



# Summary of the Measuring National Well-being Event

Organised by  
the Centre for Health and Well-being in Public Policy (CWIPP)  
University of Sheffield

18 March 2011

## Presenters:

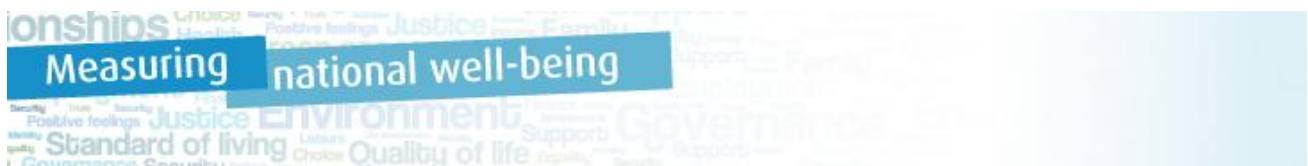
Professor Geoff Green, Sheffield Hallam University  
Mr. Stephen Hicks, Office for National Statistics  
Dr. Tessa Peasgood, University of Sheffield  
Dr. Jeremy Wight, NHS Sheffield

## Facilitators:

Anju Keetharuth  
Josie Messina  
Brendan Mulhern  
Donna Rowen

## Event Organisers:

Cheryll Bracey  
Clara Mukuria  
Aki Tsuchiya



The CWiPP and ONS Well-being event took place on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011 in the Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences (ICOSS). There were 29 participants (excluding presenters, facilitators and event organisers) from various organisations:

- University of Sheffield (16)
- Sheffield Hallam University (3)
- Sheffield City Council (2)
- NHS and PCT Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham (5)
- Barnsley MBC (2)
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (1)

For a full list of participants, see the appendix.

The event began with presentations from four representatives from the ONS, the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University and NHS Sheffield.

Stephen Hicks, the assistant deputy director for the ONS unit for Measuring National Wellbeing, set the scene by describing what national well-being (NWB) was and the rationale for measuring it. The ONS are looking to develop “an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics which people turn to first to understand and monitor national well-being”. Given the multidimensional nature of well-being, there are different avenues available to the ONS in considering how to measure NWB. One of the routes that is being tested in forthcoming surveys is that of subjective well-being (SWB). The ONS is taking a balanced approach by asking SWB questions that are related to evaluation, experience and eudemonia. The on-going national debate will inform the development of NWB measures.

Geoff Green, Emeritus professor of urban policy at Sheffield Hallam University, questioned the use of subjective measure especially with regard to their relationship with objective measures. He also raised the issue of developing measures without theoretical frameworks to underpin them. The existence of measure such as the Human Development Index (HDI) that had had extensive development was raised as an alternative to subjective measures.

Jeremy Wight, the Director of Public Health at NHS Sheffield, identified the importance of well-being in the public health arena and the lack of adequate measures to capture changes in well-being related to health inequalities. Adequate measures would be cheap to implement regularly and be granular enough to capture effects of important elements for public health practitioners. They would also be administered at small area level to allow the impact of policy to be assessed. One of the challenges of multiple measures of well-being was how to present them to users in a way that was useful.

Tessa Peasgood, from the Centre of Health and Wellbeing in Public Policy, discussed some of the limitations of SWB measures including problems related to expectations, scales in SWB and the lack of links between current and future well-being. She underlined what was required for SWB including objective and subjective causes of SWB for adults and children. She proposed developing

an index that would capture important aspects of objective well-being such as life expectancy and health inequalities as well as subjective aspects such as experience and eudemonia. Weights for the different elements of the measure would then be derived from the general public in order to produce a single index.

The presentations were followed by discussion in smaller groups where participants were able to address points raised by the four presenters. Facilitators summarised the groups' discussions (full summary available on request). There were recurring themes across the four presenters which are summarised below:

### 1) What is well-being?

Group participants were concerned about what was meant by well-being and how the different definitions would be reconciled. It was felt that a clear definition and underlying conceptual framework would assist in identifying what needed to be measured. Participants also expressed the need for measures that assessed both subjective and objective aspects of well-being.

- definitions  
evaluation vs. experience  
objective vs. subjective
- underlying theories and frameworks  
what conceptual framework?  
Capabilities?

### 2) Measurement issues

A key theme was the measurement of well-being. Participants were concerned with:

- validity and reliability of well-being measures  
validity – descriptive, content, face, construct, responsiveness
- practicality of collecting well-being information  
cost of administration  
ease of data collection  
potential solutions: GP surgeries; other government organisations - police force?;  
commercial data sets
- framing of WB questions
- time frames  
differences in well-being over life course  
appropriate recall period for well-being

- current vs. future wellbeing
  - changes over time (panel data)
- Dealing with potential bias
- single vs. multiple measures of well-being
  - Which measures were most appropriate?
  - Usefulness of a single index capturing important subjective and objective facets of well-being.
    - What subjective and objective questions?
    - How to combine them (weights)?
    - How to derive the weights?
- correlates and determinants of well-being
  - What factors are moderators/mediators of well-being and how should they be dealt with (personality, education, social capital, environment, sustainability, income, health - in particular mental health, marital status, crime, transport etc.)
  - How would these differ for different populations, time frames?
  - Negative life events?
- populations
  - local vs. national vs. international
  - adult vs. children
- presenting results
  - How to present results from multiple measures of WB

Some proposed measures:

- Human development index - developed with intellectual rigour and widely used. However, arguments against it due to lack of sensitivity in developed context
- New Economics Foundation Happy Planet Index

### 3) Policy issues

The final theme revolved around policy issues.

- How will well-being inform policy decisions
  - resource allocation? What about when there are conflicts between SWB and objective measures?
  - Monitoring?
  - Are we aiming for a norm?

- Local level priorities vs. national level priorities
- Paternalism vs. individualism  
Government role in enhancing subjective well-being  
Individual choices may not be 'good' choices e.g. current vs. future well-being and environment
- Political agenda related to focus on measures of subjective well-being instead of GDP  
- why were previous data sets (National Place) not used /scrapped
- Is there a shift to prioritising health?

The information from these discussions will be forwarded to the ONS to inform the national debate on well-being.

Also see

For details on the ONS National Wellbeing project see  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/well-being>

For details on the CWiPP ONS event see  
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/cwipp/wb-environment/ons-wellbeing.html>

## About CWiPP

Established in 2002, CWiPP is a network of researchers and academics at the University of Sheffield, with a research interest in how people's health and well-being can be defined, measured and improved in ways that help policy-makers determine the best use of scarce resources, and to investigate the determinants of well-being insofar as these are relevant to policy formulation. Members include staff from a range of disciplinary areas including criminology, economics, geography, health services research, politics, and psychology.

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/cwipp>

## Appendix: List of Participants

|           |             |  |
|-----------|-------------|--|
| Chris     | Armitage    | University of Sheffield                |
| Ian       | Bache       | University of Sheffield                |
| Jessica   | Baxendale   | Sheffield Hallam University            |
| Clive     | Belgeonne   | Sheffield Hallam University            |
| Lindsay   | Blank       | University of Sheffield                |
| Janice    | Connell     | University of Sheffield                |
| Holly     | Dannhauser  | Sheffield City Council                 |
| Permjeet  | Dhoot       | NHS Sheffield                          |
| Simon     | Dixon       | University of Sheffield                |
| Perry     | Else        | Sheffield Hallam University            |
| Hannah    | Fairbrother | University of Sheffield                |
| Liddy     | Goyder      | University of Sheffield                |
| Elena     | Hodgson     | Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Jason     | Horsley     | NHS Rotherham                          |
| Ellie     | Houlston    | Sheffield PCT                          |
| James     | Leach       | Barnsley MBC                           |
| Sarah     | McAuley     | University of Sheffield                |
| Louise    | Reardon     | University of Sheffield                |
| Jo        | Rick        | University of Sheffield                |
| Jennifer  | Roberts     | University of Sheffield                |
| Joanna    | Shapland    | University of Sheffield                |
| Chris     | Shaw        | Sheffield City Council                 |
| Rebecca   | Sherry      | NHS Barnsley                           |
| Sue       | Smith       | Barnsley MBC                           |
| Christine | Sprigg      | University of Sheffield                |
| Will      | Sullivan    | University of Sheffield                |
| Praveen   | Thokala     | University of Sheffield                |
| Peter     | Warr        | University of Sheffield                |
| Jessica   | Wilson      | NHS Rotherham                          |