



Personal Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

2017/18

PERSONAL WELLBEING IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 2017/18

INTRODUCTION

An individual's thoughts and feelings about their quality of life is an important aspect of their personal wellbeing. How satisfied people are with their lives, their levels of happiness and anxiety, and whether or not they think the things they do are worthwhile all have strong links with many elements of wellbeing, for example, people's health, employment and relationships¹.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Measuring National Wellbeing Programme monitors and reports "how the UK as a whole is doing". The measures monitored through the Programme are organised into 10 domains, including one domain focusing on personal (subjective) wellbeing. This release presents headline 2017/18 personal wellbeing data for Northern Ireland.

NISRA has participated in the Measuring National Wellbeing Programme since it was established in 2010, and several of our household surveys incorporate the four personal wellbeing questions outlined below.

- 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 to each question on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". You should note therefore that while a higher score indicates better wellbeing in relation to life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness, a lower score indicates better wellbeing for anxiety.

Personal wellbeing statistics are reported in two ways,

1. The average (mean) rating, and
2. The proportion scoring within each of the rating thresholds outlined in the table below.

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

Recent research² commissioned by ONS and undertaken by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in collaboration with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing reinforced the importance of reporting 'threshold' statistics to aid understanding of wellbeing inequalities. The appropriateness of the threshold ranges was tested by ONS who concluded that the thresholds be kept as they currently are until further work takes place (details of this testing are available in Section 7 of Personal well-being in the UK: January to December 2017³).

The Northern Ireland data included in this report are drawn from an annual Labour Force Survey dataset (year ending March 2018). These are the data which ONS use when reporting National Statistics on personal wellbeing⁴.

Your views on these statistics are welcome. If you wish to discuss this report or provide feedback, please contact Niall O'Neill, NISRA on niall.o'neill@nisra.gov.uk.

¹ [Measuring National Well-being - What matters most to Personal Well-being?](#)

² [Measuring Wellbeing Inequality](#)

³ [Personal well-being in the UK](#)

⁴ [ONS Wellbeing](#)

SUMMARY

The average (mean) wellbeing ratings across the four measures of personal wellbeing in 2017/18 (year to end March 2018) were:

- 7.9 out of 10 for **life satisfaction**
- 8.1 out of 10 for feeling that what you do in life is **worthwhile**
- 7.8 out of 10 for **happiness** yesterday
- 2.5 out of 10 for **anxiety** yesterday

Although there has been no significant change in the levels of reported personal wellbeing compared with 2016/17, there has been an improvement in all measures since these data were first collected in 2011/12.

As has been the case in previous years, people in Northern Ireland gave better ratings across all personal wellbeing measures on average compared with people in England, Scotland or Wales.

Average personal wellbeing scores for life satisfaction and feelings that activities people do in life are worthwhile tended to be lower among those aged 45-54 and males. However, females reported a higher anxiety score on average than males (indicative of poorer personal wellbeing).

The proportion of people reporting 'very high' levels (score of 9 or 10) of personal wellbeing in 2017/18 was:

- 37% for **life satisfaction**
- 44% for feeling that what you do in life is **worthwhile**
- 42% for **happiness** yesterday

In terms of **anxiety**, where a lower score indicates better personal wellbeing, 47% of people reported a 'very low' score (0 or 1).

Draft Programme for Government & NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan - Wellbeing Framework

Outcomes: *We care for others and we help those in need
We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity*

Indicator: *Average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities*

This report provides the latest figure for the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities, which is a population indicator included in the wellbeing framework overarching the draft Programme for Government and NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan.

Latest position: In 2017/18, the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities was 7.21, which represents no real change from the 2014/15 baseline year (7.24). The average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of those without a disability (8.18).

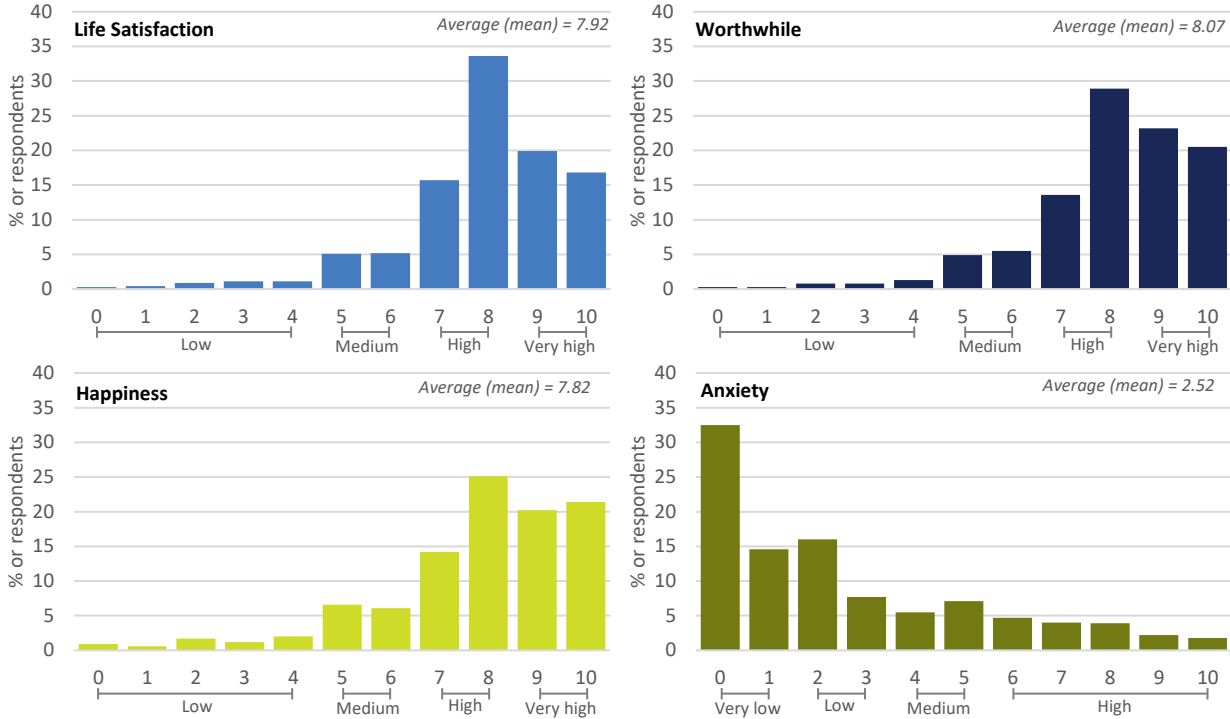
The latest position in relation to all population indicators in the wellbeing framework is available at this [link](#).

Please note that Annex 1 of this report contains data tables and Annex 2 provides some background to the development of the 4 personal wellbeing questions.

DISTRIBUTION OF WELLBEING RATINGS

The frequency charts in Figure 1 show the distribution of scores for each personal wellbeing measure in 2017/18. All four personal wellbeing measures are skewed towards the positive end of the scale (note that a lower score in the anxiety scale represents better personal wellbeing).

Figure 1
Distributions of the proportion of respondents scoring 0 to 10 on the 4 personal wellbeing scales, 2017/18



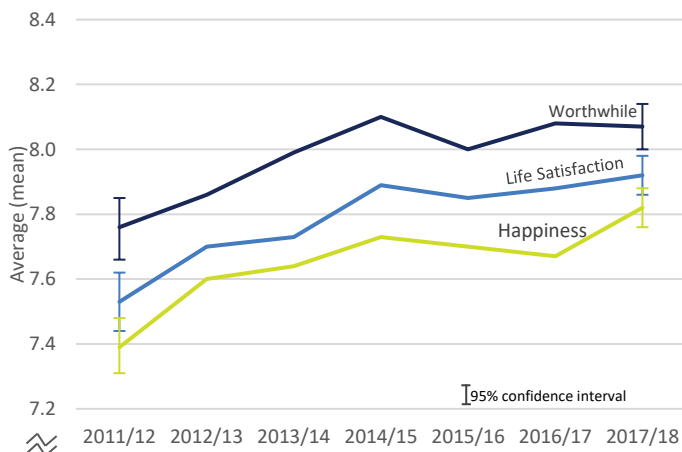
Roughly two in five people report ‘very high’ levels of personal wellbeing (score of 9 or 10) for life satisfaction (36.7%), worthwhile (43.7%) and happiness (41.6%). Small proportions of respondents reported ‘low’ levels of personal wellbeing (score of 0 to 4) in these areas (life satisfaction: 3.8%, worthwhile: 3.4%, happiness: 6.3%).

In terms of anxiety, 47.1% of respondents report a ‘very low’ level (score of 0 or 1), while 16.5% report a ‘high’ level of anxiety (score of 6 to 10).

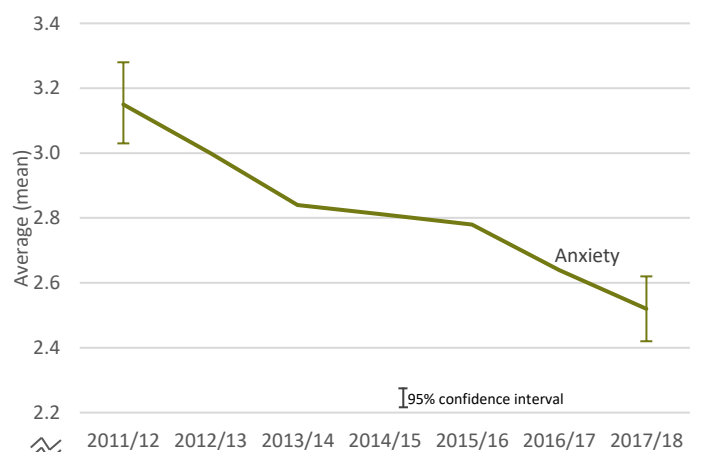
AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS - TIME SERIES

There has been a significant improvement in average personal wellbeing ratings in Northern Ireland for all four measures since data were first collected in 2011/12.

Figure 2
Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings 2011/12 to 2017/18



Average anxiety ratings 2011/12 to 2017/18



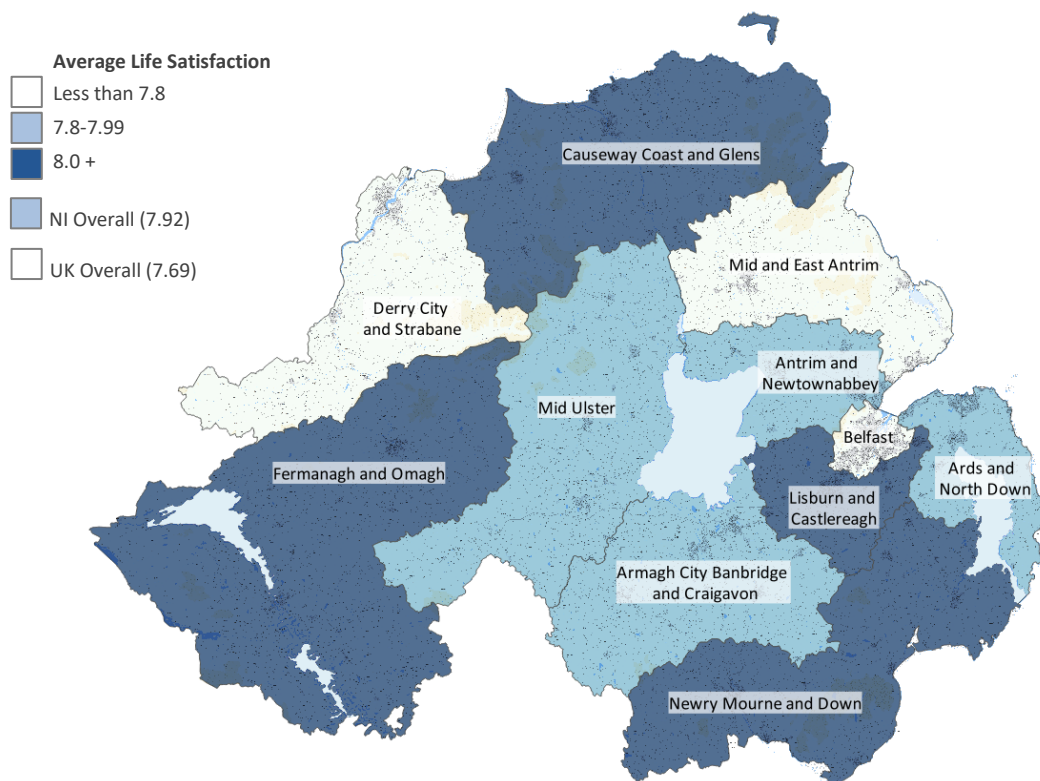
Throughout the period, people in Northern Ireland reported higher average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings compared with the UK overall, and in recent years there has also been a difference in terms of anxiety, with NI respondents indicating a lower score on average (indicative of better personal wellbeing) than in the UK overall (Table 2).

AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT

Average personal wellbeing ratings varied across local government districts (LGDs). Several LGDs in Northern Ireland rank highly across all UK local authorities in terms of personal wellbeing, for example Newry, Mourne & Down ranks highly across all four measures. Data for all local authorities are available from the ONS website at this [link](#), and average scores for NI LGDs are available in Table 3 in Annex 1.

When considering statistics by LGD it is important to note the relatively small sample sizes upon which such figures are based. For example, in 2017/18, the number of respondents providing personal wellbeing ratings ranged from around 180 in Mid & East Antrim to almost 500 in Belfast, and there were fewer than 250 respondents in five of the eleven LGDs. Figure 3 below illustrates the variation in average life satisfaction ratings across Northern Ireland.

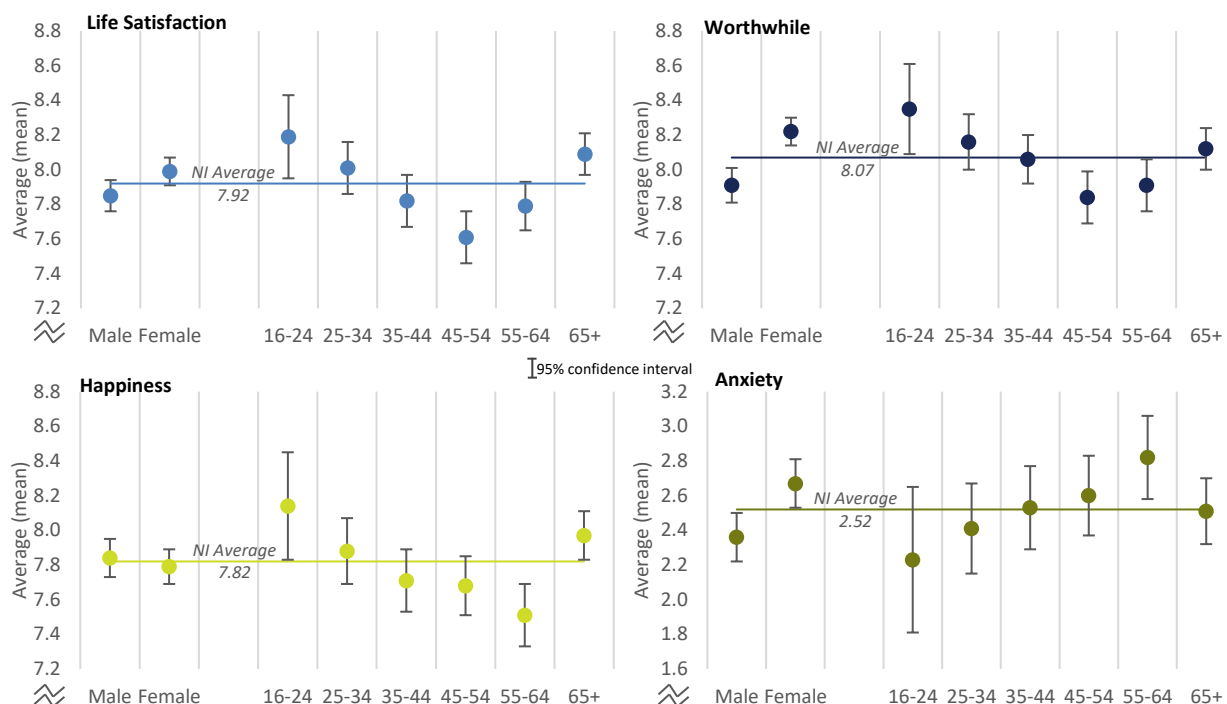
Figure 3
Average life satisfaction rating by Local Government District
 2017/18



AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS – GENDER AND AGE

Figure 4 shows the variation in average personal wellbeing scores by gender and age. In terms of life satisfaction and feelings that activities they do in life are worthwhile, personal wellbeing tended to be lower among those aged 45-54. Average scores for these measures were also lower among males than females. However, females reported a higher anxiety score on average than males (indicative of poorer personal wellbeing).

Figure 4
Personal Wellbeing by Age and Gender
 2017/18



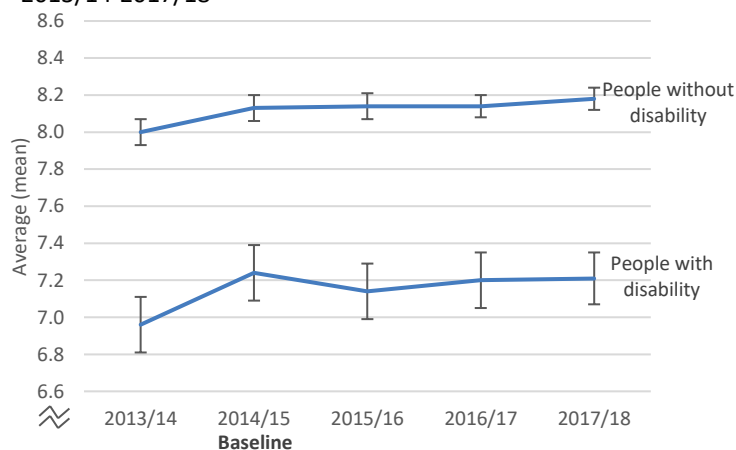
AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS - DISABILITY

The data presented in this report are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS uses the Government Statistical Service harmonised definition of disability which covers people who report,

- physical or mental health condition(s) or illness(es) lasting or expected to last 12 months or more; and
- the condition(s) or illness(es) reduce their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

The average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities is a population indicator included in the wellbeing framework which overarches the draft Programme for Government⁵ and NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan⁶. In 2017/18, around a quarter of LFS respondents (aged 16+) had a disability and, as can be seen from Figure 5, their average life satisfaction score has been consistently lower than that of those without a disability.

Figure 5
Average Life Satisfaction Score by Disability
 2013/14-2017/18



In 2017/18, the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities was 7.21, which was significantly lower than that of those without a disability (8.18).

On average, people with a disability also report lower ratings for worthwhile (7.39 compared with 8.32) and happiness (7.12 compared with 8.07) than those without a disability.

The average anxiety score is higher males (poorer personal wellbeing) for those with a disability than those without (3.56 compared with 2.14).

⁵ [NI Programme for Government 2016-21](#)

⁶ [Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018/19](#)



ANNEX 1: TABLES

ANNEX 2: BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 4 PERSONAL WELLBEING QUESTIONS

ANNEX 1: TABLES

Table 1: Personal Wellbeing by year, 2011/12-2017/18

			Thresholds - Proportion of respondents in each threshold (%)			
		Average (mean)	Low (0-4)	Medium (5-6)	High (7-8)	Very High (9-10)
Life Satisfaction	2011/12	7.53	6.4	15.9	47.7	30.1
	2012/13	7.70	4.2	15.8	47.1	32.9
	2013/14	7.73	4.7	15.1	44.4	35.8
	2014/15	7.89	3.4	13.0	44.4	39.2
	2015/16	7.85	4.4	12.8	44.0	38.7
	2016/17	7.88	4.3	10.6	48.0	37.1
	2017/18	7.92	3.8	10.2	49.3	36.7
Worthwhile	2011/12	7.76	4.4	14.6	44.1	36.8
	2012/13	7.86	3.7	13.5	45.5	37.3
	2013/14	7.99	3.3	11.4	43.5	41.7
	2014/15	8.10	2.9	12.7	39.6	44.8
	2015/16	8.00	4.2	11.4	42.1	42.5
	2016/17	8.08	3.1	9.6	46.1	41.2
	2017/18	8.07	3.4	10.3	42.6	43.7
Happiness	2011/12	7.39	9.8	16.4	41.1	32.7
	2012/13	7.60	8.5	13.5	41.9	36.1
	2013/14	7.64	8.0	13.9	40.0	38.2
	2014/15	7.73	6.8	14.8	37.9	40.6
	2015/16	7.70	8.7	13.5	35.3	42.6
	2016/17	7.67	7.4	14.6	39.2	38.8
	2017/18	7.82	6.3	12.8	39.3	41.6
			Thresholds - Proportion of respondents in each threshold (%)			
		Average (mean)	Very Low (0-1)	Low (2-3)	Medium (4-5)	High (6-10)
Anxiety	2011/12	3.15	34.1	29.7	15.9	20.3
	2012/13	3.00	38.5	26.7	15.3	19.5
	2013/14	2.84	40.6	27.2	14.8	17.4
	2014/15	2.81	42.0	24.0	16.2	17.8
	2015/16	2.78	43.6	23.9	14.3	18.2
	2016/17	2.64	46.3	22.7	13.7	17.3
	2017/18	2.52	47.1	23.8	12.6	16.5

Table 2: Personal Wellbeing, Average (mean) score in Northern Ireland and UK overall, 2011/12-2017/18

Average (mean)	Life Satisfaction		Worthwhile		Happiness		Anxiety	
	NI	UK	NI	UK	NI	UK	NI	UK
2011/12	7.53	7.42	7.76	7.67	7.39	7.29	3.15	3.13
2012/13	7.70	7.46	7.86	7.70	7.60	7.30	3.00	3.03
2013/14	7.73	7.51	7.99	7.74	7.64	7.39	2.84	2.92
2014/15	7.89	7.61	8.10	7.82	7.73	7.46	2.81	2.86
2015/16	7.85	7.65	8.00	7.84	7.70	7.48	2.78	2.87
2016/17	7.88	7.68	8.08	7.86	7.67	7.51	2.64	2.90
2017/18	7.92	7.69	8.07	7.88	7.82	7.52	2.52	2.89

Table 3: Personal Wellbeing, Average (mean) by Gender, Age, and Local Government District, Disability, 2017/18

Average (mean)	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxiety
Gender				
Male	7.85	7.91	7.84	2.36
Female	7.99	8.22	7.79	2.67
Age-group				
16-24	8.19	8.35	8.14	2.23
25-34	8.01	8.16	7.88	2.41
35-44	7.82	8.06	7.71	2.53
45-54	7.61	7.84	7.68	2.60
55-64	7.79	7.91	7.51	2.82
65+	8.09	8.12	7.97	2.51
Local Government District				
Antrim & Newtownabbey	7.84	7.92	7.75	2.45
Ards & North Down	7.95	8.10	7.90	2.54
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	7.97	8.11	7.94	2.15
Belfast	7.53	7.68	7.26	3.00
Causeway Coast & Glens	8.28	8.39	8.15	2.41
Derry & Strabane	7.72	8.14	7.90	3.47
Fermanagh & Omagh	8.06	8.24	7.95	2.09
Lisburn & Castlereagh	8.18	8.20	8.02	1.92
Mid & East Antrim	7.77	7.87	7.60	2.71
Mid Ulster	7.94	8.02	7.85	2.65
Newry, Mourne & Down	8.30	8.51	8.22	1.94
Disability (GSS Harmonised Definition)				
People with disability	7.21	7.39	7.12	3.56
People without disability	8.18	8.32	8.07	2.14

ANNEX 2: BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 4 PERSONAL WELLBEING QUESTIONS

The ONS personal wellbeing questions were developed as part of the Measuring National Wellbeing Programme.

ONS sought advice from experts working in the field of subjective wellbeing and consulted with specialists on the National Statistician's Measuring National Wellbeing Advisory Forum and Technical Advisory Group. Based on this, as well as extensive question testing, four questions were designed. They provide a concise and balanced approach to the measurement of subjective wellbeing, drawing on three main theoretical approaches.

These include:

- the 'evaluative' approach which asks people to reflect on their life and assess how it is going overall in terms of their satisfaction with life;
- the 'eudemonic' approach which asks people to consider the extent to which they feel a sense of meaning and purpose in life;
- the 'experience' approach which asks about people's positive and negative experiences and emotions over a short period of time to assess these aspects of personal wellbeing on a day-to-day basis

ONS conducted focus groups with members of the public in 2013, and found that 'personal wellbeing' is clearer and simpler for people to understand than 'subjective wellbeing'. Since then, both the questions and estimates have been referred to as 'personal wellbeing'.

The following are the ONS personal wellbeing questions that have been included on the Annual Population Survey each year since 2011:

1. overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? (evaluative approach)
2. overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? (eudemonic approach)
3. overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? (experience approach)
4. overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (experience approach)

All are answered using a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'. Further information on the ONS approach to measuring personal wellbeing can be found in the paper 'Measuring Subjective Well-being' (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/well-being/wellbeing-knowledge-bank/understanding-wellbeing/measuring-subjective-well-being.pdf>)