



The Good Childhood Report **2020**

**The
Children's
Society**

Welsh Summary

Good Childhood Report 2020: Children's well-being in Wales

The Children's Society is a national charity which works with vulnerable young people in Wales and England. Our work in Wales focuses on policy and public affairs, in which we advocate and call for change for young people who may face or experience a range of issues. As well as working towards ensuring that young people access support for their well-being and mental and emotional health, we also work on tackling child poverty in Wales, and tackling various forms of exploitation which many young people face or already experience. It is crucial that young people's voices are central in our work, therefore we work with, as well as for, young people to ensure that their calls are heard and considered by decision makers.

What is well-being?

'Well-being' is used to refer to a range of things in everyday life, such as being happy, not being ill, feeling fulfilled and being financially secure. To quote the What Works Centre for Well-being definition, which is based on the work of ONS:¹

'Well-being, put simply, is about 'how we are doing' as individuals, communities and as a nation, and how sustainable this is for the future'.²

There is debate about what constitutes individuals' well-being, and, as a result, there is a range of different definitions. Broadly speaking, two different types of measures are used:

1. 'Objective' measures, which use social indicators on people's lives, such as physical health, education and material resources.
2. 'Subjective' measures, which focus on people's own views about how their life is going.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2011). Measuring what matters. National Statistician's Reflections on the National Debate on Measuring National Well-being. Crown.

² What Works Centre for Well-Being. See <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/about-wellbeing/what-is-wellbeing/> [Last accessed: 3rd August 2020].

The Good Childhood Reports focus primarily on children's own views of their lives - or the subjective well-being of children.

The Children's Society's household survey

Each year, The Children's Society conducts an annual household survey with parents and children, which collect data on children's well-being, their household and other characteristics. The 2020 survey was completed in April-June 2020 and covered 2,000 children (aged 10 to 17) and their parent/carer from all four nations in the UK who were selected to closely match the demographic and socio-economic make-up of the wider population. A small additional boosted sample of children in Wales was also collected in 2020.

The combined results for this boosted sample and children from Wales completing the main survey are presented for a small number of questions from the survey in this brief summary report – a total of 254 children (aged 10 to 17). As the sample size is small, only analysis for the whole sample are presented and the results presented are indicative only and provide only a snapshot of how a group of children in Wales were feeling at the time of the pandemic.

The data presented in this report have been weighted to closely match the age and gender distribution of children in Wales.

Children's Worlds, International Survey of Children's Well-being

(See isciweb.org for further information)

Children's Worlds is an International Survey of children's lives and subjective well-being. Findings from the most recent, third wave, relating to children aged 10 years in England, Wales and 14 other European countries are drawn upon in this report.

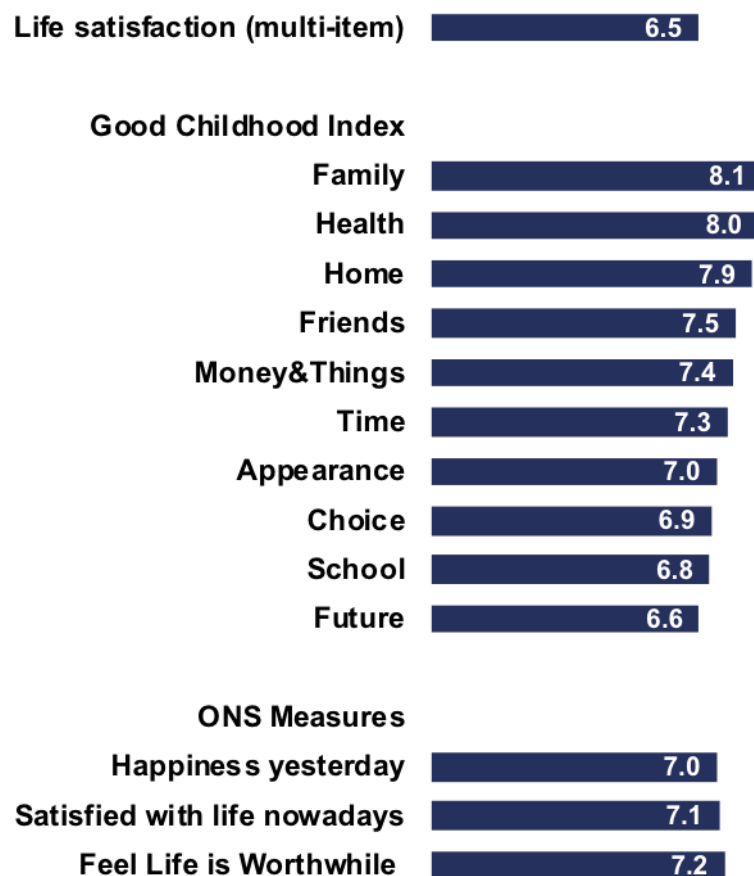
Our annual household survey was conducted during the government-imposed lockdown for Coronavirus and will therefore reflect children's well-being during this period. Children's Worlds provides a picture of children's well-being before the pandemic.

The current state of children's well-being

In the Good Childhood Report, we report on a number of different measures of children's subjective well-being for the UK. These include three measures reported by the ONS and our own Good Childhood Index, which are collected in our annual household survey 2020.

Figure 1 shows the mean scores of children in Wales for the multi-item measure of life satisfaction, the different aspects of life included in our Good Childhood Index (GCI), and the three well-being indicators developed by the ONS.

Figure 1: Mean scores (out of 10) for well-being measures



Of the ten aspects of life covered by the GCI, Children in Wales were, on average, happiest with their family, health and home. They were least happy with the future, their school and the amount of choice they have.

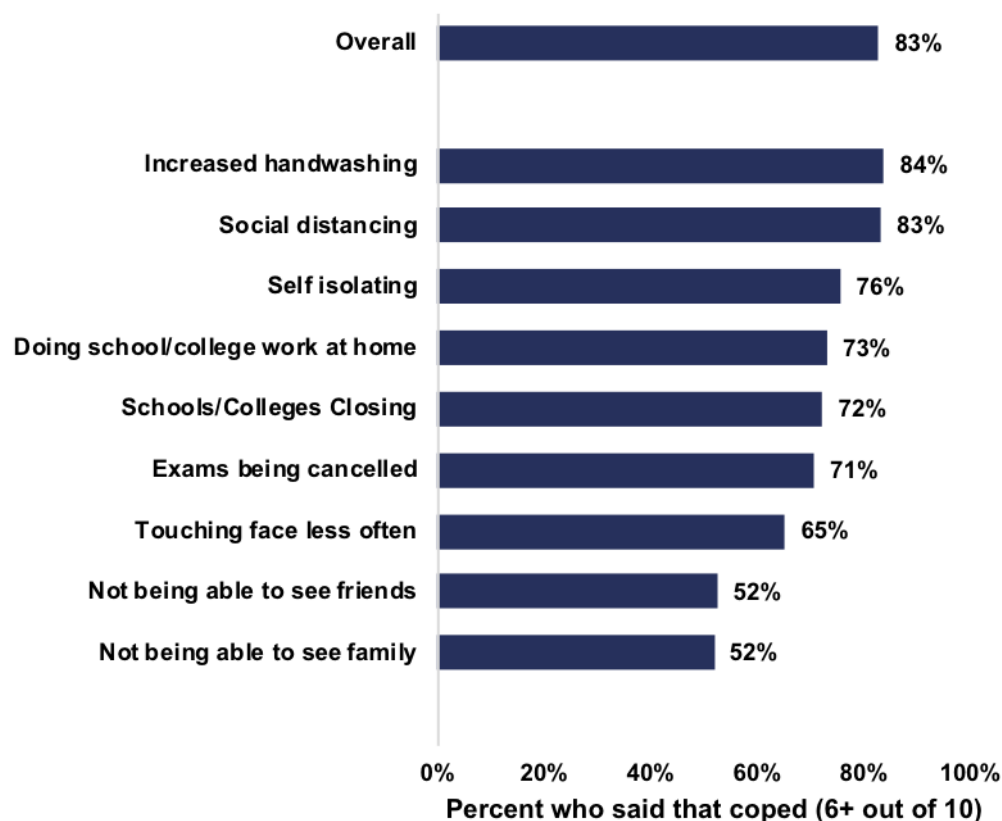
Life during lockdown

We developed a small number of questions with children to explore children's own views about the impact that Coronavirus has had on their lives. We asked: *How well do you think you have coped with the following changes that the government put in place because of Coronavirus?* We also asked how they had coped overall.

Figure 2 suggests that the majority of children scored above the midpoint on the 0 to 10 scale (where 0 indicated they had not coped very well and 10 that they had coped very well) across the 10 areas examined. Response levels were high among those completing these questions.³

³ NB. Overall 90% of children in the Wales sample completed the questions on COVID (those who had experienced a family bereavement, whose parents said they did not want their child to be asked the questions and children who did not want to ask the questions were not asked to complete the questions).

Figure 2: Proportion of children (aged 10 to 17) who felt they are coping with Coronavirus changes (score 6 or higher on the scale), Wales



As in the UK as a whole, the majority of children completing the survey in Wales felt that they had coped with the changes implemented as a result of the lockdown measures.⁴

They felt they had coped best with handwashing and social distancing, and least well with not being able to see their friends and family.

Children's Worlds, International Survey of Children's Well-being

In the third chapter of the Good Childhood Report 2020, we examined international differences in children's well-being. This included analysis of data from the most recent wave of The Children's World Survey, which included questions asking children to rate their satisfaction with 10 aspects of their lives that are similar to those in The Good Childhood Index.⁵

⁴ The Children's Society (July 2020) Life on Hold. Available: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/life-on-hold-childrens-well-being-and-covid-19>

⁵ Note that the response scale for the Children's Worlds study was different – with 0 signifying 'Not at all satisfied' (rather than 'very unhappy') and 10 signifying 'Totally satisfied' (rather than 'very happy').

In Figure 3, we compare mean scores on these 10 aspects of life for children aged around 10 years old in England and Wales, with 14 other European countries (or regions of countries): Belgium (Flanders), Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy (Liguria), Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain (Catalonia) and Switzerland.

There were five aspects where children aged around 10 in England and/or Wales were below average and fared significantly worse than many countries.

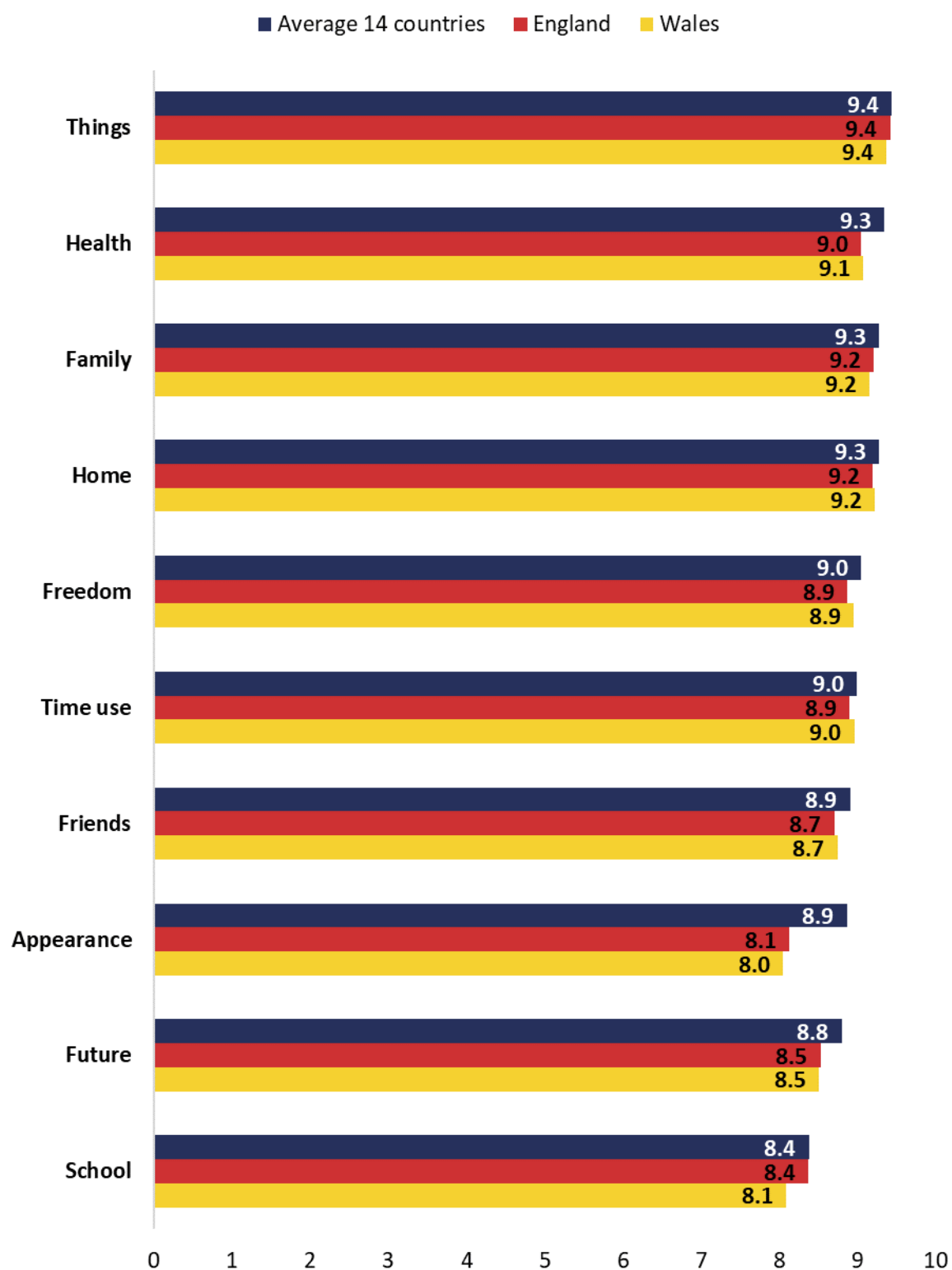
- England (but not Wales) was significantly below the average of the 14 comparator countries for satisfaction with friends.⁶
- Wales (but not England) was significantly below the average for satisfaction with life at school.
- Both England and Wales were significantly below the average of the other countries for satisfaction with health, appearance and what might happen in the future.
- The largest difference was for satisfaction with appearance. Mean scores were 8.13 for England and 8.04 for Wales, compared to an average across the other 14 countries of 8.86. In fact, Wales and England occupied the two lowest positions in the rankings for this aspect of life and had significantly lower scores than 12 out of the 14 countries.

Individual country reports have been published by project teams responsible for each individual country and both the Welsh, English and full international comparison report are available from The Children's World webpage.⁷

⁶ A 95% confidence level was used to test for statistical significance for the Children's Worlds data.

⁷ <https://iscweb.org/publications-and-events/publications/country-reports/country-reports-of-the-third-wave-2016-2019/>

Figure 3: Children's (aged 10 years old) mean satisfaction with different aspects of life, Children's World



Source: Children's Worlds Survey, 2020. Weighted data.

Policy context in Wales

The Welsh government has placed improving well-being at the centre of its activities having introduced major pieces of legislation which provide a framework for improving well-being in Wales and making well-being a key element of the new curriculum.

Legislation

Two key pieces of legislation place duties on public bodies in Wales to promote well-being.

1) The Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 places a duty on authorities to promote the well-being of people who require care and support, which includes children in need of protection and in the care of the state. Despite the strong legislative framework to promote well-being, Welsh government's conceptual approach to well-being is largely objective – that is a focus on the components that allow the measurement of 'quality of life' such as housing, access to rights, education and work. A recent literature review as part of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being Act notes that the Welsh government should broaden its approach to well-being, incorporating subjective elements and measures to better understand 'life satisfaction' of the population who receive care and support.⁸

2) The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires Welsh Government and other public bodies to think about the long-term impact of policy decisions so as to bring about, amongst other goals, "a healthier Wales" and "a more resilient Wales". The Act requires the formation of a Public Service Board (PSB) in each local authority, and for each PSB to develop a well-being plan for its area, which lays out its objectives towards improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of its area. The Future Generations Commissioner commissioned analysis which found that across PSBs the plans presented a "narrow and shallow picture of well-being"⁹.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act sets the framework for meeting long-term challenges and opportunities. In last year's Good Childhood Report, young people in Wales told us that the things that worry them the most are crime, the environment, information sharing online, whether they will have enough money in the future and getting a job. These concerns, which underline the experience of individual children but also their generation, cannot be easily gleaned from existing official datasets relating to children, but provide vital evidence and direction to ensure that the implementation of the Act is addressing the concerns young people hold today for

⁸ Llewellyn, M., Verity, F. and Wallace, S (eds). (2020) Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: Literature Review. Cardiff. Welsh Government, GSR report number 60/2020. Available at: <https://gov.wales/evaluation-social-services-and-well-being-walesact-2014-literature-review>

⁹ P.3 <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Netherwood2c-Flynn2c-Lang-OfGC-Overview-Report-2.0-1.pdf>

the future. Many of these concerns could be addressed by PSBs in their wellbeing plans by working with young people to better understand their worries and what they would find helpful to address their worries. The Children's Society believe that the introduction of comprehensive national measurement of subjective well-being in Wales, which can be broken down to PSB level, is the most effective way to gather these insights and to add depth and breadth to the picture of well-being locally and nationally. At a local level, young people should be involved in the design and development of the next tranche of Well-being Assessments and plans. It is important to note how being listened to and being taken seriously in itself can promote positive well-being for young people.

Curriculum for Wales

The Welsh Government has, through its Curriculum for Wales, placed well-being at the core of the Welsh education system. As part of the new curriculum being developed in Wales, one of the six areas of learning and experience will be Health and Well-Being. This area of the curriculum will consist of five key elements or 'statements of what matters'¹⁰:

1. Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits
2. How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being
3. Our decision-making impacts on our quality of lives and the lives of others
4. How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being
5. Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being

This health and well-being area of the curriculum will include pupils learning about help seeking behaviour, self-regulation and strategies that they can use when experiencing low emotional well-being.

Having well-being as a key aspect of learning in the new curriculum will be crucial towards enabling pupils to understand at an early stage in their lives the importance of better understanding why they might think or feel a certain way, and what they can do and who they can turn to support when they are experiencing a difficult time.

However, to best ensure that this area of learning and experience is successful in its intention, it is important to ask and understand how pupils are feeling about their lives, and how this area of learning and experience can best support them. If schools are to truly take a whole-school approach to well-being, they need data on children's subjective well-being to monitor their progress and inform areas of emphasis within their teaching and where additional support might be needed.

¹⁰ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/health-and-well-being/statements-of-what-matters/>

There is already good understanding of the health of Welsh students through the valuable work of School Health Research Network (SHRN). The Network provides important insights into children's health behaviours and into their emotional, or mental well-being. We recommend that the work of the Network be expanded to regularly provide insights into life satisfaction (cognitive well-being) and into children's psychological well-being. This would provide an even more comprehensive view of the well-being of children in Wales which could be used to drive important improvements. To underpin its commitment to children's well-being we also recommend that Welsh Government make a long-term investment in the future of the Network in order to ensure that decision makers in Wales will always have the very best, and latest insights into children's lives in order to inform their decisions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Welsh government has taken significant strides to better understand the well-being of the Welsh population, and to build structures which enables well-being to inform policy making. However, limited progress has been made in increasing the sum of knowledge decision makers hold about children's subjective well-being – that is, how they feel about their own lives. This is the key to unlocking progress in other well-being outcomes, for example, understanding children's experience of school and taking action to improve this should lead to improvements in educational attainment.

The next tranche of PSB well-being plans will be developed in the shadow of the Coronavirus. Children are already telling us through the analysis presented in this report that they are on average, happiest with their family, health and home. They were least happy with the future, their school and the amount of choice they have. It is vital that children's experiences of this crisis and recovery are properly understood and used to inform these.

As we look ahead to the sixth Welsh parliament, the next government will need to set out their well-being objectives and strategy. A strong commitment to understanding and improving the subjective well-being of children and young people must be at its heart.

National

- Welsh Government should support schools and other stakeholders towards expanding measurement of pupils' well-being through SHRN using additional measures of children's subjective well-being.
- Welsh Government should commit to long term funding of SHRN to help drive a data driven approach to improving pupils' experience of school and their lives as a whole.

Local

- Public Services Boards should use SHRN data to inform decisions on how to support children and young people in their areas.
- Public Service Boards should ensure that all of their well-being plans includes an objective specifically for how to improve the lives of children and young people in their areas.
- Public Service Boards should ensure that children and young people are consulted on the development of their next Well-being Assessment.

Every young person should have the support they need in order to enjoy a safe, happy childhood.

That's why we run services and campaigns that make children's lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger.

The Children's Society is bringing hope back to children's lives.

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