

Personal Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

2018/19

Estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in Northern Ireland.

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1. 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 that focuses on personal (subjective) wellbeing. This release presents some key 2018/19 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". This means that a higher score indicates better wellbeing in relation to life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness, and 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

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 should 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 the annual Labour Force Survey dataset. These are the data which ONS uses when reporting National Statistics on personal wellbeing⁴. Personal wellbeing estimates for the years 2011/12 to 2018/19 have been revised following the re-weighting of the LFS and estimates for these years presented here will differ from previous publications (See Annex 2: Point 3).

Your views on these statistics are welcome. If you wish to discuss this report or provide feedback, please contact Katie Barbour, NISRA on katie.barbour@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](#)

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The average (mean) wellbeing ratings across the four measures of personal wellbeing in 2018/19 (year to end March 2019) were:

- 7.89 out of 10 for **life satisfaction**
- 8.07 out of 10 for feeling that what you do in life is **worthwhile**
- 7.69 out of 10 for **happiness** yesterday
- 2.83 out of 10 for **anxiety** yesterday

All four measures of personal wellbeing have improved since 2011/12 when data were first collected, however life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness have not changed in the last year (since 2017/18) in terms of a statistically significant change.

Anxiety scores have shown consistent improvement each year between 2011/12 and 2017/18. However in the last year (between 2017/18 and 2018/19) the mean anxiety score increased significantly from 2.53 to 2.83. The increase in average anxiety score was driven by a decrease in the proportion of people who reported 'Very low' anxiety (a score of 0 or 1) which fell from 47 % in 2017/18 to 41 % in 2018/19.

As has been the case in previous years, people in Northern Ireland gave better average ratings for life satisfaction, feelings that things done in life are worthwhile and happiness than people in England, Scotland or Wales. The increase in average anxiety score seen in 2018/19 brings Northern Ireland closer into line with the rest of the UK (Table 2).

The average score for happiness within Northern Ireland was higher and anxiety was lower among those aged 65+, which is indicative of better wellbeing in both measures. The average personal wellbeing score for feelings that things that people do in life are worthwhile was higher among females. However, females reported a higher anxiety score on average than males, which is indicative of poorer wellbeing in this measure (Figure 4).

The proportion of people reporting 'Very high' (score of 9 or 10) levels of personal wellbeing in 2018/19 was:

- 37% for **life satisfaction**
- 42% for feeling that what you do in life is **worthwhile**
- 38% for **happiness** yesterday.

In terms of **anxiety**, where a lower score indicates better personal wellbeing, 41% 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 an updated 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 2018/19, the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities was 7.05, 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 (8.21).

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

3. DISTRIBUTION OF WELLBEING RATINGS

Figure 1

Distributions of the proportion of respondents scoring 0 to 10 on each of the 4 personal wellbeing scales 2018/19

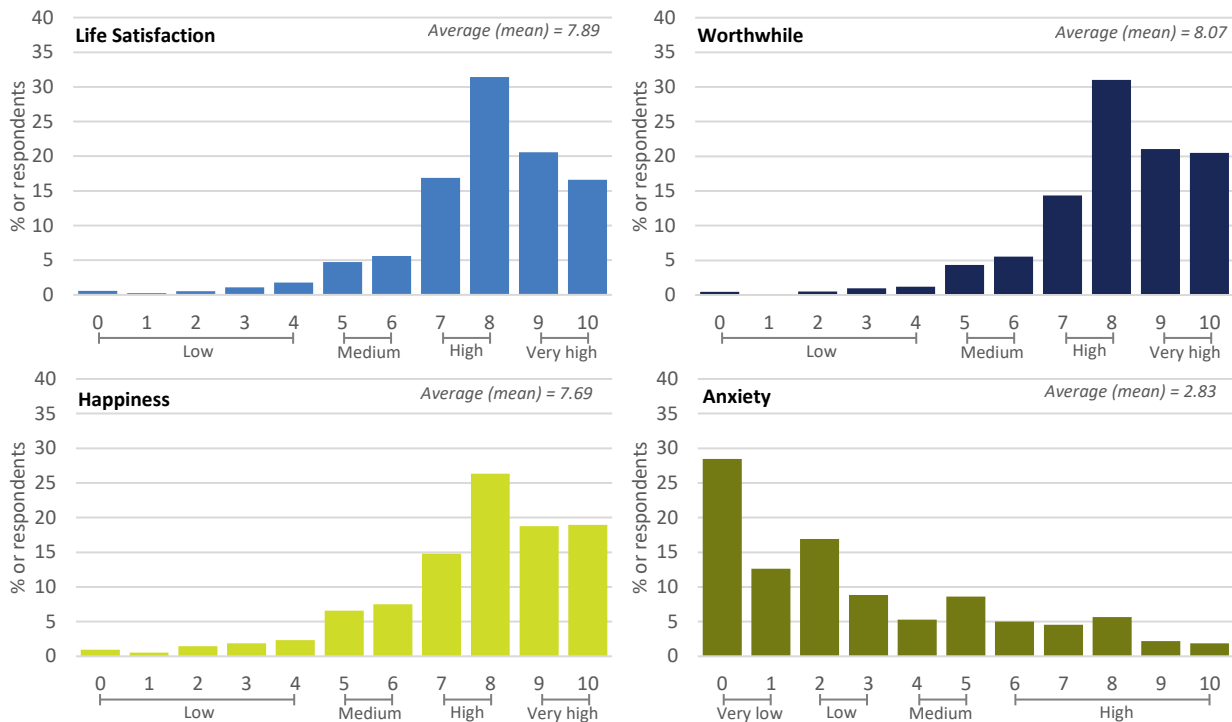


Figure 1 shows the distribution of scores for each personal wellbeing measure in 2018/19 in Northern Ireland. All four personal wellbeing measures are skewed towards the positive end of the scale (note that a lower score in the anxiety scale represents better personal wellbeing).

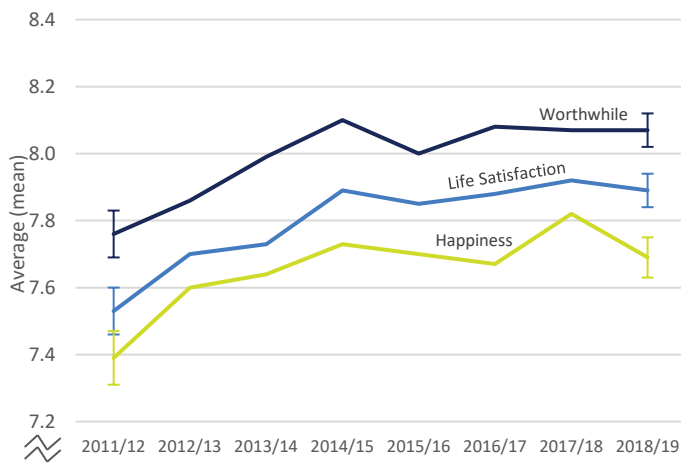
Roughly two in five people report 'Very high' levels of personal wellbeing (score of 9 or 10) for life satisfaction (37%), worthwhile (42%) and happiness (38%). Small proportions of respondents reported 'Low' levels of personal wellbeing in these areas (life satisfaction: 4%, worthwhile: 3%, happiness: 7%).

In terms of anxiety, 41% of respondents report a 'Very low' level (score of 0 or 1), while 19% report a 'High' level of anxiety (score of 6 to 10).

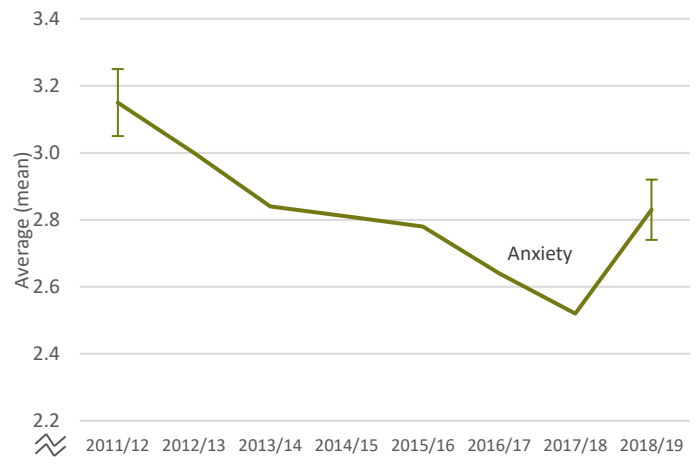
4. AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS - TIME SERIES

Figure 2

Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings
2011/12 to 2018/19



Average anxiety ratings
2011/12 to 2018/19



There has been a significant improvement in average personal wellbeing ratings in Northern Ireland for all four measures since these data were first collected in 2011/12 (Figure 2).

Throughout this 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 than is the case in the UK overall (Table 2).

5. AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT¹

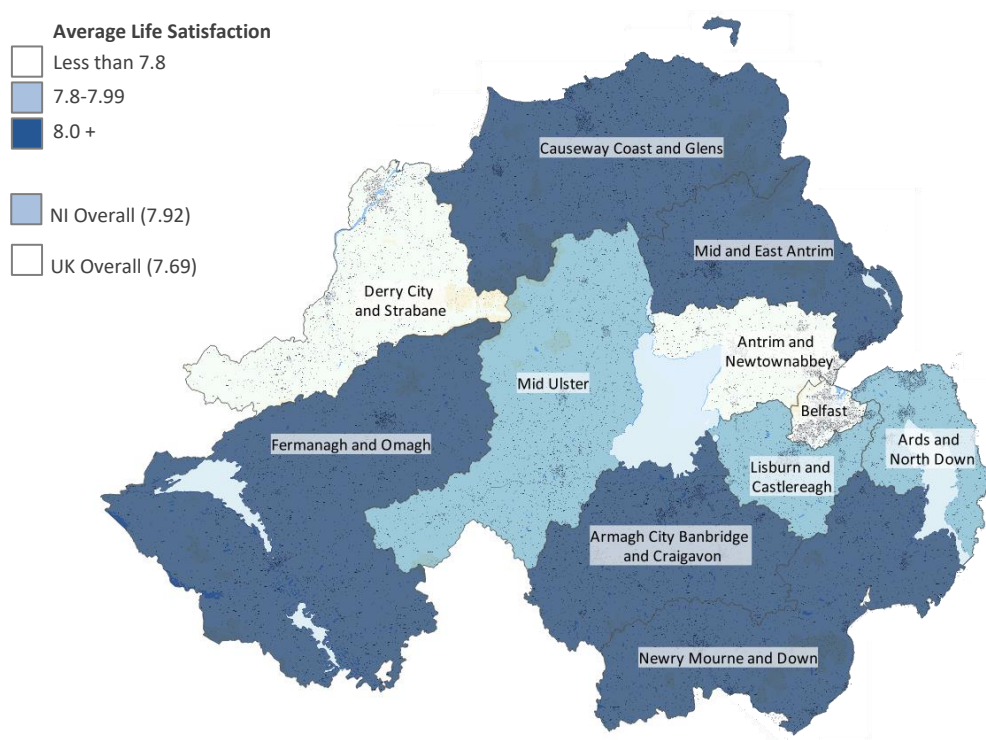
Average personal wellbeing ratings in 2018/19 varied across local government districts (LGDs). Several LGDs in Northern Ireland rank highly across all UK local authorities for several measures of personal wellbeing. For example Newry, Mourne and Down and Causeway Coast and Glens District Councils rank highly (are within the top 10% of UK districts) for both life satisfaction and feelings that things done in life are worthwhile. 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.

The map below illustrates the variation in average life satisfaction ratings across Northern Ireland.

Figure 3

Average life satisfaction rating by Local Government District

2018/19



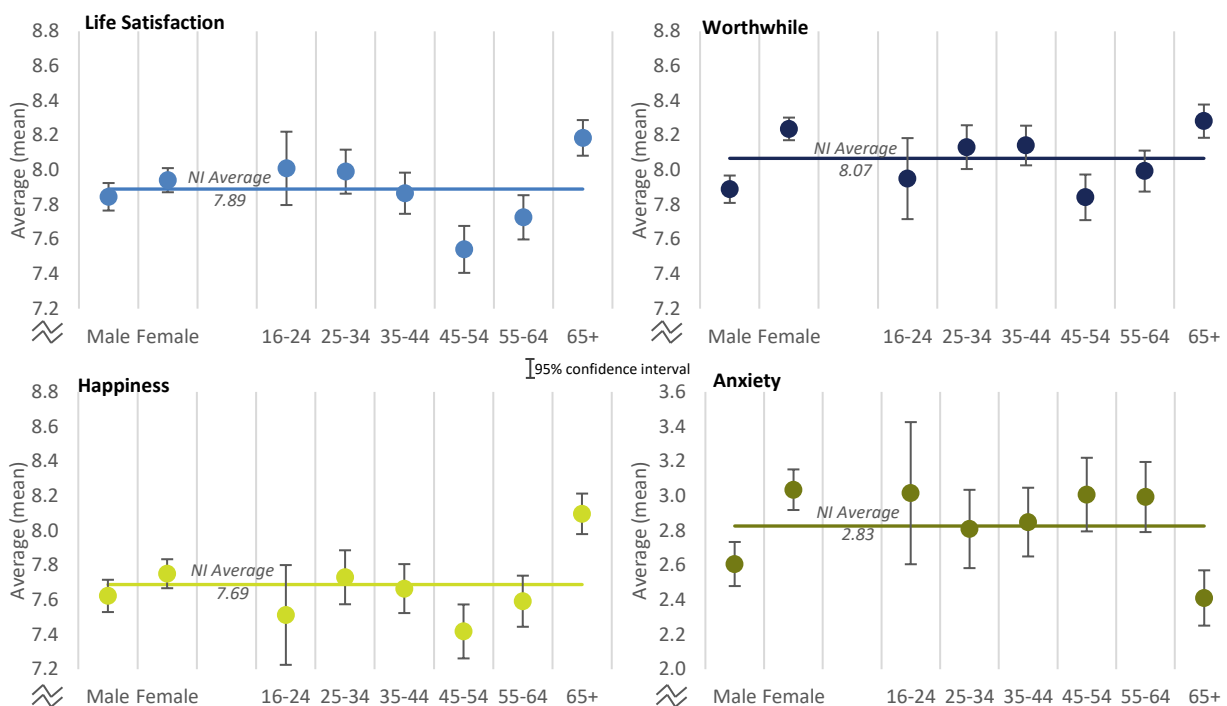
¹ When considering statistics by LGD it is important to note the relatively small sample sizes upon which such figures are based (See Annex 2: Point 2).

6. PERSONAL WELLBEING BY AGE AND GENDER

Figure 4 shows the variation in average personal wellbeing scores by age and gender in 2018/19 in Northern Ireland. Feelings of happiness were higher and feelings of anxiety were lower for people aged 65+ which is indicative of better wellbeing. Average scores for feeling that things that what we do in life is worthwhile were higher for females than males. However, females reported a higher anxiety score on average than males, which is indicative of poorer wellbeing in this measure.

Figure 4

Personal Wellbeing by Age and Gender
2018/19



7. PERSONAL WELLBEING BY 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.

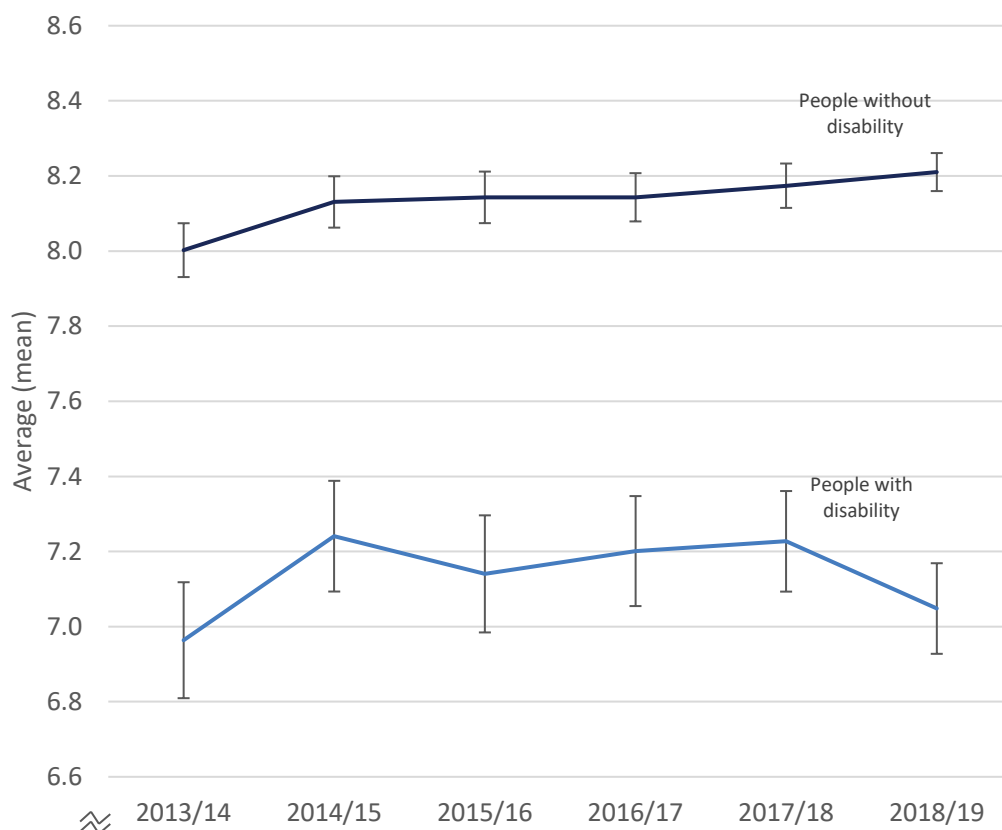
In 2018/19, more than 1 in 4 (27%) of LFS respondents (aged 16+) had a disability and their average life satisfaction score has been consistently lower than that of those without a disability (Figure 5).

In 2018/19, the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities was 7.05 which was significantly lower than that of those without a disability (8.21).

On average, people with a disability also report lower ratings for worthwhile (7.39 compared with 8.32) and happiness (6.94 compared with 7.97) than those without a disability. The average anxiety score is higher for those with a disability than those without (3.89 compared with 2.42).

Figure 5

Average Life Satisfaction Score by Disability
2013/14-2018/19



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

⁶ [Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018/19](#)

Annex

Annex 1: Tables

Annex 2: Further Information

ANNEX 1: TABLES

Table 1: Personal Wellbeing by year, 2011/12-2018/19¹

		Average (mean)	Thresholds - Proportion of respondents in each threshold (%)			
			Low (0-4)	Medium (5-6)	High (7-8)	Very high (9-10)
Life Satisfaction	2011/12	7.53	6.4	15.8	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	3.6	10.4	49.7	36.4
	2018/19	7.89	4.2	10.3	48.3	37.1
Worthwhile	2011/12	7.76	4.4	14.6	44.1	36.9
	2012/13	7.86	3.7	13.5	45.5	37.3
	2013/14	7.98	3.3	11.4	43.5	41.7
	2014/15	8.10	2.9	12.7	39.6	44.8
	2015/16	8.00	4.1	11.3	42.1	42.5
	2016/17	8.08	3.1	9.6	46.1	41.2
	2017/18	8.08	3.3	10.0	43.1	43.6
	2018/19	8.07	3.2	9.9	45.4	41.5
Happiness	2011/12	7.39	9.8	16.3	41.2	32.7
	2012/13	7.60	8.5	13.5	41.8	36.2
	2013/14	7.63	8.0	13.9	40.0	38.1
	2014/15	7.73	6.7	14.8	37.9	40.6
	2015/16	7.70	8.6	13.4	35.4	42.6
	2016/17	7.67	7.4	14.6	39.2	38.8
	2017/18	7.80	6.3	12.9	39.8	41.0
	2018/19	7.69	7.1	14.1	41.2	37.7
		Average (mean)	Thresholds - Proportion of respondents in each threshold (%)			
			Very low (0-1)	Low (2-3)	Medium (4-5)	High (6-10)
Anxiety	2011/12	3.15	34.1	29.6	15.8	20.4
	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	41.9	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	2.53	47.0	23.8	12.5	16.7
	2018/19	2.83	41.1	25.8	13.9	19.3

Table 2: Personal Wellbeing, Average (mean) score in Northern Ireland and UK overall, 2011/12-2018/19¹

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	7.98	7.74	7.63	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	8.08	7.88	7.80	7.52	2.53	2.89
2018/19	7.89	7.71	8.07	7.89	7.69	7.56	2.83	2.87

¹ Personal wellbeing estimates for the years 2011/12 to 2018/19 have been revised following the re-weighting of the LFS and estimates for these years will differ from previous publications (See Annex 2: Point 3).

Table 3: Personal Wellbeing, Average (mean) by Gender, Age, and Local Government District, Disability, 2018/19

Average (mean)	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxiety
Gender				
Male	7.85	7.89	7.62	2.61
Female	7.94	8.24	7.75	3.04
Age-group				
16-24	8.01	7.95	7.51	3.02
25-34	7.99	8.13	7.73	2.81
35-44	7.87	8.14	7.67	2.85
45-54	7.54	7.84	7.42	3.01
55-64	7.73	7.99	7.59	2.99
65+	8.19	8.28	8.10	2.41
Local Government District				
Antrim & Newtownabbey	7.74	7.98	7.62	2.80
Ards & North Down	7.91	8.12	7.65	2.61
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	8.04	8.20	7.69	2.72
Belfast	7.58	7.60	7.29	3.31
Causeway Coast & Glens	8.06	8.25	7.82	2.80
Derry & Strabane	7.72	8.00	7.66	3.35
Fermanagh & Omagh	8.20	8.26	8.15	2.25
Lisburn & Castlereagh	7.97	8.10	7.91	2.56
Mid & East Antrim	8.04	8.39	7.78	2.57
Mid Ulster	7.96	8.12	7.75	2.70
Newry, Mourne & Down	8.05	8.29	7.87	2.71
Disability (GSS Harmonised Definition)				
People with disability	7.05	7.39	6.94	3.89
People without disability	8.21	8.32	7.97	2.42
General Health				
Very good	8.37	8.45	8.13	2.15
Good	8.05	8.18	7.81	2.78
Fair	7.49	7.85	7.45	3.33
Bad	6.38	6.74	6.14	4.62
Very bad	5.80	6.20	5.52	5.10
Employment				
Employed	8.08	8.24	7.84	2.59
Unemployed	7.19	7.49	6.98	3.24
Economically Inactive	7.67	7.86	7.51	3.14
Marital Status				
Single, never married	7.74	7.86	7.45	3.09
Married, living with husband/wife	8.19	8.37	8.00	2.47
Married, separated from husband/wife	6.77	7.11	6.93	3.87
Divorced	7.43	7.67	7.17	3.31
Widowed	7.75	7.97	7.67	2.83
Rural/Urban				
Rural	8.06	8.25	7.89	2.58
Urban	7.79	7.95	7.56	2.98

ANNEX 2: FURTHER INFORMATION

1. 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 ask 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 'Personal well-being user guidance'.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingsurvey/userguide>

2. Sample Sizes

The sample size for the UK as a whole was approximately 146,500. The sample for Northern Ireland was 4,080. When considering statistics by LGD it is important to note the relatively small sample sizes upon which such figures are based. For example, in 2019, the number of respondents providing personal wellbeing ratings ranged from around 270 in Antrim and Newtownabbey to 780 In Belfast with 4 of 11 LGDs having fewer than 300 respondents The confidence intervals around the average (mean) life satisfaction therefore range from 7.54 to 7.95 for Antrim and Newtownabbey and from 7.45 to 7.71 for Belfast.

3. LFS data reweighting

Based on new population estimates, new wellbeing weights have been available for the LFS data since March 2019. This has resulted in Personal wellbeing estimates for the years 2011/12 to 2018/19 being revised and estimates for these years presented here will differ from previous publications.

4. Significant Difference

Any differences mentioned in this release are “statistically significant” as determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals. Confidence intervals and comparisons of confidence intervals have been made on unrounded data.