

Statistical bulletin

Personal well-being in the UK: Jan to Dec 2016

Estimates of personal well-being for UK and countries of the UK for the year ending December 2016.



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1 . Main points

- No change in personal well-being ratings for the UK overall between years ending December 2015 and 2016.
- Anxiety ratings increased slightly in England but fell in Northern Ireland between years ending December 2015 and 2016.

2 . Statistician's quote

"Today's figures show there are no changes in personal well-being ratings at a UK level. However, average ratings of life satisfaction, feeling things done in life are worthwhile and happiness remain at their highest since we began collecting this data in 2011. There is a different picture at a country level, with self-reported anxiety improving in Northern Ireland but getting slightly worse in England over the past year.

"Whilst it is too early to say why this is, we know from our prior research that factors impacting on people's well-being include a person's sense of choice and contentment with their situation, along with health, job status and relationship status."

Matthew Steel, Office for National Statistics

3 . 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 December 2016, together with how things have changed over the last 5 years.

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](#).

4 . Things you need to know about this release

Annual estimates of personal well-being have been presented on a rolling quarterly basis since January 2017. These estimates provide a timelier picture of how the UK population are feeling and allow us to monitor how well-being is changing in the UK more frequently.

The annual reporting period for this release includes 6 months worth of data before and 6 months worth of data 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, which will be published in autumn 2017.

We are able to compare with the same period last year (January 2015 to December 2015) to identify any changes that may have occurred. However, we are not able to reliably compare with the preceding period (October 2015 to September 2016) as they include overlapping time periods that contain the same 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 with any comments or suggestions, including your views on improvements we might make.

5 . No change in personal well-being ratings for the UK overall

The average (mean) ratings across the four measures of personal well-being in the year ending December 2016 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

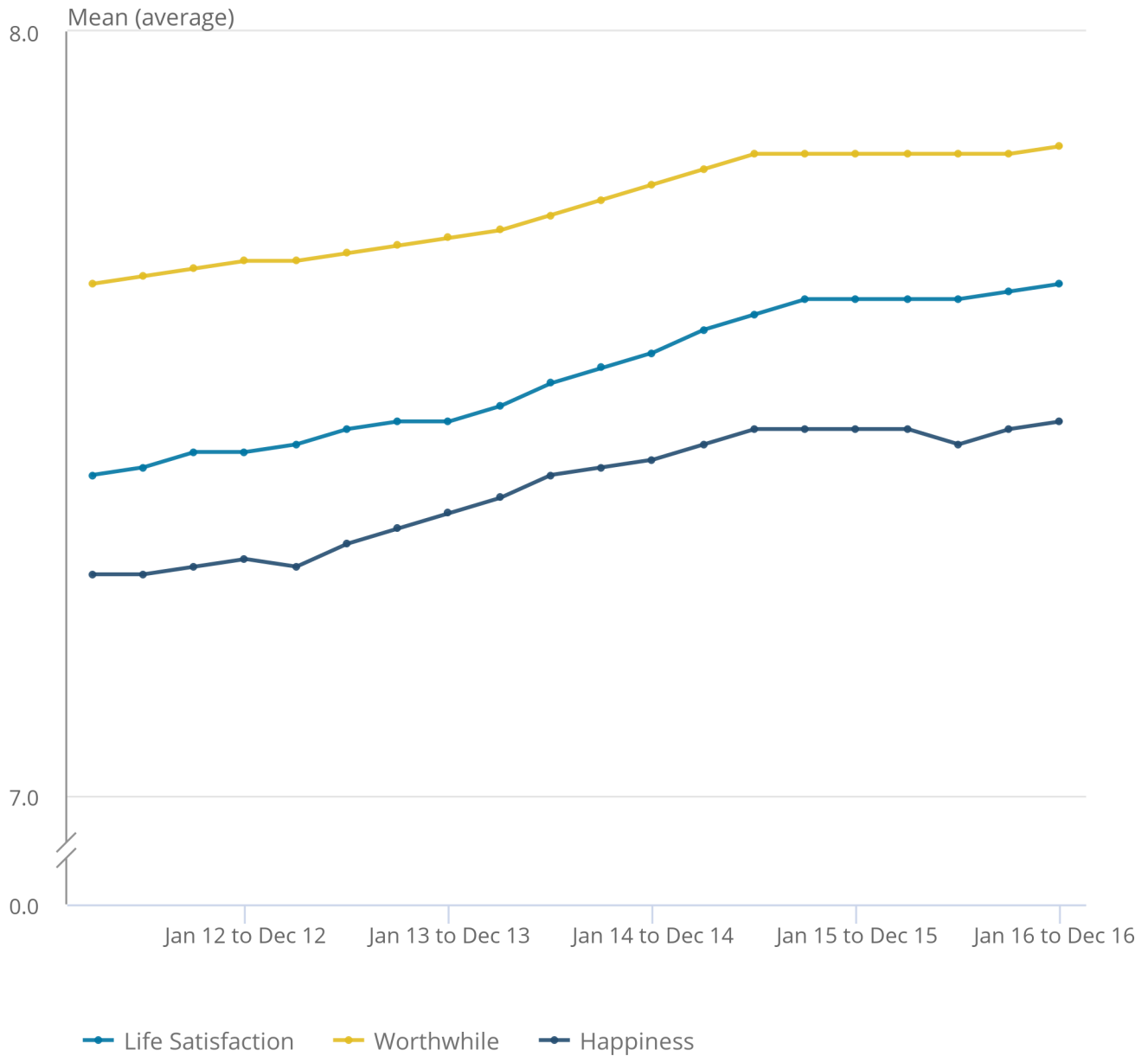
When comparing the years ending December 2015 and December 2016, there has been no statistically significant change in any of the four personal well-being measures for the UK overall, as shown in Figures 1a and 1b. Despite this, average ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness remain at their highest level since we began collecting the data in 2011. Average anxiety ratings are also lower compared with the years ending December 2012 and 2013.

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

UK

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UK



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

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Notes:

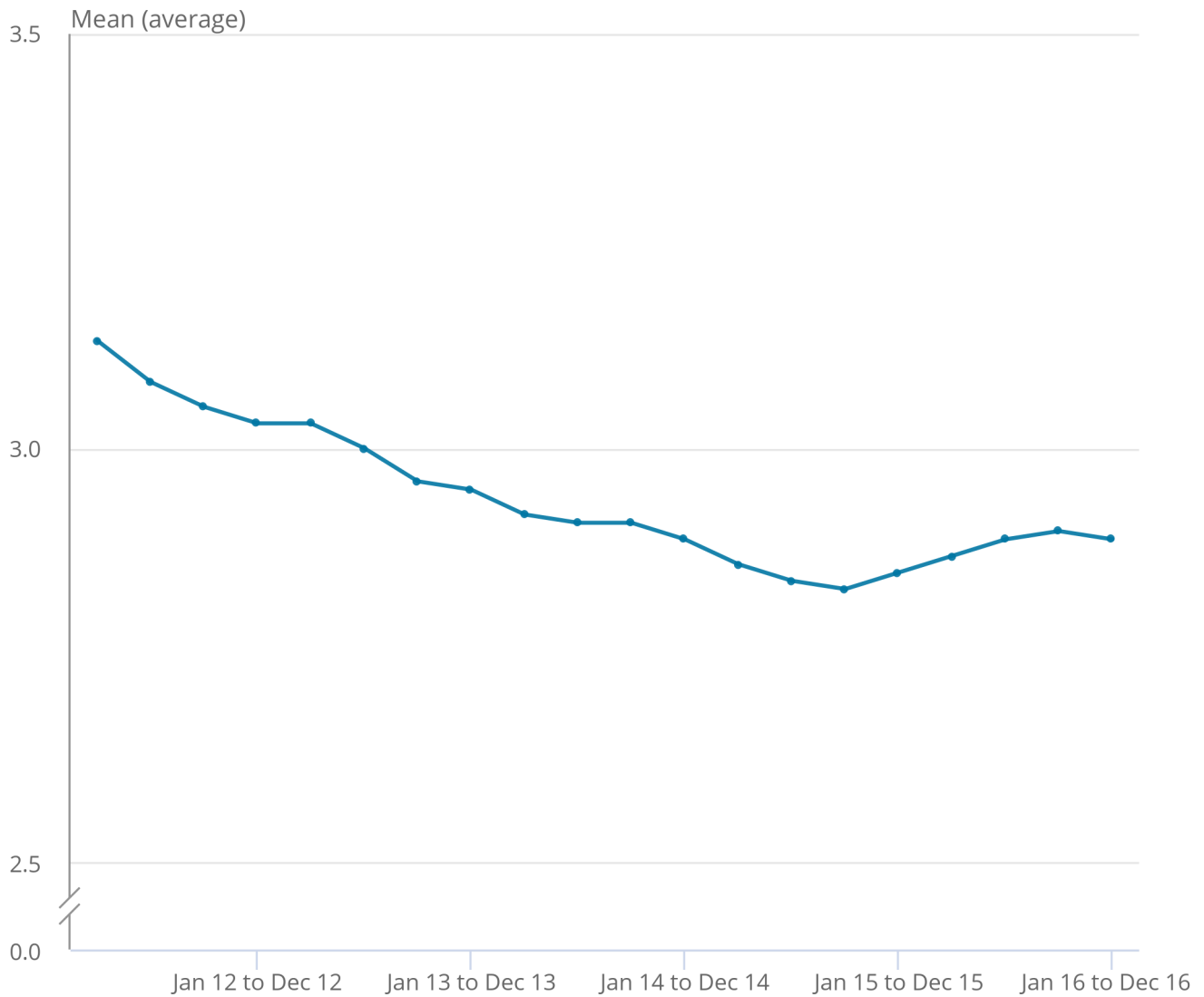
1. Chart axis does not start at 0.
2. Year ending March 2012 was the first year of data collection.

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

UK

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UK



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

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Notes:

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

It is important to consider how personal well-being ratings have changed for each country across the 5 years we have been collecting the data to see whether there is a differing picture.

6 . Anxiety ratings increased in England but fell in Northern Ireland

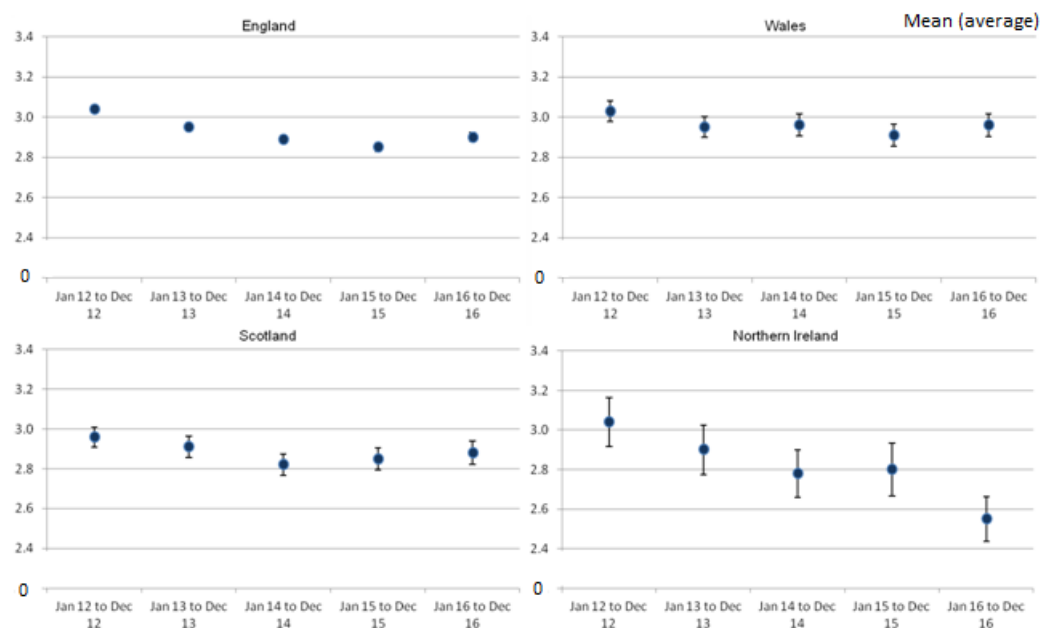
In the year ending December 2016, Northern Ireland continues to report the highest life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, and the lowest anxiety ratings, when compared to the other constituent countries of the UK.

Considering change over time between the years ending December 2015 and 2016, average (mean) ratings of anxiety have increased slightly in England, as shown in Figure 2. This rise has been driven by a small decline in those reporting their anxiety yesterday as very low (0 or 1 out of 10). Over the same time period, average (mean) ratings of anxiety fell in Northern Ireland, whilst ratings remained unchanged in Wales and Scotland.

Ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness remained unchanged between years ending December 2015 and 2016 for each country of the UK.

Figure 2: Average anxiety ratings, year ending December 2012 to year ending December 2016

UK countries



7 . What may explain these results?

Despite no change in personal well-being ratings at a UK level, breaking analysis down to country level has revealed some interesting differences in how adults report feeling about their lives.

When assessing people's feelings and opinions it is important that we understand the context of the time. The latest period covered by these data include a period of political uncertainty, not least campaigning for the EU referendum, as well as 6 months post-EU referendum. Also, during this period, a number of terrorist attacks were experienced across the world.

Along with health, job status and relationship status, a person's [sense of choice and contentment with their situation](#) is also important to personal well-being. Over time changes and differences between areas could be related to uncertainties felt about events at the time.

These results may also be reflecting people's mixed thoughts and feelings about the future and how this may have an impact on their lives. A [survey conducted by Ipsos Mori, in December 2016](#) asked respondents the question "And looking ahead to 2017, do you think it will be a good year or a bad year for each of the following?"

- 72% thought that 2017 would be good for their family
- 45% thought that 2017 would be good for the UK

We also monitor and report how the UK is doing against a set of measures on the different areas of life that matter most to the UK. The latest data can be explored in our [well-being dashboard](#).

Asking how people feel about their lives also helps us to see whether, and how, changes such as an increase in reported anxiety, are linked to other changes in society, for example, an increase in symptoms of mental or physical ill health. It also highlights the importance of looking at who reports higher anxiety and why, and whether some groups are disproportionately affected. This is something we will look at in greater depth in our next release of findings from the 3-year combined dataset, to be published on 9 May 2017.

8 . Links to related statistics

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

[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: 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 4, Oct to Dec 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. **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

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.
4. Comparisons have been based on unrounded data.