

Statistical bulletin

# Personal well-being in the UK: Oct 2015 to Sept 2016

Estimates of life satisfaction, whether you feel the things you do in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK and for constituent countries for the period October 2015 to September 2016.



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# 1 . Main points

Average ratings of anxiety increased slightly between the years ending September 2015 and 2016.

Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings were unchanged between the years ending September 2015 and 2016.

Wales was the only country to have higher anxiety ratings than the UK average.

## 2 . Statistician's quote

"At a time when economic measures are generally improving, this is not necessarily reflected in how people tell us they are feeling about their lives. Whilst it is too early to say why anxiety ratings have increased slightly and why life satisfaction, happiness and worthwhile ratings have levelled off in the past 12 months, we know from our previous research that factors impacting most on people's personal well-being include health, work situation and relationship status. Publishing this data quarterly, rather than annually, means we can monitor these trends more closely."

Matthew Steel, Office for National Statistics.

## 3 . How we measure personal well-being

Since 2011, we have asked personal well-being questions to adults in the UK, to better understand how they feel about their lives. This release presents headline results for the year ending September 2016, together with how things have changed over the last 5 years.

The 4 personal well-being questions are:

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

People are asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". We produce estimates of the mean ratings for all 4 personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions, [using the thresholds](#).

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

For the first time we are presenting annual estimates of personal well-being on a rolling quarterly basis. These estimates provide a timelier picture of how the UK population are feeling and allows us to monitor how well-being is changing in the UK more frequently.

The annual reporting period for this release includes only 3 months worth of data for the period after the EU referendum. The first release to include data solely for the period after the referendum and therefore enabling pre- and post-referendum comparisons, will be July 2016 to June 2017, and will be published in autumn 2017.

We are able to compare with the same period last year (October 2014 to September 2015) to identify any changes that may have occurred. However, we are not able to reliably compare with the preceding period (July 2015 to June 2016) as they include overlapping time periods which contain the same data.

We welcome feedback on these changes. Please contact the Quality of Life team ( [QualityOfLife@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:QualityOfLife@ons.gsi.gov.uk)) with any comments or suggestions, including your views on improvements we might make.

## 5 . Self-reported anxiety rises

The average (mean) ratings across the 4 measures of personal well-being in the year ending September 2016 were:

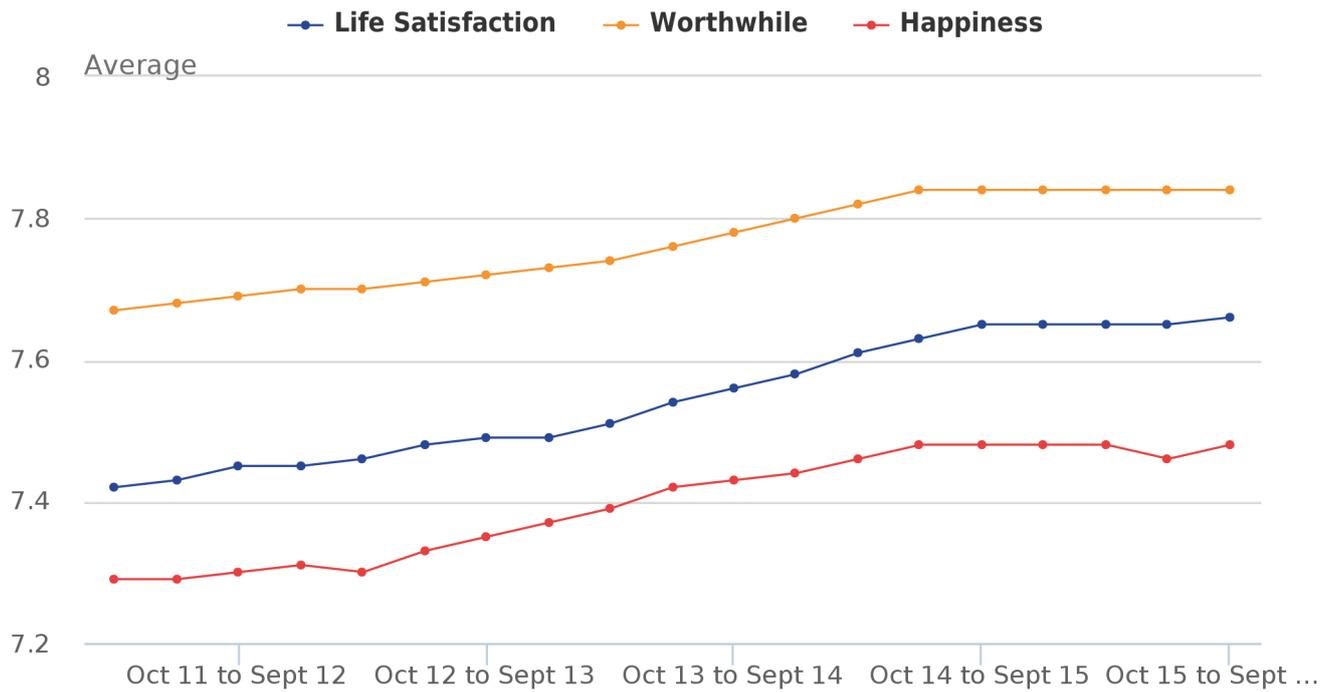
- 7.7 out of 10 for life satisfaction
- 7.8 out of 10 for feeling that what you do in life is worthwhile
- 7.5 out of 10 for happiness yesterday
- 2.9 out of 10 for anxiety yesterday

Average ratings of anxiety increased when comparing the years ending September 2015 and 2016 (Figure 1b). Over the same period, ratings of life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile and happiness were unchanged (Figure 1a).

Despite the recent increase in anxiety, average ratings remained lower compared with the years ending September 2012 and 2013. Although we have not seen year-on-year improvements in life satisfaction, worthwhile or happiness, average ratings remain at their highest level since we began collecting the data in 2011.

**Figure 1a: Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending September 2016**

United Kingdom

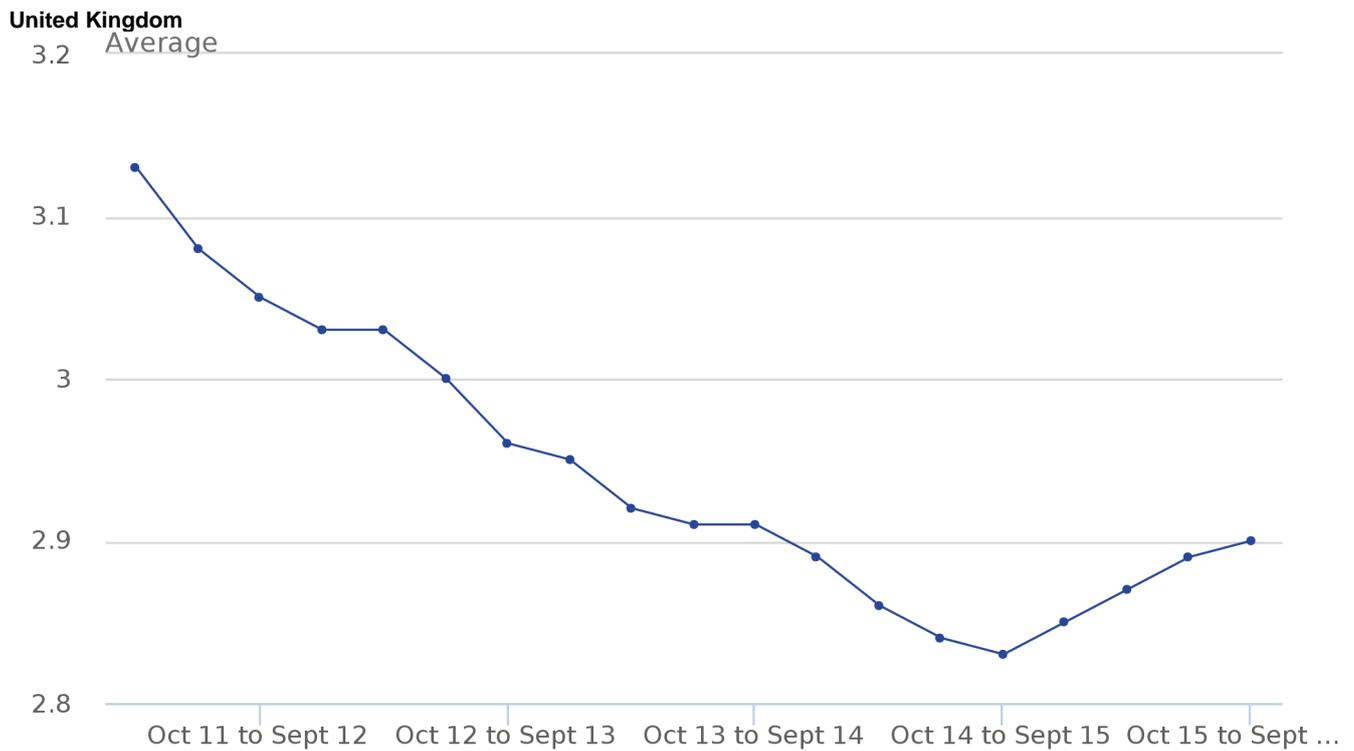


Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Chart axis does not start at 0.
2. Year ending March 2012 was the first year of data collection.

**Figure 1b: Average anxiety ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending September 2016**



**Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics**

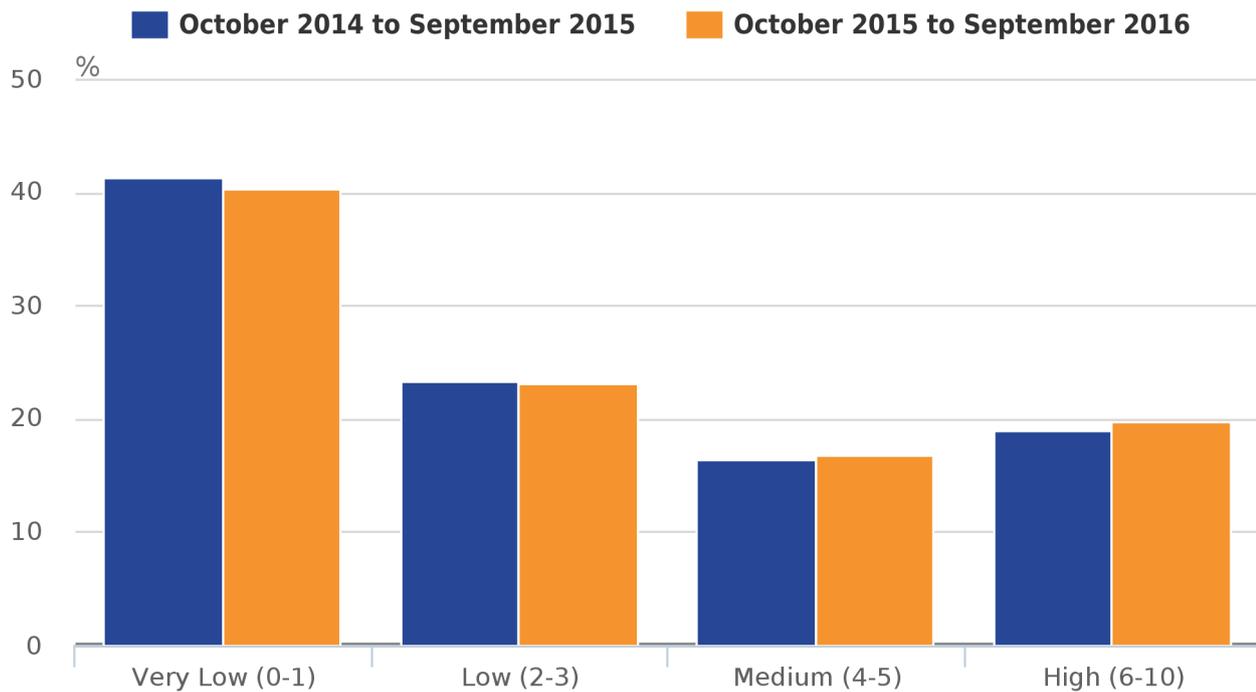
**Notes:**

1. Chart axis does not start at 0.
2. Year ending March 2012 was the first year of data collection.

To better understand the increase in anxiety in the UK, Figure 2 shows the change in reported anxiety between the years ending September 2015 and September 2016. There has been both a reduction in those reporting very low anxiety and an increase in those reporting high anxiety.

**Figure 2: Proportions reporting very low, low, medium and high, years ending September 2015 and September 2016**

United Kingdom



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

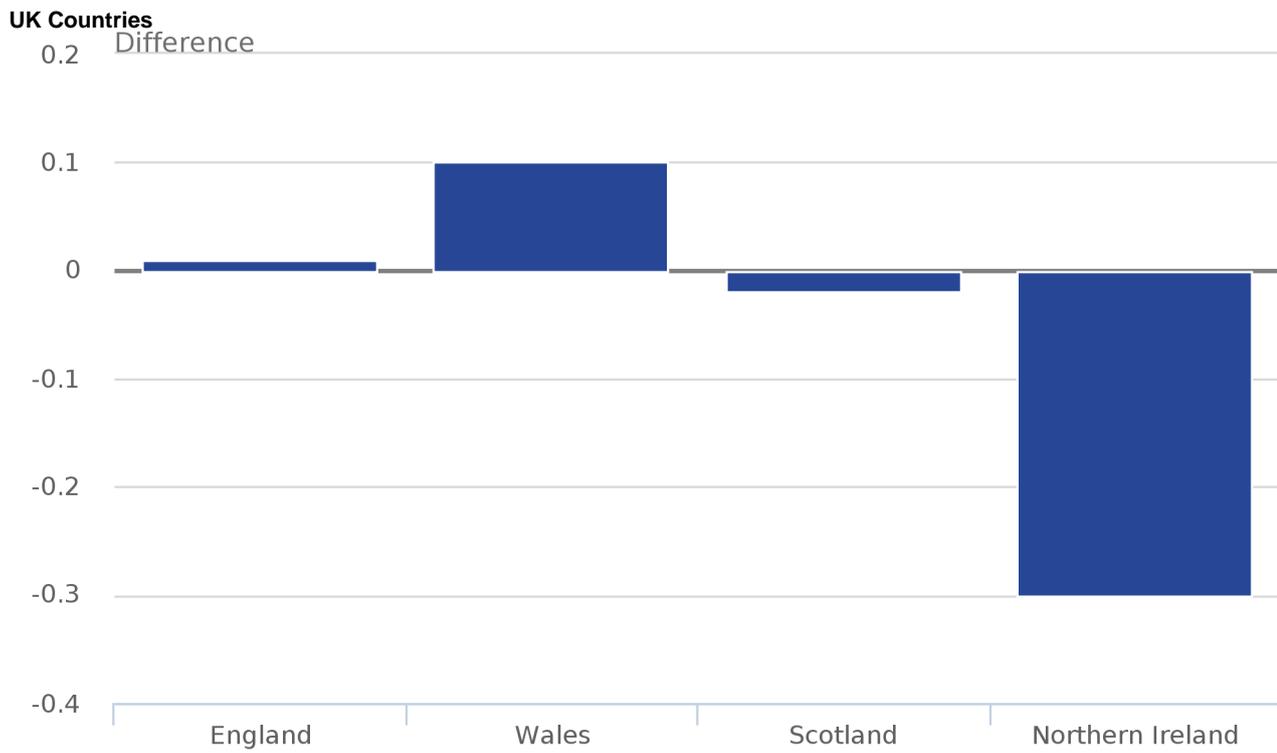
## 6 . Personal well-being ratings continue to be highest in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland continues to have the highest personal well-being ratings when compared with the other constituent countries of the UK (Figure 3).

Ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness in Northern Ireland are higher than those in England, Wales, Scotland and the UK average.

Wales has higher anxiety than the UK average. Conversely, Northern Ireland has lower anxiety than the UK average.

**Figure 3: Difference in anxiety ratings compared with UK average ratings, year ending September 2016**

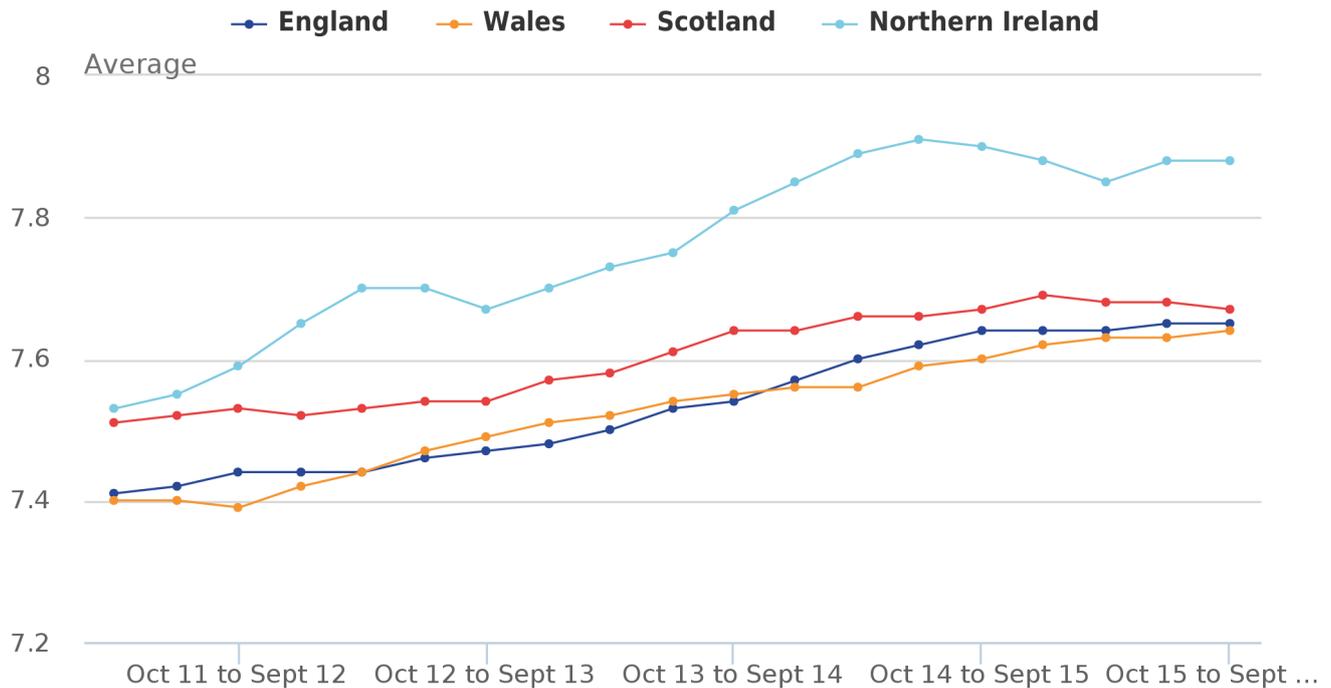


**Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics**

It is also important to consider how personal well-being ratings have changed for each country across the years; we have been collecting the data to see whether there is a differing picture (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Average life satisfaction ratings, years ending March 2012 to September 2016**

UK countries



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Chart axis does not start at 0.
2. Year ending March 2012 was the first year of data collection.

In England and in Wales there were no year-on-year improvements between the years ending September 2015 and September 2016 for life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness. However, there was an increase in anxiety between these 2 time periods.

Scotland and Northern Ireland have not seen a significant change in any of the well-being measures between the years ending September 2015 and September 2016.

## 7 . What may explain these results

In [previous research](#) we identified people's self-reported health as the most important factor associated with personal well-being, followed by their work situation and relationship status.

During the year ending September 2016, the unemployment rate has continued to fall and GDP per head has increased. There has been a mixed picture in health outcomes for the period 2013 to 2015. Life expectancy has continued to increase for both males and females. However, both the proportion of life spent disability-free and the proportion of life spent in good health have fallen between 2009 to 2011 and 2013 to 2015, for both males and females.

It is possible the lack of improvement in 3 of the 4 personal well-being measures and increase in anxiety in this period compared with this period last year could be associated with the uncertainties surrounding governance, the economy and global security. For example, the latest period covered by these data included campaigning for the EU referendum, as well as 3 months post-EU referendum. In addition there was severe flooding across parts of the UK and numerous terror attacks around the world.

These results may also be reflecting people's thoughts and feelings about the future, where an [Ipsos Mori poll](#) in February 2016 showed that 54% of people believed that today's youth would have a worse quality of life than their parent's generation. This was up from 35% in 2011 and 12% in 2003.

## 8 . Links to related statistics

[Personal well-being in the UK: 2015 to 2016](#)

[Personal well-being in the UK: local authority update, 2015 to 2016](#)

[Measuring national well-being in the UK, domains and measures: Sept 2016](#)

[Measuring National Well-being: At what age is Personal Well-being the highest?](#)

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

[Economic Well-being: Quarter 3 July to September 2016](#)

[Social capital across the UK: 2011 to 2012](#)

[Health State Expectancies, UK: 2013 to 2015](#)

## 9 . Quality and methodology

1. The [Personal Well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information document](#) contains important information on:

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

2. Labelling of thresholds

**Table 1: Labelling of threshold**

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

Source: Office for National Statistics

3. All the differences noted in the text are statistically significant. The statistical significance of differences are approximate because they are determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals. This method provides a conservative estimate of statistical significance, which may result in estimates that are statistically significantly different to one another being assessed as not.