

Statistical bulletin

# Personal well-being in the UK: July 2016 to June 2017

Estimates of personal well-being for the UK and countries of the UK for the year ending June 2017.



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# 1 . Main points

- Average ratings of life satisfaction, feeling that the things we do in life are worthwhile and happiness have increased slightly in the UK between the years ending June 2016 and 2017.
- There was no change in average anxiety ratings in the UK between the years ending June 2016 and 2017.
- Improvements in life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings in the UK were driven by England, the only country where average ratings across these measures improved.
- People in Northern Ireland report the highest levels of personal well-being, when compared with the UK average.
- This publication is the first to present a full year of personal well-being data since the EU referendum.

## 2 . Statistician's comment

"Today's figures, the first to be based on a full year of data since the EU referendum, show small increases in how people in the UK rate their life satisfaction, happiness and feelings that the things they do in life are worthwhile. The improvements were driven by England - the only country where quality of life ratings got better over the last year."

Matthew Steel – Office for National Statistics

## 3 . Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings reach highest levels since 2011

The average (mean) ratings across the four measures of personal well-being in the year ending June 2017 were:

- 7.7 out of 10 for life satisfaction
- 7.9 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

Between the years ending June 2016 and 2017, there have been statistically significant improvements in average ratings of life satisfaction, feeling the things we do in life are worthwhile and happiness for the UK overall. There was no change in average ratings of anxiety.

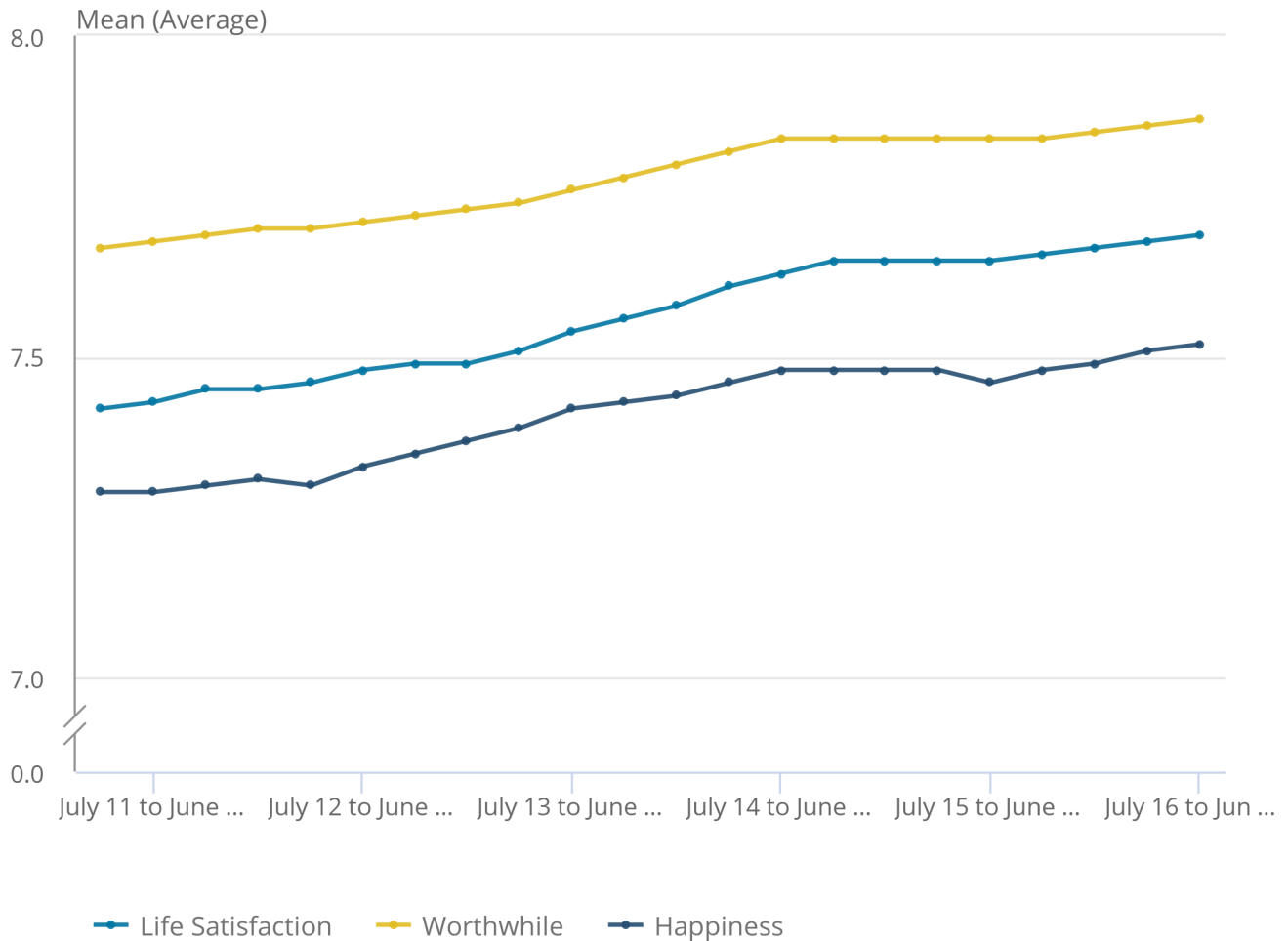
Figures 1a and 1b display the changes in personal well-being between the years ending March 2012 and June 2017. In the year ending June 2017, average ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness reached their highest levels since we began measuring personal well-being in 2011. For anxiety, average ratings reached a low in the year ending September 2015 but subsequently rose. They have since levelled off and were unchanged between the years ending June 2016 and 2017 and remain lower compared with the years ending June 2012 and 2013.

**Figure 1a: Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending June 2017**

UK

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UK



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

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Notes:

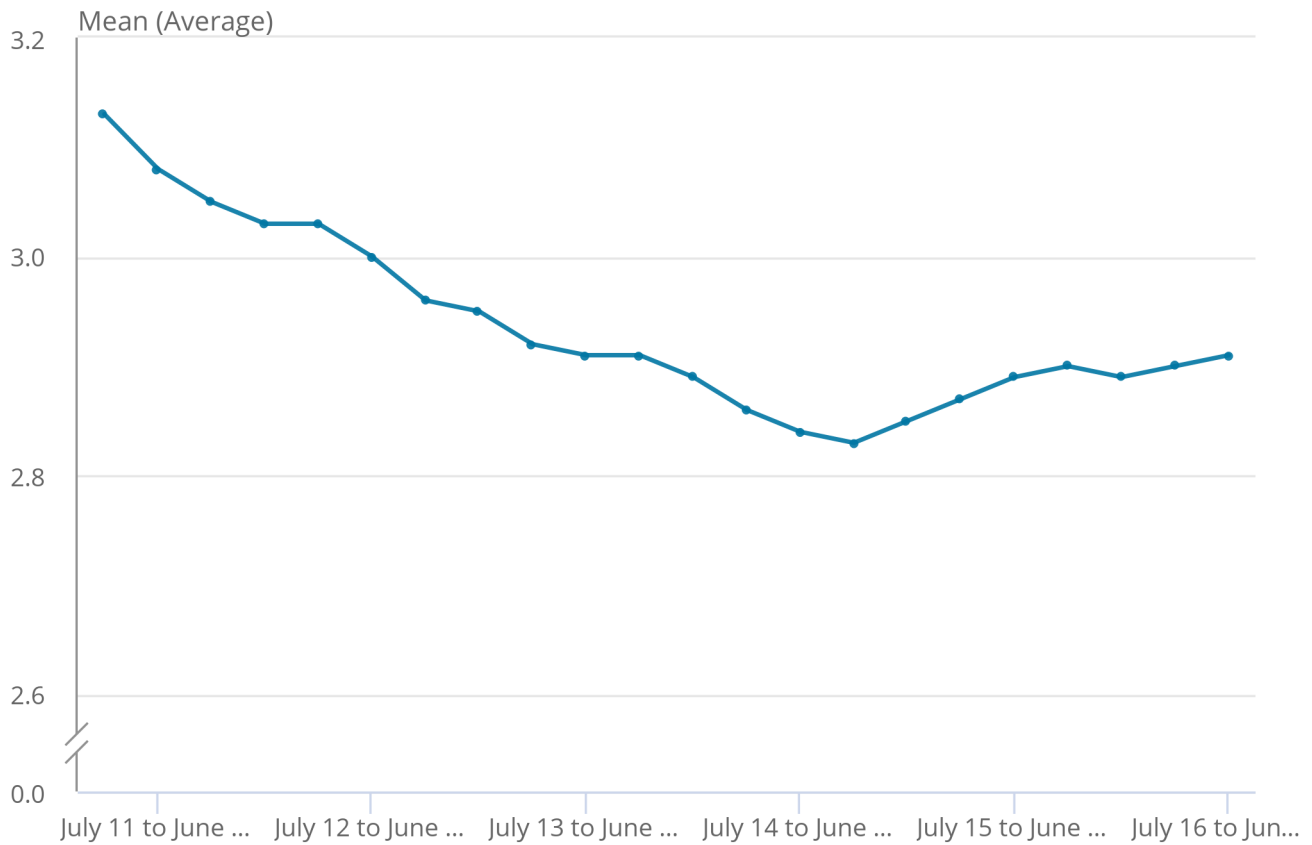
1. Chart axis does not start at zero.

Figure 1b: Average anxiety ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending June 2017

UK

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UK



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Chart axis does not start at zero.

## **4 . Increase in the proportion of people reporting very high levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings**

A higher proportion of people reported very high levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness in the year ending June 2017 compared with the previous year. The proportion rating their anxiety as very low did not change between the year ending June 2016 and June 2017.

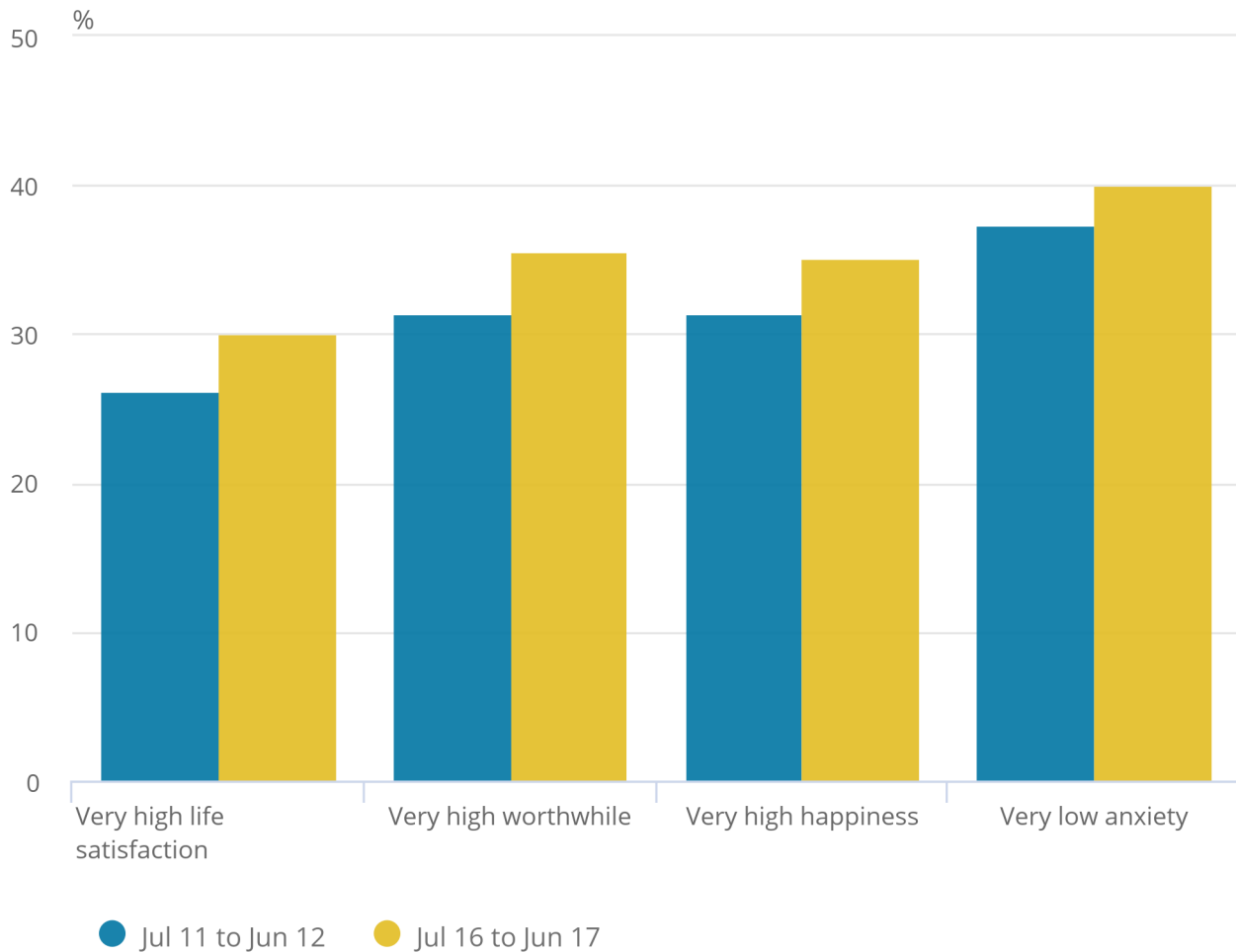
Figure 2 displays changes in the proportion of people reporting the highest levels of personal well-being between the years ending June 2012 and 2017. In the year ending June 2017 a higher proportion of people reported very high levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness compared with the year ending June 2012. In addition to this, there is also an increase in the proportion of people who reported very low levels of anxiety between the years ending June 2012 and 2017.

**Figure 2: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness and very low ratings of anxiety**

UK, year ending June 2012 and year ending June 2017

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness and very low ratings of anxiety

UK, year ending June 2012 and year ending June 2017



Source: Annual Population Survey (APS), Office for National Statistics

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**Notes:**

1. Very high life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness are defined as those reporting 9 or 10 out of 10.
2. Very low anxiety is defined as those reporting 0 or 1 out of 10.

## 5 . England was the only country to show improvements across any measures of personal well-being

Between the years ending June 2016 and 2017, improvements in life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings in the UK were driven by England, where average (mean) ratings improved across all three measures. England also had an increase in the proportion of respondents reporting very high levels of personal well-being across each of these measures. No changes in reported personal well-being were found in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

However, people in Northern Ireland continued to report higher average levels of personal well-being across all four measures compared with the UK average in the year ending June 2017.

## 6 . What may explain these results?

Research shows that a number of factors influence our quality of life and well-being. Employment and job satisfaction, our health, the quality of our relationships and our financial situation are just some of the aspects of our lives shown to have an effect. Over time, changes and differences in the four measures could be related to these factors.

Some of the increases in well-being ratings may be explained through the improvement in certain economic indicators within the UK. For example, the employment rate is at its highest level since comparable records began in 1971 and the unemployment rate is at its joint lowest since 1975. Additionally, there were improvements in both gross domestic product (GDP) per head and net national disposable income (NNDI) per head. Despite these improvements, real household disposable income (RHDI) per head fell for the fourth quarter in a row and, for the first time in two years, consumers reported a worsening perception of their own financial situation in April to June 2017.

Over the year that this publication covers, various situations of uncertainty, not least in political terms, have unfolded in the UK. For example, alongside the appointment of a new prime minister, the 12-month period covered by this release also allows the first opportunity to consider how personal well-being has fared in the year following the UK's vote to leave the European Union (EU). [Ipsos MORI's Political Monitor](#) asked people in the UK "Now that Britain has voted to leave the EU, to what extent do you think it will be better or worse for your own standard of living, or will it make no difference?" March 2017 saw 40% report that it would make no difference, which is up from 24% in October 2016, possibly implying that as time goes on people are becoming more relaxed about the implications of Brexit. Another thing to note is that although Article 50 has been triggered, we have not yet left the EU and hence the implications on the daily lives of people in the UK remain to be seen.

In addition to the political uncertainties mentioned previously, the UK has witnessed a number of other incidents over the year, including several terror attacks. Considering this, it may be surprising that levels of personal well-being are increasing. However, it is important to note these figures are only reported at a country and national level, and are presented over the year. It is therefore possible that any sudden or individual change in personal well-being may not be seen in the data.

We are always looking for ways to improve our releases and make them more useful and helpful. Please contact the Quality of Life team via email at [QualityOfLife@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:QualityOfLife@ons.gsi.gov.uk) with any comments or suggestions, including your views on improvements we could make.

## 7 . Links to related statistics

Recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) publications related to well-being:

[Personal well-being in the UK, local authority release: April 2016 to March 2017](#)

[Measuring national well-being in the UK, domains and measures: April 2017](#)

[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 1, January to March 2017](#)

[Wealth in Great Britain: Relationship between wealth, income and personal well-being, July 2011 to June 2012](#)  
[Income, Expenditure and Personal Well-being, 2011 to 2012](#)

[Social capital in the UK: May 2017](#)

[Well-being dashboard](#)

## 8 . Quality and methodology

The [Personal well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information report](#) contains important information on:

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

### How we measure personal well-being

Since 2011, we have asked personal well-being questions to adults aged 16 and over in the UK, to better understand how they feel about their lives. This release presents headline results for the year ending June 2017, along with changes over the last six years. It provides data at a national level and country level.

The four 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 four personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions, [using thresholds](#).



For more information on personal well-being, please see the [personal well-being user guide](#).

**Table 1: 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 – 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

The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are approximate because they are determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.

Comparisons have been based on unrounded data.

We are able to compare with the same period last year (July 2015 to June 2016) to identify any changes that may have occurred. However, we are not able to reliably compare with the preceding period (April 2016 to March 2017) as they include overlapping time periods that contain the same data.

Personal well-being data are now included within the main Annual Population Survey (APS) dataset rather than released as a separate dataset. As part of this transition, personal well-being estimates now go through the regular APS re-weighting timetable. For the series published in this release, the estimates for the years ending June 2013 through to 2017 have been weighted to 2015 mid-year population estimates (MYPEs). For more information, see [Impact of transition to Annual Population Survey dataset](#).