an important consideration. We know that it is not only response scales that differ from survey to survey but also question wording, including the use of time frames (ONS, 2010). It will be important as we go forward to ascertain the impact these differences have on any estimates, particularly when thinking through the extent to which question wording should be harmonised in order to gain comparable results. Just how sensitive subjective well-being estimates are to question wording is an important methodological consideration.

Scales

Different response scales for subjective well-being questions have been used on different surveys (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2008). For example, the BHPS asks respondents 'How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with.....your life overall' with responses on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is 'Not satisfied at all' and 7 is 'Completely satisfied'. However, the subjective well-being questions on the Eurobarometer Survey use a four point scale: 'On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?' Differences in scaling and labelling of scale points require careful consideration as a different scale may affect how people respond. Additionally the use of different scales in different surveys means that it is more difficult to compare across different sources of data. It appears that the way the scales are labelled can also have an impact on these estimates and that is something that needs further investigation.

ONS decided that an 11 point scale from 0-10 where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is an absolute value such as 'completely' should be used for all the IHS subjective well-being questions. The reason for this decision was to ensure that the scales between the questions are consistent in order to help respondents answer the questions more easily and also to aid analysis across the separate questions. Further to this, 11 point scales of this nature are commonly used across other surveys of interest, particularly internationally, and using the same type of scale will aid comparisons with these estimates.

Testing and development of ONS subjective well-being questions

Further methodological exploration is needed for subjective well-being estimates and ONS is undertaking further methodological testing. ONS is combining qualitative methods such as cognitive testing with the more quantitative methods.

The main quantitative testing vehicle that ONS is using is the monthly Opinions survey (OPN). This survey provides flexibility that the IHS does not. ONS is able to add questions on each month and the strategy will be to run the four overall monitoring questions on this survey every month which will be supplemented by modules of other questions. These more detailed questions will be from each of the three approaches to measuring subjective well-being questions, along with a fourth module of 'societal' subjective well-being questions. This will allow opportunity to ask questions on, and investigate further, many of the aspects of subjective well-being that were shown to be important to people in the national debate, such as a sense of purpose and fulfilment, relationships with family and friends, leisure time, and sense of community.

The OPN is also being used to test how mode of interview, the order and placement of questions and nuances in question wording as well as the scales used affect responses. So far, in April, June and July ONS has run a split trial in the OPN to test for interview mode effects between interview administered questions in the home compared with a self-completion method. In subsequent months split trials will also be used to test the other methodological aspects outlined in this paper. This will allow ONS to understand more fully the extent to which these affect the estimates of subjective well-being. This will be particularly important for advising users about the quality of these estimates.

In April 2011, satisfaction with specific domains were asked of respondents as well as the four overall monitoring questions and again in June but this time the Cantril Ladder question was also added along with other evaluative questions. The OPN did not run in May 2011 due to the ONS Census Coverage Survey taking place. In July 2011 ONS asked a range of eudemonic questions as well as the four overall questions in a module that Prof. Felicia Huppert and Juliet Michaelson from nef advised on. In August ONS will be asking a range of positive and negative affect questions along with the four overall questions.

The national debate also highlighted the fact that subjective well-being measures should also take into account wider societal aspects rather than just focussing on the individual. During the debate ONS learned of various initiatives in this area for example work by the [Barrett Values Centre](#) and work by City University for the European Policy Centre. For this reason in September 2011, ONS plan to test questions in the OPN about how people view their own community, for example whether there is a sense of trust and belonging and also their views of national issues which relate to well-being.

For more detailed information on the types of questions that will be asked and also the testing that will be carried out on the OPN please see the tables presented in Annex B. It should be noted that this is an indicative plan and that part of the reason for using the OPN for testing is its flexibility and it could be revised to respond to emerging findings.

The cognitive testing that ONS will be undertaking over the next few months will include the regular annual Labour Force Survey cognitive testing exercise and will also go to more respondents than

usual to ask in more detail about their experiences of answering the subjective well-being questions. For example, ONS will explore what they had in mind when responding to these questions, how they understood particular concepts and wording and how they interpret response scales.

It will also be important to look at the IHS data itself at an early stage to ensure that the questions are working well and also to look at mode of interview effects between telephone and face-to-face interviews, for example.

One indicator of quality is item non-response and this is something that ONS will look at on the IHS as part of the testing and development work. So far, early indications from testing work carried out on the December OPN survey suggest that item non-response to these types of questions is low, indicating general acceptance from respondents and the ability to answer them. A similar suite of subjective well-being questions were asked on the December 2010 OPN. Analysis of these questions carried out by Paul Dolan (LSE) and Robert Metcalfe (Oxford University) shows that item non response for similar overall subjective well-being questions of this kind was around two to three per cent on the December OPN survey (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2011).

It will also be possible to see how the four overall monitoring questions, along with other questions we choose to ask from month to month, are associated with each other. This is important as it will allow us to know how much extra information is gained from each of the questions and how similar apparently different questions actually are. Initial analysis from the December 2010 OPN (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2011) shows that the life satisfaction, happiness yesterday and purpose and worthwhile questions, although correlated, appear to be picking up different concepts. In particular, it seems that happiness as an experience question (relating to yesterday) is different from that as an evaluation question (relating to generally or overall), since previous studies have found a higher correlation between overall life satisfaction and overall happiness than the December OPN analysis showed between life satisfaction nowadays and happiness yesterday (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2011). This adds to the evidence that happiness can take both an evaluative and an affective role in the measurement of subjective well-being (Helliwell, 2011).

Using subjective well-being estimates in policy

In November 2010 the UK signalled its commitment to wider measures of national well-being when David Cameron gave a speech on well-being stating that there was a need to “take practical steps to make sure government is properly focused on our quality of life as well as economic growth” (Number 10, 2010). ONS was asked to devise a new way of measuring well-being in Britain, as “a re-appraisal of what matters” that would “lead to government policy that is more focused not just on the bottom line, but on all those things that make life worthwhile”. Since then ONS has been actively involved in the Social Impacts Taskforce as part of our work to ensure that any measures of national well-being that we will develop are relevant for government policy. The Social Impacts Taskforce is an analytical group of the Government Economic Service (GES) and Government Social Research (GSR), examining how departments in UK government can use a more systematic understanding of the social impacts of policies to give Ministers better advice on the effects of policy options. The provision of subjective well-being data is a vital part of this development.

Dolan et al. (2011) note that there are three main uses of subjective well-being data: to monitor progress, to inform policy design, and for policy appraisal. Further to this, monitoring well-being over time is very important to ensure that changes that affect society do not reduce overall well-being. In order for this to take place well-being data would need to be collected over a long period of time. Additionally, in order that well-being measures can be used to inform policy it is necessary that sub-groups in the population can be identified in order that the well-being of certain groups (for example the unemployed) can be investigated. Dolan et al. (2011) recommended that the three different types of subjective well-being measure (evaluation, experience and eudemonic) should be measured separately in order that they can be investigated separately by policy makers.

Subjective well-being data can be used for policy appraisal through use in cost benefit analysis. This process could help inform decisions around which forms of spending will lead to the largest increases in subjective well-being (Dolan et al. 2011). The Green Book is HM Treasury's guide for government departments on the appraisal of the costs and benefits of projects through Social Cost Benefit Analysis. A Green Book discussion paper (Fujiwara & Campbell 2011), produced jointly by HMT and DWP and released at the same time as this ONS paper, looks at the potential uses of subjective well-being measures in Social Cost Benefit Analysis. It looks specifically at the life satisfaction approach, which involves estimating the impact of certain outcomes or non-market goods on life satisfaction from surveys such as the IHS. From the paper, we can judge that HMT is optimistic about the life satisfaction approach soon being able to provide a possible complement to the more traditional approaches to estimating the value of non-market goods within Social Cost Benefit Analysis as the methodology continues to evolve; but we can also take from the paper the caveat from HMT that, for the moment, many of the estimates so far generated by the life satisfaction approach are probably not robust enough for use in Social Cost Benefit Analysis. This paper represents a challenge for each department to pursue research in this area further and the subjective well-being estimates from the IHS will be important in carrying this analytical work forwards.

The importance of ONS providing measures for use in cost benefit analysis is also highlighted by Professor John Helliwell. He recommends that consideration of cost benefit-analysis should be made integral to the selection and reporting of subjective well-being measures (Helliwell, 2011).

There are many practical applications in policy where subjective well-being data can be used. Halpern (2010) gives an example of the Merseyside police who started to collect data on how satisfied members of the public were with the service provided by police as well as collecting data on crimes committed and clear-up rates. The data on satisfaction with service showed that people were more concerned over whether the police arrived to see them at the time and date when they said they would than about the speed of the police response. Merseyside police were able to change their procedures as a result of these findings; this led to increased efficiency and an increase public satisfaction of their services.

Nef provide a further example of how subjective well-being data could be used in policy to tackle the problem of poor sleep quality. Poor sleep quality is associated with a large difference in people's reported enjoying of the time they spend at home. If poor sleep were given attention and therefore promoting sleep was a policy goal, behaviours such as exercise and reducing noise pollution could be targeted by policy makers. This would in theory lead to an overall improvement in subjective well-being. Furthermore, nef argue that the use of subjective well-being indicators

would allow policy makers to identify differences and inequalities in people's well-being such as certain demographic groups and geographical areas. Policy makers would then be able to target policies to address these differences. As Helliwell puts it, *"If taking subjective well-being more seriously has the potential for increasing the quality of lives while reducing pressures on available resources, should there not at least be a stronger commitment to broaden the range of policy alternatives to include those with a strong chance of improving subjective well-being."* (Helliwell, 2011: 17)

Presentation of subjective well-being measures

Consideration into the most effective ways to present subjective well-being data is of high importance and it is key that the measures are presented effectively for their use by policy makers and the wider public.

During the debate Dolan and Layard highlighted the importance of the data being presented in such a way that the drivers of the improvements and declines in subjective well-being data can be identified for use by policy makers. They stated that when presenting subjective well-being data it is important to develop a unit of measurement which can be easily understood by the public and policy makers alike. They argue that the data should be presented in a time series in order that change over time can be examined.

ONS also received written responses from OECD and nef. This paper will now discuss the aspects of presentation that were commented on.

Thresholds

If subjective well-being data were to be presented using thresholds then this would be the percentage of people that fall above and below a certain threshold on the 11 point scale adopted, for example the percentage of people who have life satisfaction 7 out of 10 or above, and the percentage of people who have a life satisfaction score of three and under.

Comments were received on this topic from the OECD who argued against using thresholds to present subjective well-being data. This is because there can be large differences in both intra-country distribution responses that do not relate to equivalent changes in the mean, therefore if a percentage above or below a certain threshold is used the results will be very sensitive to the particular threshold chosen. This argument can also be applied to comparing different sub-groups in the same country using thresholds.

Although nef agreed that there are limitations to using thresholds to present subjective well-being data nef support using thresholds as the headline measure. They proposed that the mean should be published alongside the threshold measure. Nef argued that thresholds are more easily understood, that they would highlight the distribution of well-being more effectively and are more likely to show year-on-year change than averages, attracting more interest in the measure. Nef stated that there is a danger that averages will not change very much which could mean that the measures lose credibility if thresholds are not employed. Nef recommended that there should be some research carried out into the public's understanding of data presentation before the presentation of the well-being measure(s) are decided on.

In terms of presenting data for different domains, the OECD suggested that ONS consider the use of a personal well-being index. For example, as developed by Deakin University, Australia. This uses a set of domain well-being scores to develop a multi-item scale for overall life satisfaction; the OECD suggested that it is one way to compare domain satisfactions with overall satisfaction. Additionally the OECD suggested using an 'affect balance' as one way of reporting data from the subjective well-being affect questions, for example to show the percentage of the population for whom positive affect is stronger than negative affect.

Measuring change over time

The comments received from the OECD stressed both the importance and the difficulty of measuring change over time. This is because changes in life satisfaction are likely to be fairly small compared with measurement errors and the influence of outside factors, therefore focusing on change over time could undermine the credibility of the measure.

Aggregation

OECD suggested that aggregation should be used with caution and that the only measures that should be aggregated together are measures that are related, for example different measures of life satisfaction could be aggregated. OECD state that combining measures of evaluation, eudemonia and affect should not be carried out as the three concepts are fundamentally different and should be kept separate. Nef, on the other hand, argued that the IHS subjective well-being questions should be aggregated in order to provide one headline subjective well-being measure which could then be used in cost benefit analysis. They thought this could also avoid life satisfaction being chosen as the headline measure at the expense of other measures.

Next Steps

The national debate showed that there was recognition that the subjective well-being of individuals is an important component of national well-being. However, there was in the main also recognition that these types of measures should be placed alongside, rather than be used instead of, objective measures to gain a full picture of national well-being.

In taking this work forward it should be recognised that measuring subjective well-being is still an 'emerging' science despite all the earlier work ONS is drawing on. ONS statistics have been labelled 'experimental' to signal their further refinement and development and further methodological exploration is needed.

As outlined in this paper, ONS will undertake further testing and development which will involve further quantitative and qualitative testing to work through the methodological aspects identified. ONS wants to engage with users as we go forward and plan to publish some information on an interim basis before the first annual experimental IHS dataset (April 2011 to March 2012) is published in July 2012. For example, ONS will publish the results from the OPN Survey in November 2011, which will allow users to be involved in the evaluation of these statistics at an early stage.

ONS also wants to engage further with users around the presentation of the subjective well-being estimates. This includes not only considering how best to present the subjective well-being estimates themselves, but also how these measures will sit alongside objective measures of well-

being and fit into the wider indicator set that ONS is developing. ONS will engage further with users on these issues in autumn 2011.

Given that the aim of the national well-being programme is to produce an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics which help people to understand and monitor national well-being there is a need to involve users before the subjective well-being estimates can be submitted to the UK Statistics Authority for assessment as National Statistics. ONS needs to ensure that the methodological aspects are worked through and the dimensions of statistical quality including relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability and coherence are considered.

Harmonising measures across surveys will be an important aspect to increase the value of the subjective well-being estimates that are collected. ONS will work with other organisations to include the four IHS questions on non-ONS surveys. This should include other government surveys but there is also scope for employers' surveys of job satisfaction to ask these questions.

ONS will continue to engage with policy departments, for example through the Social Impacts Taskforce, so that subjective well-being data from the IHS can be fully embedded in the design and evaluation of government policy. ONS will liaise with DEFRA who have included subjective well-being questions in surveys in England annually since 2007. [Results for 2007 to 2011](#) were published in April this year. ONS will also work with Devolved Governments to ensure that the subjective well-being measures that ONS produces for the UK as a whole fit with their responsibilities, for example, "Measuring Scotland's Progress".

ONS sees it as a priority to work collaboratively with international partners to achieve, where possible, consistency with international standards and concepts in order to increase the value of these statistics. ONS will need to ensure that the right balance is struck between meeting international needs and domestic requirements. ONS will continue to work with international organisations on the measurement of subjective well-being as we go forward, including the OECD on their guidelines for measuring subjective well-being as well as Eurostat as they seek to develop measures for inclusion in the 2013 EU-SILC ad-hoc module on well-being, which will include subjective well-being questions.

ONS is aware that the Integrated Household Survey only captures information from living in private households and excludes people living in communal establishments (a diverse set of premises including hotels, guest houses and nursing homes for example). Although this is a relatively small part of the population, around 1 million or 1.8 per cent of the population according to the 2001 Census, it is important in policy terms that these people are captured and their subjective well-being considered. There are significant obstacles and challenges in surveying people in the non-household population and ONS will, working with others, explore this issue further as we go forward.

The importance of children and young people's well-being also came through strongly in the national debate. In response to this ONS will undertake further work to help improve the measurement of children and young people's well-being, including both objective and subjective measures. The IHS sample includes young people and adults aged 16 and over; ONS need to work with other organisations in order to ascertain how to best measure the subjective well-being

for children and young people under 16. In order to start this process ONS dedicated the Measuring National Well-being Technical Advisory Group in June 2011 towards exploring this subject in more detail, a range of experts in this topic attended this group. The supplementary paper: measuring children's and young people's well-being, available at www.ons.gov.uk/well-being/well-being/understanding-well-being/index.html, provides more information.

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Annex A

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SUBJECTIVE 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 = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+

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+

Thank you, that is the end of this section of questions.

Annex B

Table 1 - Proposed timetable of SWB question testing on the Opinions Survey for 2011/12

The testing and development outlined in the below table may be subject to change depending on emerging findings.

	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Module	Evaluative - domain satisfaction questions asked	Eudemonic – further functioning/flourishing questions.	Experience – ask longer list of affect questions (positive and negative)	Societal – ask others about societal well-being	Evaluative	Eudemonic	Experience	Societal	Eudemonic	Experience
Testing on four core overall monitoring questions	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI)	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI)	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI)	*Ask core questions in different order (3 way split level trial) *Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI)	*test different question wording of core questions (2 or 3 way trial) * Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI)	*Ask core questions in different order (3 way split level trial) *Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI)	*test different question wording of core questions (2 or 3 way trial) *Split level trial – show cards for CAPI vs. no show cards for CAPI	*Ask core questions in different order (3 way split level trial) *Split level trial – show cards for CAPI vs. no show cards for CAPI.	*test any additional questions for core	*test any additional questions for core
Testing on module questions	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI) *split trial between 12 months and 5 years ahead on life satisfaction *Ask Cantril ladder *Life Sat / now compared to past/future *Domains *Optimism *Work Life Balance *other questions	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI) *Include a loneliness nowadays question *control over important aspects of life *other additional questions	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI) *testing of order effects of asking positive and negative affect questions first or second *Include a loneliness yesterday question. *other questions	*Split level trial Mode affects – self completion (CASI) vs. Interview led questions (CAPI) *Testing new social questions	*further testing of domains - *Test other domains (PWI, Accommodation, with and without children) satisfaction *Test any revisions or additions to module questions since June	*Test any revisions or additions to module questions since July	*Test any revisions or additions to module questions since August *test frequency vs. Intensity of emotion (split level trial)	*Test any revisions or additions to module questions since September	*Test any revisions or additions to module questions since October	*Test any revisions or additions to module questions since November

Evaluative Module – questions already asked in June OPN Survey

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how satisfied are you with your personal relationships?
Overall, how satisfied are you with your physical health?
Overall, how satisfied are you with your mental well-being?
Overall, how satisfied are you with your work situation?
Overall, how satisfied are you with your financial situation?
Overall, how satisfied are you with the area where you live?
Overall, how satisfied are you with the amount of time you have to do things you like doing?
Overall, how satisfied are you with the well-being of your child/children?
Overall, how satisfied with your life were you 12 months/ 5 years ago?
Overall, how optimistic do you feel about the next 12 months / 5 years?
<p>Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from nought at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you.</p> <p>On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?</p> <p>On which step of the ladder do you think you will stand about five years from now?</p>
On a nought to 10 scale where nought is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied', how satisfied are you with the balance between the time you spend on your paid work and the time you spend on other aspects of your life?

Eudemonic Module – questions already asked in July OPN survey

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
On a scale where nought is 'no control at all' and 10 is 'complete control', How much control do you feel you have over important aspects of your life?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all lonely' and 10 is 'extremely lonely', How lonely do you feel in your daily life?
On a scale where nought is 'no opportunity' and 10 is 'a great deal of opportunity', In your daily life, how much opportunity do you feel you have to show how capable you are?
On a scale where nought is 'no sense of direction at all' and 10 is 'complete sense of direction', To what extent do you generally feel you have a sense of direction in your life?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all positive' and 10 is 'extremely positive', How positive do you feel about yourself as a person?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all important' and 10 is 'extremely important', How important is it to you to learn new things?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all well' and 10 is 'extremely well', How well do you generally get on with people around you?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all useful' and 10 is 'extremely useful', How useful a role do you feel you play in the world around you?
On a scale where nought is 'no respect at all' and 10 is 'complete respect', To what extent do you feel that people treat you with respect?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all appreciated' and 10 is 'completely appreciated', To what extent do you feel appreciated by the people you know?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all optimistic' and 10 is 'extremely optimistic', How optimistic do you feel about your future?
On a scale where nought is 'no sense of accomplishment at all' and 10 is 'complete sense of accomplishment', To what extent do you feel a sense of accomplishment from things you do in your daily life?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all quickly' and 10 is 'extremely quickly', How quickly do you feel you return to normal after setbacks in your life?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all' and 10 is 'a great deal', To what extent do you feel that you learn new things in your daily life?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all able' and 10 is 'extremely able', To what extent do you feel able to deal with important problems in your life?

Experience Module – questions planned to be asked in August OPN survey

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how relaxed did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how calm did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how content did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how excited did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how energised did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how peaceful did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how joyful did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how much enjoyment did you experience yesterday?
Overall, how much pain did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how stressed did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how worried did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how angry did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how lonely did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how tired did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how bored did you feel yesterday?
Overall, how much pain did you feel yesterday?

Wider societal module – Potential areas for September OPN – yet to be finalised

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
On a scale where nought is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
Do you have any relative, friend or neighbours that you can ask for help?
To what extent do you feel that you have someone to discuss personal matters with?
Overall, how satisfied are you with the area where you live?
To what extent do you feel that you are involved in the local community?
To what extent do you feel that this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?
To what extent do you feel you can influence local decisions?
To what extent do you feel people in this local area pull together to improve the neighbourhood?
Would you say most people can be trusted?
How safe do you feel walking alone in your area after dark?
In general how would you rate the quality of the following public services in the UK? 0-10 scale (worst quality) to (best quality): health services, education system, public transport childcare services, health care services for the elderly, state pension system
Please tell me how much you personally trust each of the following institutions? 0-10 scale, a score of 10 indicates complete trust): parliament, legal system, police, press, government, political parties
To what extent do you feel informed about national affairs?
To what extent do you feel you can influence decisions affecting the UK?
How satisfied are you with the UK as a country to live in these days?
How optimistic are you about the future?

Notes

ⁱ List of Advisory Forum members available at www.ons.gov.uk/well-being/advisory-forum-members/index.html

ⁱⁱ Information about the Technical Advisory Group available at www.ons.gov.uk/well-being/technical-advisory-group/index.html