

Research Project: Work, Wellbeing and Welfare: Wellbeing and Young People.**Researchers:** Dr Julie Newton, Cerys Ponting

Background: There is growing academic and policy interest in the concept of ‘wellbeing’ and measures to explore it. In particular, there is recognition of the need to explore what wellbeing means for different social groups and the implications of this for wellbeing measurement, in the case of this project, specifically amongst children and young people.

Aims and objectives: The project aimed to facilitate young people’s engagement with the subject of wellbeing, and elicit their views on what constitutes wellbeing, including their ideas for its measurement, through an interactive workshop and associated support resources for teachers. The project also aimed to submit the findings to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) as one of the inputs into the UK national debate about wellbeing.

About the research: This project was commissioned by the ONS to provide preliminary data on the views of young people (16-19 year olds) in Wales on wellbeing. BRASS initially provided a literature review on the subject of young people and wellbeing as part of the project planning. The project involved trials of a Wellbeing Contemporary Science Debate (CSD) developed by Technquest in collaboration with BRASS. The trials took place in six schools and colleges in Wales (Torfaen, Caerphilly, Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taf) and were co-funded by the European Social Fund project ‘*Reach the Heights*’ and the ONS as part of its broader remit to stimulate a UK-wide debate on wellbeing and developing wellbeing measures. The CSD format used was based on DEMOCS (Deliberative Meeting of Citizens) originally developed by NEF. It is a conversation game that helps groups discuss issues using cards based on stories and information relating to the topic. The debate resources are developed with input from experts in the field (in this case with expertise from BRASS) and with facilitators to guide the discussion, not to influence the young people’s views, but to help them focus on the topic.

Results and outputs: The data collected from the trials suggests that wellbeing is multidimensional; there are multiple facets to how young people experience wellbeing. Our results based on word frequency analysis suggest that the key dimensions of wellbeing for young people (16-19) in order of most frequently cited were: friends, family, sports, money, food, music, health, fast-food, education and alcohol. The way in which these were subsequently grouped into categories and ranked provided insights into why these dimensions were more prevalent. Soundbites capturing the rich discussions emerging from the various activities provided further elaboration of why certain dimensions were highlighted as more important than others. The wellbeing dimensions highlighted in this project generated key wellbeing ‘domains’ for further wellbeing indicator development for this age group.

Friends and family by far outranked the other wellbeing influences cited. The discussions within the groups confirmed that these individuals were often perceived as the foundation of young peoples’ wellbeing by providing the core structure of their life (i.e. parents) and essential support: “*that’s what your life is built around...without any of them...the others don’t really count*”. Many of the pupils also put these individuals in other categories such as ‘most important’ and ‘essential’.

Other important wellbeing dimensions highlighted in the top ten influences included sports, particularly in relation to its role in socialising, entertainment and hobbies; money, which was often seen as a route to both independence and the purchasing of material possessions; food and health (both perceived as elements of basic needs and essentials), education which was perceived as a route to employment, money and independence; music and alcohol, which were often discussed in the context of socialising, entertainment and an aspect of teenage life. Additional dimensions of

wellbeing explored in more detail during the discussions focused on the importance of social networking sites and technology more generally (including mobile phones, the internet and videogames) for communicating between friends. The importance of feelings and emotions (“*like being happy to do them things that you want to do...it’s about how you feel about things*”) as well as humour and laughter (LOL) were also highlighted.

The trials also revealed that young people have very strong views about having their voices heard. The majority of our sample felt that young people are negatively stereotyped and that this is a key reason for why their views are not taken into account. When asked whether measuring wellbeing was worthwhile the majority agreed that it was particularly important for their age group as they were the future generation and were going to have an impact on the future development of the economy. It was strongly felt that they should have equal rights to older groups to be heard. It was also noted that it was important to monitor wellbeing for their age group as this is a highly stressful, emotional and transitional phase for young people with the pressures of exams and finding jobs. A number of participants also felt that social networking sites would be a more effective mechanism of outreach to gauge views of young people on wellbeing more generally. The results of this work suggest that the key dimensions of wellbeing for young people include the people in their lives (specifically friends and family), how they socialise (i.e. through technology, drinking, sports), and the spaces and times in which they socialise (schools, homes, weekends). These findings support the work of others working in this field who have highlighted the importance of family, friends, leisure, school/education/learning, behaviour, the local environment, community, money, attitudes and health. The centrality of interpersonal relationships with family and friends as well as the value of ‘activities’ and ‘things to do’ appears to be a consistent theme across current research on young people wellbeing.

Newton, J. and Ponting, C. (2013), [Eliciting young people’s views on wellbeing through contemporary science debates in Wales](#), *Child Indicators Research*, 6 (1), 71-95

Impacts achieved/potential for impact: The results were presented to a largely policy-maker audience in June 2011 at the National Museum of Wales as part of Wales Sustainability Week. Stephen Hicks, Assistant Deputy Director of the ONS's Measuring National Well-being Programme said: "*This kind of research is invaluable to our wider programme of well-being as the report contains qualitative information from young people in Wales. There is need to understand, as part of measuring National Well-being and sustainability, the issues that relate to young people and the findings from this research will help us to do that.*" The findings from the report were also mentioned in several key documents published in July 2011 at the six-month stage of the national ‘*What matters to you?*’ debate launched by the Prime Minister in November 2010. The insights should assist in developing future objective and subjective measures of wellbeing by including questions that address the specific areas which can be considered as examples of wellbeing ‘domains’ for this specific age group. Ideally, more research is required to unpack why these particular ‘domains’ are of importance and the links between them. Further comparison is also necessary in order to explore the extent to which these potential domains might differ amongst other age groups of young people and children as well as adults. Dr Julie Newton was also asked by the ONS to provide an analysis of the answers to the open-ended question about wellbeing measurement within the UK National Wellbeing survey.