

# Eudaimonia: How do humans flourish?

A research report into the impact of lifestyle factors on people's wellbeing.

By Central YMCA, Autumn 2016

## Eudaimonia

(Greek: εὐδαιμονία [eudaimonía:]), sometimes anglicised as eudaemonia or eudemonia /ju:di'mouniə/, is a Greek word commonly translated as happiness or welfare; however, "human flourishing" has been proposed as a more accurate translation.

Central YMCA was formed more than 150 years ago to help people live happier, healthier, and more fulfilled lives.

The YMCA movement may have been a new concept in 1844, but its mission to help people flourish has much deeper roots. More than 2,000 years previously, Socrates, Aristotle and Plato were setting out their principles of Eudaimonia and human flourishing, a goal they saw as the highest human good to which societies can aspire.

Fast forward to 21st century Britain and the terminology of Eudaimonia may have changed (wellbeing, wellness, happiness, comfort, security), but our goal remains the same. While we face different challenges to the ancient Greeks, and even to Central YMCA's Victorian founders, our mission to maximise wellbeing remains crucial.

At Central YMCA there are many ways we work to achieve this goal – enabling greater wellbeing through fitness, education, community cohesion, and helping people to secure better employment opportunities. We set out to help those most in need within our society, but are open to anyone and everyone who wants our support.

To help inform our task, we have undertaken research into the state of Eudaimonia in modern Britain, looking at how feelings of wellbeing are affected by lifestyle and personal circumstances. The results of our research are published in this report.

We believe that the insights provided are hugely valuable, helping us understand exactly how the support we offer (to improve physical activity, mental stimulation and good relationships) directly affects people's ability to flourish. We can also see the impact that social issues (such as the growing gap between the richest and poorest in society, or the impact of poor educational experiences) are having on people's wellness and quality of living.

Our findings examine the aspects of people's lives that encourage or hamper greater wellbeing, highlighting opportunities to enable more people to improve the quality of their lives.

They also explore how our feelings of wellbeing change in different situations – in the workplace, when studying, while on holiday, when we're engaging with social media – to provide clues about how we might better structure different aspects of our daily lives.

At Central YMCA, we recognise that we don't operate in isolation and are most successful in achieving goals in collaboration with others.

For this reason, we are sharing our findings; contributing to the ongoing human endeavour to achieve Eudaimonia – the highest goal to which our society can aspire.

## Our research

We surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,000 UK adults in September 2016. They were asked to complete an online questionnaire that tested their responses to a number of wellbeing statements, as well as other questions relating to their current circumstances and attitudes.

### Assessing wellbeing

The wellbeing statements used in our questionnaire were based on the WEMWBS (The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) to measure mental wellbeing. WEMWBS was created by mental wellbeing experts, and is often used by scientists and psychologists\*.

Respondents were given 14 statements, for which they were asked to choose from five responses that best described their state of mind over the past two weeks.

To allow us to look at trends within the data, each response was allocated a points value, which was then converted into each individual's average wellbeing score across all 14 statements. The individual statement scores were also recorded for later analysis.

### Lifestyles and personal circumstances

Each respondent also completed a lifestyle and circumstances questionnaire which looked at the following:

- Levels of physical activity
- Levels of mental stimulation
- The quality and quantity of social contact and personal relationships
- Levels of financial security and confidence
- The quality of past educational experience.

This allowed us to analyse the impact of these personal circumstances on wellbeing. Not only the related increase and decrease in wellbeing caused by these factors, but also exactly how these interact with wellbeing – i.e. the specific wellbeing statements each one helps support.

\* The WEMWBS questionnaire for measuring mental wellbeing was developed by researchers at Warwick and Edinburgh Universities (see Tennant R, Hiller L, Fishwick R, Platt P, Joseph S, Weich S, Parkinson J, Secker J, Stewart-Brown S (2007) The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS): development and UK validation, Health and Quality of Life Outcome; 5:63 doi:10186/1477-7252-5-63).

The below table demonstrates the average wellbeing scores (out of 10) of respondents across the 14 wellbeing statements:

Indicator of wellbeing	Average score general population
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	7.3
I've been thinking clearly	6.73
I've been feeling loved	6.55
I've been interested in new things	6.4
I've been dealing with problems well	6.24
I've been feeling interested in other people	6.15
I've been feeling cheerful	6.14
I've been feeling useful	6.1
I've been feeling close to other people	6.03
I've been feeling confident	5.93
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	5.86
I've been feeling good about myself	5.73
I've been feeling relaxed	5.65
I've had energy to spare	5
Average score = 6.13	

*N.B. – all scores within this report are out of 10 unless otherwise stated.*

## Before reading on, try the test yourself

This wellbeing test provides a useful opportunity to reflect on areas that are positively or negatively affecting our enjoyment of life. They provide pointers for how we might try to increase our sense of wellbeing.

Make a note of the statements below that you would like to improve. You'll find this useful when reading the results of our research.

Indicator of wellbeing	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
1. I've been able to make up my own mind about things					
2. I've been thinking clearly					
3. I've been feeling loved					
4. I've been interested in new things					
5. I've been dealing with problems well					
6. I've been feeling interested in other people					
7. I've been feeling cheerful					
8. I've been feeling useful					
9. I've been feeling close to other people					
10. I've been feeling confident					
11. I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
12. I've been feeling good about myself					
13. I've been feeling relaxed					
14. I've had energy to spare					

## The correlation between lifestyle and wellbeing

Our study demonstrated the importance of maintaining positivity in all aspects of our lives.

**Activity levels:** Leading an active lifestyle brings a 13% increase in average wellbeing scores. An inactive lifestyle reduces the average wellbeing score by 19% (meaning there's a 32% gap in average wellbeing scores between the most and least active).

**Mental stimulation:** Leading a mentally stimulating life increases wellbeing scores by the same percentage (13%). However, having a mentally unstimulating life reduces the average score by a massive 35% (giving a 48% swing).

**Quality of relationships:** Being surrounded by negative relationships reduces wellbeing by 33% - a 50% swing.

**Financial confidence:** Money also causes a major swing in wellbeing. Being happy with your financial situation causes a 19% lift, whereas being extremely worried about money causes a 33% fall.

**Educational experience:** People's experience of the education system also seems to have a lasting impact on wellbeing. A positive experience of education increased average wellbeing scores by 10%, while the most negative experience reduces the average by 20%.

These findings demonstrate how wellbeing can be seriously undermined if any one of these factors is adversely affected. It highlights, for example, how concentrating on just one means of increasing wellbeing (e.g. physical fitness) will be undermined if we don't place similar emphasis on our relationships or mental stimulation.

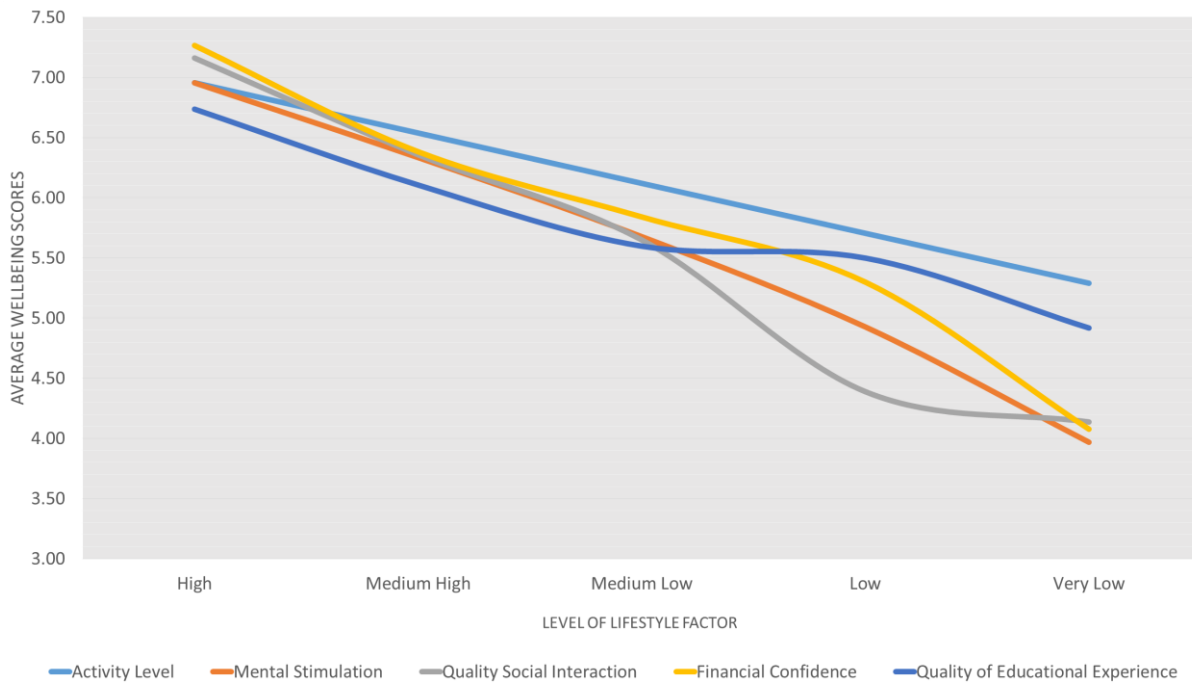
It poses the thought – should gyms be used to focus on more than just physical fitness? Should we move from a spin class to a TED lecture, in an environment designed to help us meet new people and build positive relationships?

Perhaps the most surprising result from the research is the potential lifelong impact that a poor experience of the education system can have on wellbeing. Highlighting the importance of ensuring everyone receives an education that provides a good foundation for a happy and fulfilling life - not just one designed to make us fit for the workplace.

Continued...

## Relationship with lifestyle factors and wellbeing

The below graph demonstrates the impact of five key lifestyle factors on our average wellbeing scores:



	Average uplift in wellbeing scores from lowest to highest / Level quality of lifestyle factors
Financial confidence	3.19
Quality social interaction	3.02
Mental stimulation	2.99
Quality of educational experience	1.82
Activity level	1.67

## Using the results

The findings from our study also reveal exactly how each of the factors examined works its magic on wellbeing.

On the pages that follow, we have taken each of the aspects that make up our sense of 'feeling good' – having energy to spare, feeling confident etc. – and shown how they are affected by each factor.

These are ranked in order of impact. Therefore, the ones towards the left-hand side on each page are the aspects with the largest swing from good to bad – i.e. this is the aspect that will be affected the most if you make that particular change in your lifestyle or circumstances.

For example – a person with low levels of activity who changes their lifestyle to get fit is likely to benefit from a massive boost in having energy to spare, feeling confident and being relaxed.

However, it won't do as much for their ability to tackle problems or be decisive. For these, they need to spend time on mental stimulation or sorting out possible money worries.

In this way, the results can be used as a guide to increasing wellbeing – helping figure out the best ways to tackle the areas where your scores are a little below par.

Got it? Good! You're now ready to read on.

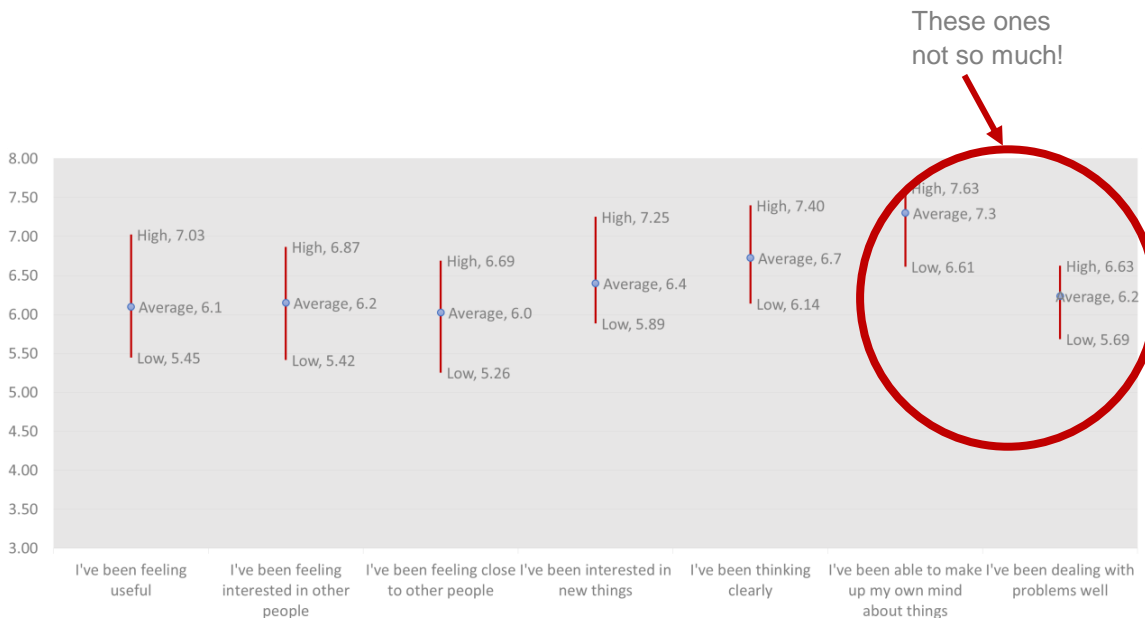


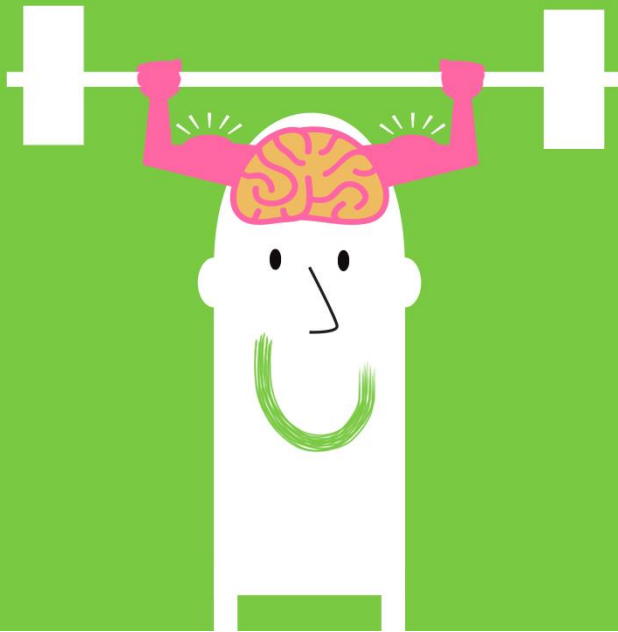
### Individual wellbeing scores - highest and lowest activity levels

Aspects of wellbeing where increasing activity levels has most impact:



Aspects of wellbeing where increasing activity levels has least impact:





## How does an increase in activity levels support wellbeing?

Those people with an active lifestyle in our research recorded the highest wellbeing scores (an average score of 6.92).

People who have seen a sustained increase or decrease in activity levels over three years saw significant shifts in wellbeing.

Those who are much more active than they were three years ago enjoyed an uplift of 8%. People who became much less fit over three years saw wellbeing fall by 22%.

The aspects of wellbeing that are most sensitive to activity levels are:

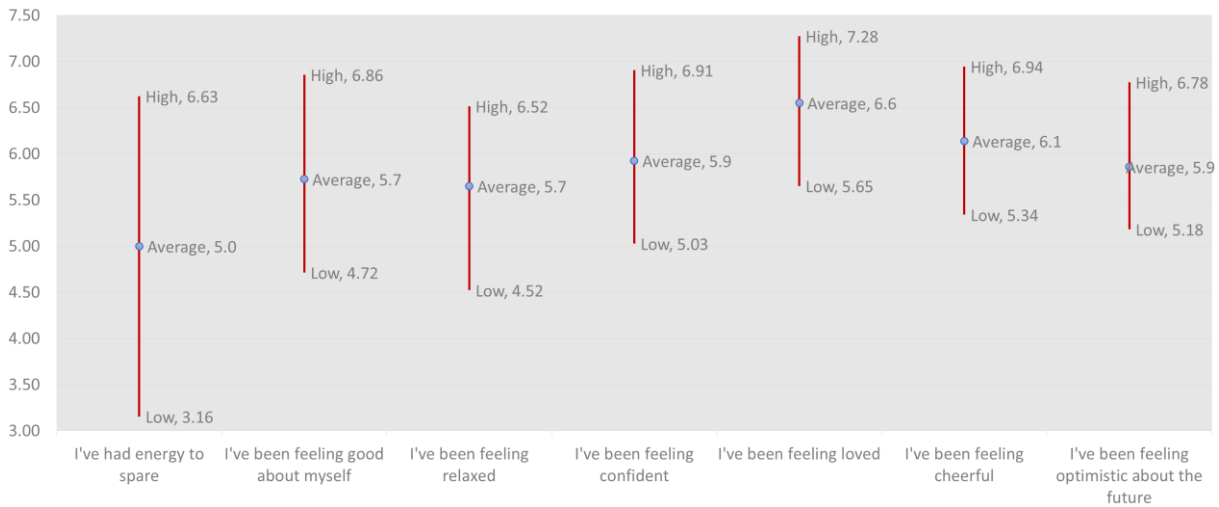
1. I've had energy to spare
2. I've been feeling good about myself
3. I've been feeling relaxed
4. I've been feeling confident
5. I've been feeling loved

When asked what would help them boost their activity levels, most people said they needed more free time or money to improve this aspect of their lifestyle.

Therefore, to help increase levels of physical activity we need to be looking at free, or low cost opportunities to exercise. Employers should also make time for their employees to get active, and opportunities for parents to exercise alongside their kids, or while they get help with childcare, should be sought out.

### Individual wellbeing scores - highest and lowest activity levels

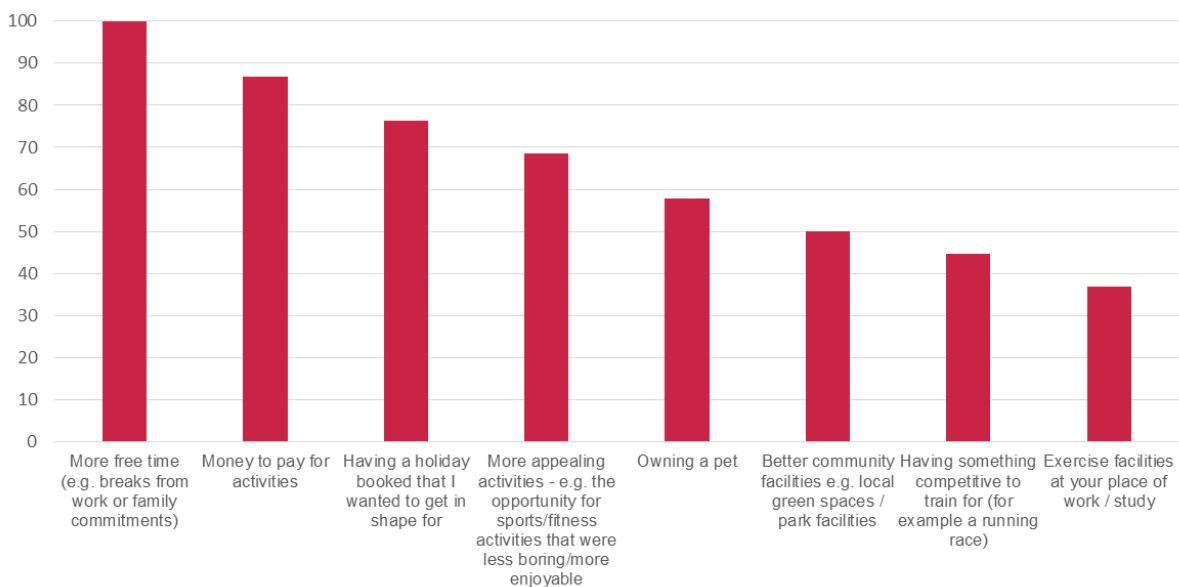
Aspects of wellbeing where increasing activity levels has most impact:



Aspects of wellbeing where increasing activity levels has least impact:



### Index of changes that would significantly increase activity level: 100 = most impact





## How does an increase in mental stimulation support wellbeing?

High levels of mental stimulation (for example learning a new skill or spending time tackling challenging problems) led to the highest wellbeing scores – 6.9.

The factors most undermining the wellbeing benefits of mental stimulation were feelings of life becoming repetitive or routine (4.95), or feelings of regular boredom or being too tired to think creatively (4.07).

The aspects of wellbeing most sensitive to mental stimulation are:

1. I've been feeling confident
2. I've had energy to spare
3. I've been interested in new things
4. I've been feeling useful
5. I've been feeling loved

When asked how they could increase levels of mental stimulation, people were hungry for new experiences (such as opportunities for travel) or the chance to learn a new skill (like a new language).

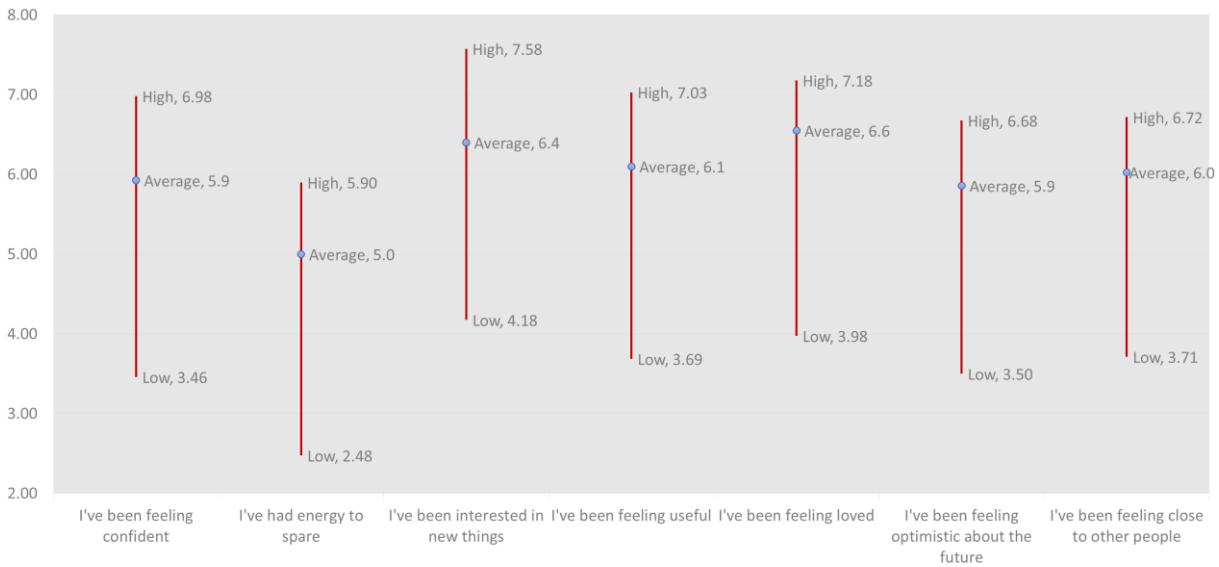
This poses the question, can advances in e-learning be used to help make learning new skills more readily (and cheaply) available. Organisations like FutureLearn, for example, provides free access to education courses from institutions all over the world.

Within Central YMCA, we also use e-learning to help people gain easier access when training to become fitness instructors.

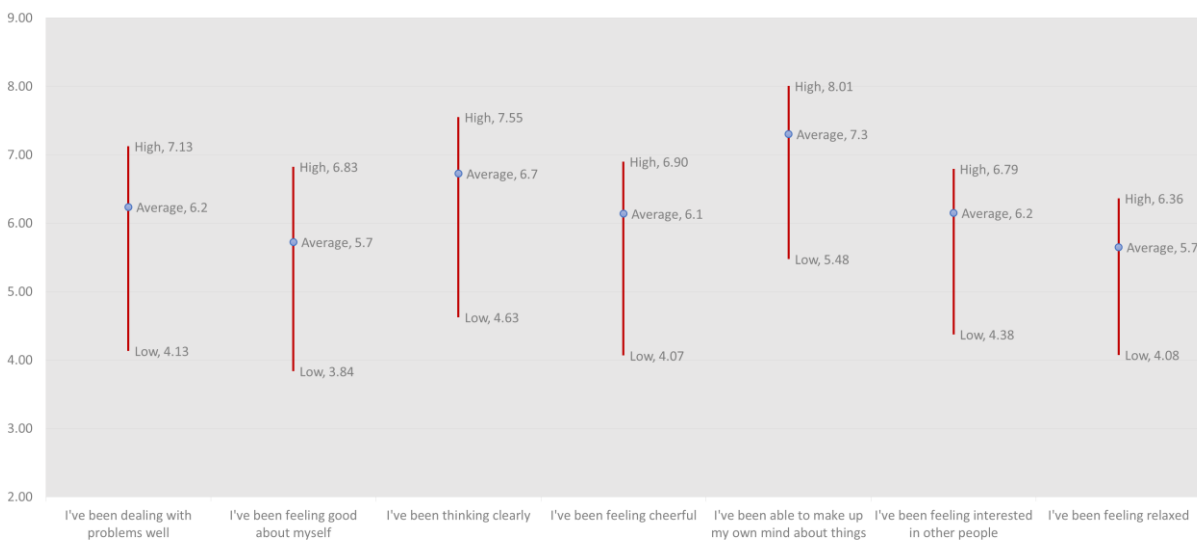
Should employers also be looking at how they can provide opportunities for staff to stretch themselves? Either with courses related to their work, or with sabbaticals where staff are encouraged to travel, take educational courses, or volunteer within communities.

### Individual wellbeing scores - highest and lowest mental stimulation

Aspects of wellbeing where increasing mental stimulation has most impact:

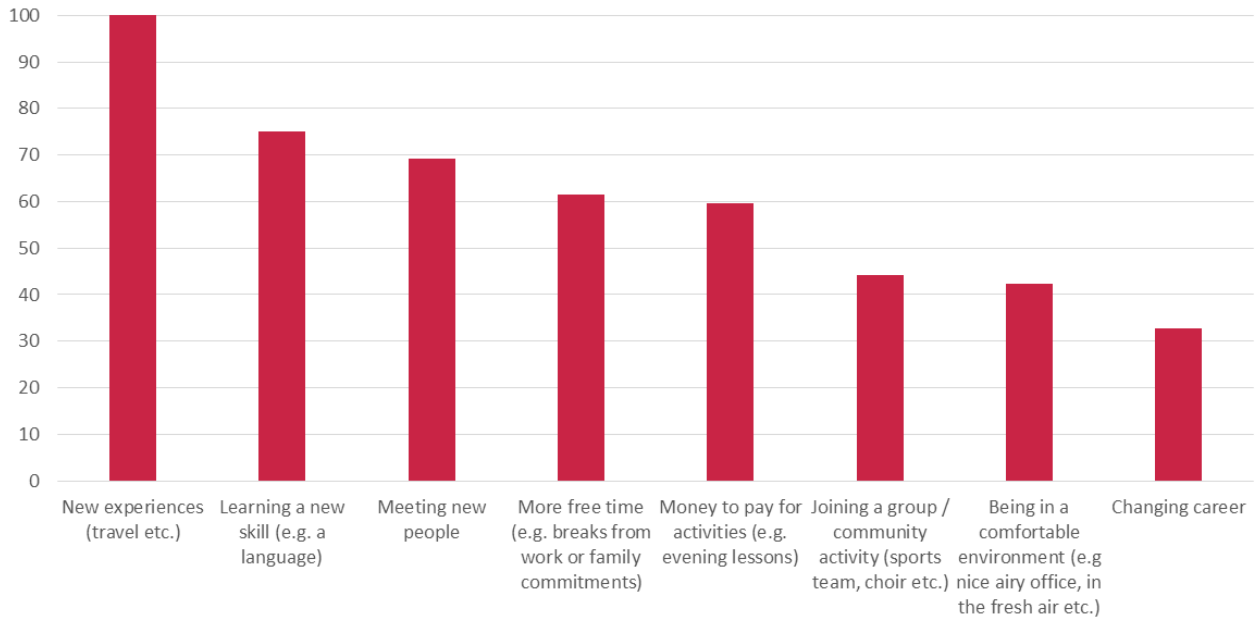


Aspects of wellbeing where increasing mental stimulation has least impact:



### Philosopher Alain de Botton speaking at our Eudaimonia! event

“The history of philosophy began in the gym. In ancient Greek culture we see this desire to integrate the body with the mind. But we have betrayed those origins - the notion of an integrated health of the body and mind has gone. Everyone knows the body has to be trained. This is something that we need to do with the mind. If we succeed today then it will be beginning of the revolution where we begin to put the learning of the psychology capacity on the same plane as the bodily capacity.”

**Index of changes that would significantly increase levels of mental stimulation: 100 = most impact**



## How does the quality of relationships and social interaction support wellbeing?

People who are always around friends or family with whom they have a positive relationship have the highest uplift in wellbeing (average scores of 7.16).

The lowest scores were recorded by those who are rarely with their friends or family (4.39), and those who may be regularly with friends or family but the relationships are poor (4.14).

The aspects of wellbeing most affected by the quality of relationships and social interaction are:

1. I've been feeling close to other people
2. I've been feeling loved
3. I've had energy to spare
4. I've been feeling optimistic about the future
5. I've been feeling good about myself

When asked how they could increase their number of good quality relationships, people named a range of factors including having more free time, starting a new hobby, having more money to pay for activities, or travelling.

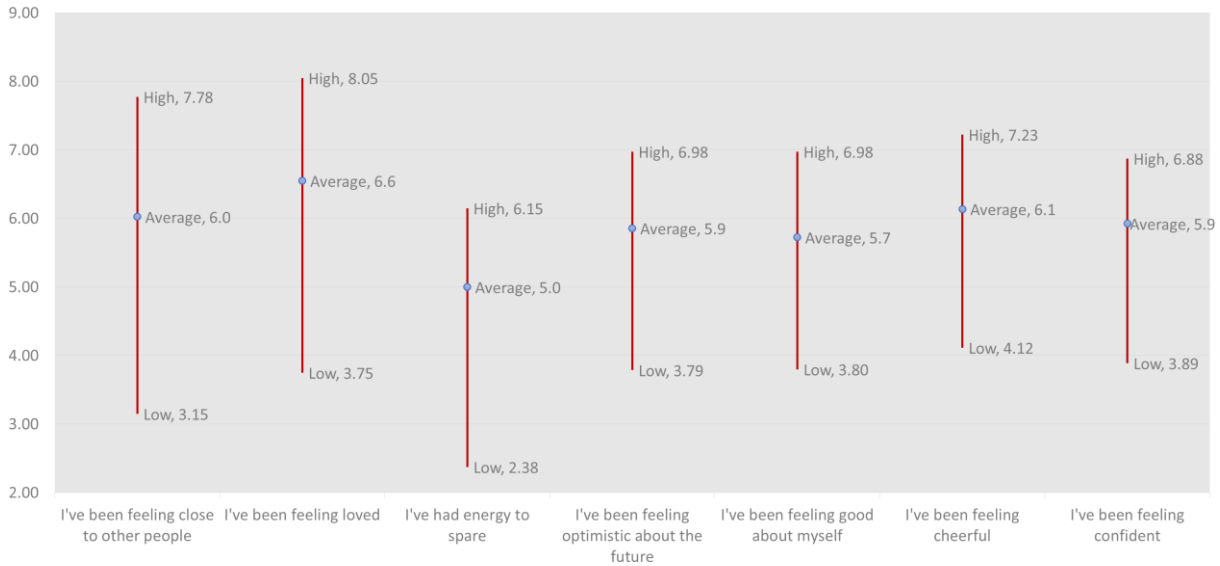
Could it be that in a world of social media and on-demand home entertainment, we need more motivation to get out and engage with fellow human beings?

How can community spaces be used to facilitate more interaction, for example?

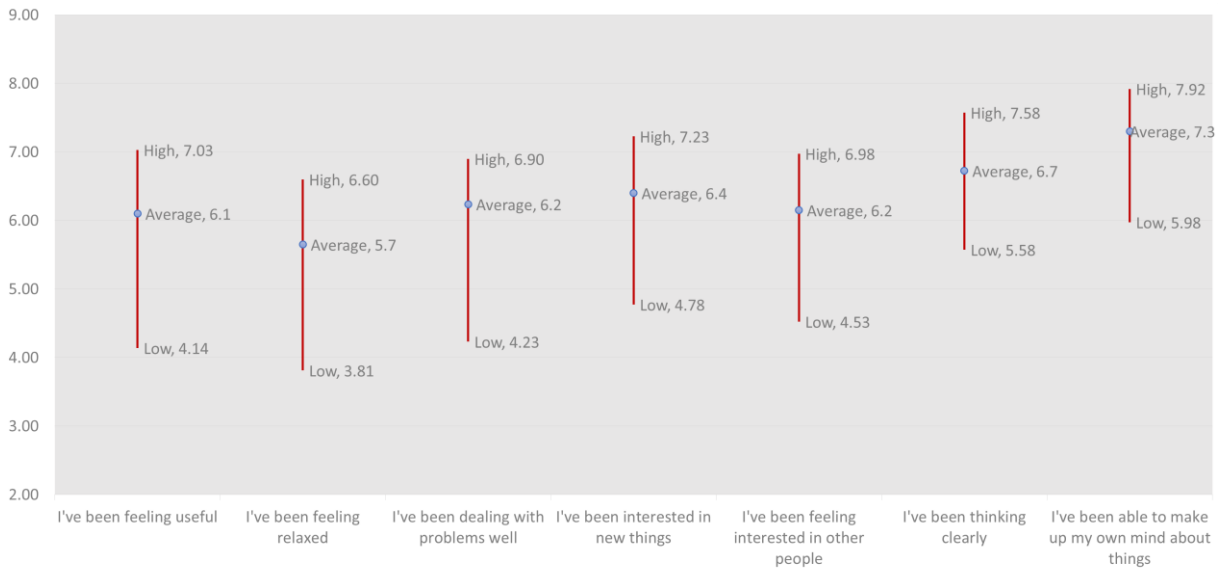
How can we help those who find social interaction difficult, or are lacking the free time to make more meaningful connections with the people around them?

**Individual wellbeing scores - highest and lowest quality of social interactions**

Aspects of wellbeing where increasing the quality of social interactions has most impact:



Aspects of wellbeing where increasing the quality of social interactions has least impact:

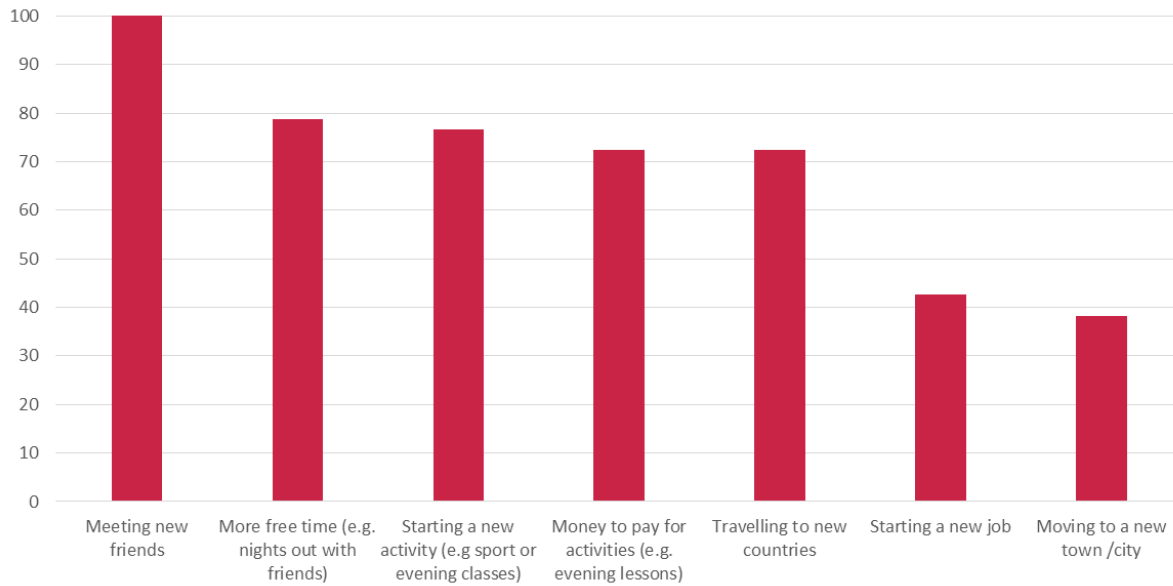


**Ivo Gormley, Founder of GoodGym, speaking at our Eudaimonia! event**

**“A big part of feeling a happy person is being able to contribute to the society you are in.”**



**Index of changes that would significantly increase quality of relationships: 100 = most impact**





## How does financial confidence affect wellbeing?

Financial confidence was the factor that has the most impact on wellbeing, with the largest gap in scores between those at either end of the spectrum.

Those who felt financially secure scored an average of 7.27/10, whereas those currently experiencing financial worries scored an average of just 4.39/10.

The research also underlined how hard it is for people to see past their immediate financial situation.

Those who were very worried about their financial situation, but had an expectation that it would improve in the future, had lower scores (5.14) than those who were simply mildly worried about their current circumstances (5.3) even though they didn't expect that situation to improve.

The aspects of wellbeing most affected by financial confidence are:

1. I've been feeling close to other people
2. I've been feeling good about myself
3. I've been feeling loved
4. I've been feeling confident
5. I've been feeling optimistic about the future

These scores are important because they challenge the 'poor, but happy' fallacy; the myth that it's easier to be happy when you're poor because you're spared the stress of society's high earners. Equally, the myth of the lonely millionaire who feels isolated from the rest of society by his or her wealth.

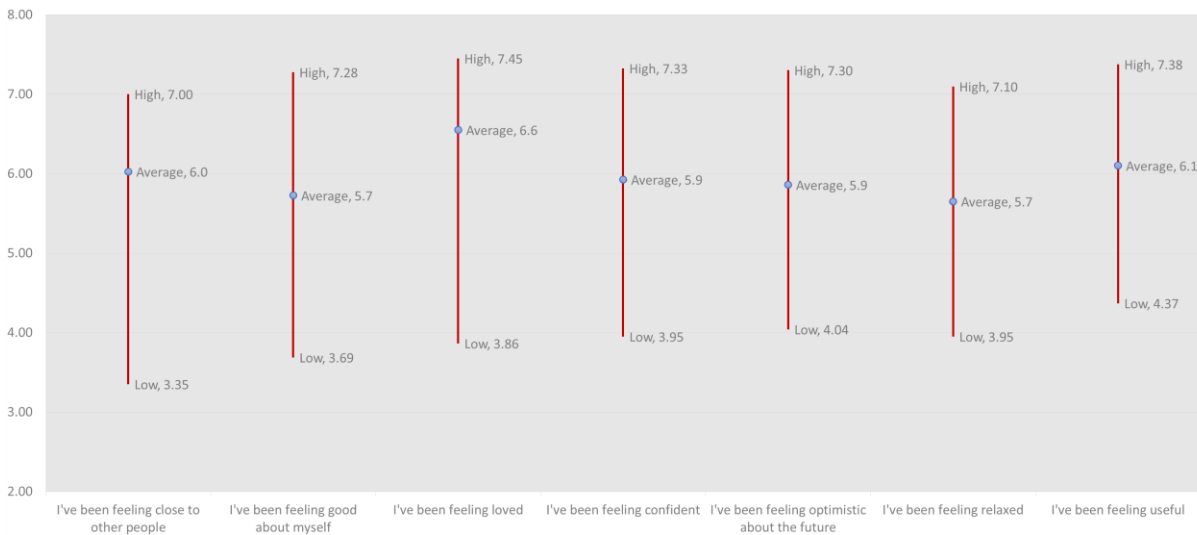
The truth of the matter is, as evidenced by studies such as 'The New Stylized Facts about Income and Subjective Well-Being' by Sacks, Stevenson and Wolfers (see figure one), the more affluent a society is, the greater its reported happiness.

That's not to say all rich people are happy – the relatively affluent can worry about money too – but having spare cash can certainly help (especially judging by some of the responses elsewhere in our study).

You just need to know how to spend it!

### Individual wellbeing scores - highest and lowest financial confidence

Aspects of wellbeing where increased financial confidence has most impact:



Aspects of wellbeing where increased financial confidence has least impact:

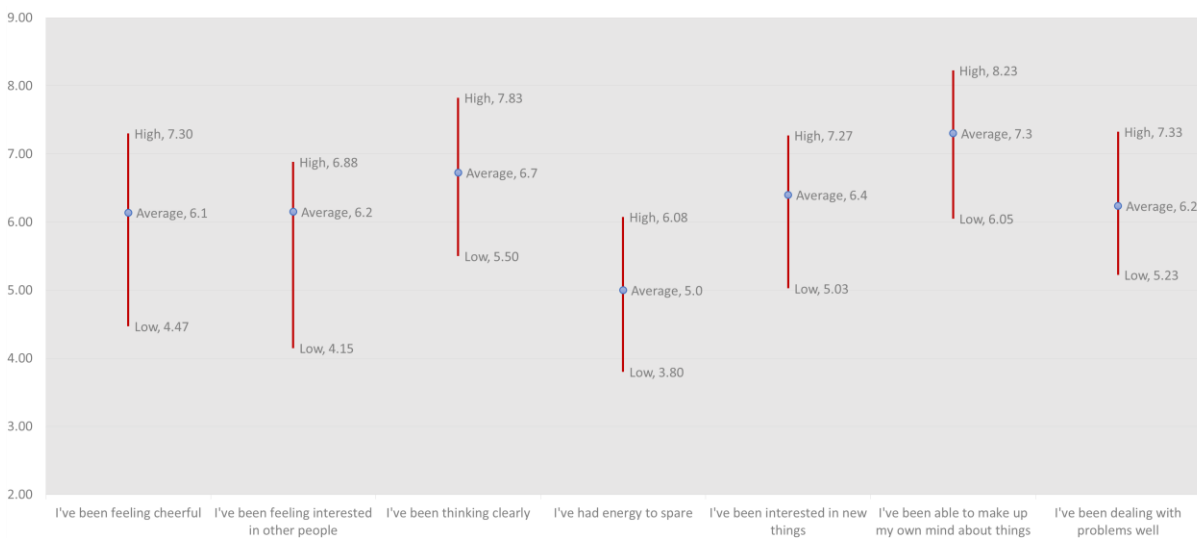
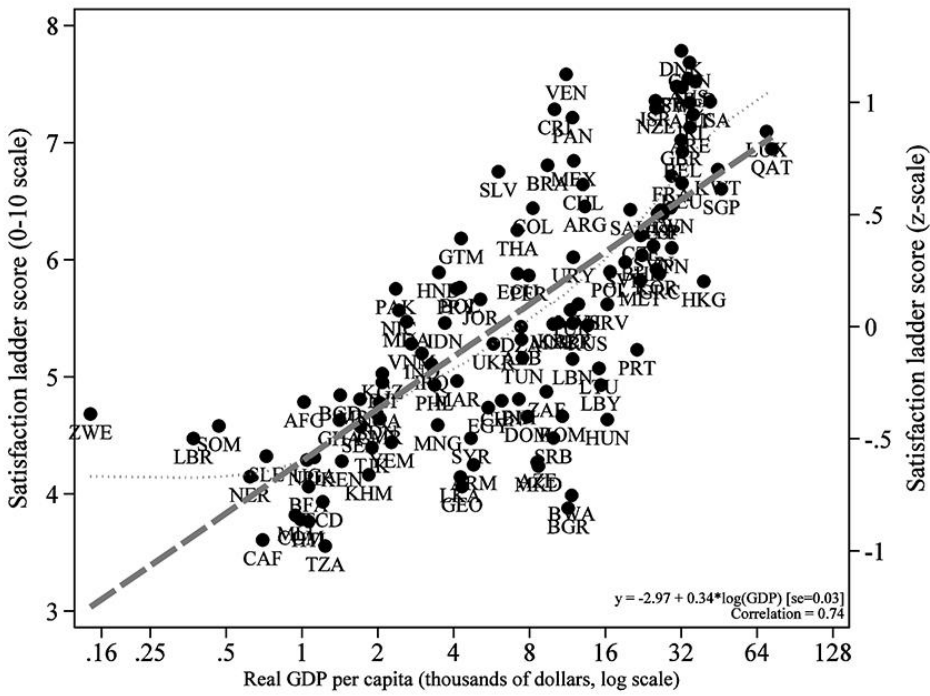


Figure 1: Life satisfaction and per capita GDP, 2010, Gallup World Poll





## How does educational experience affect wellbeing?

It seems that our past, as well as our present, can have a significant impact on wellbeing scores.

Those who felt that they had had a positive experience of the education system (regardless of their current circumstances and lifestyle) displayed much higher wellbeing scores (6.92) than those who felt traditional education didn't help them to achieve their potential (4.92).

The aspects of wellbeing most affected by satisfaction with past education experiences are:

1. I've been feeling good about myself
2. I've been feeling confident
3. I've been able to make up my own mind about things
4. I've been feeling loved
5. I've been thinking clearly

A worrying aspect of this finding is that evidence suggests that a poor experience of education is more common amongst less affluent members of society.

A study conducted in 2015 by Sutton Trust (Missing Talent Report 2015), highlighted the extent of this issue. For example, more than a third of boys on free school meals who are in the top 10% of performers at the age of 11, have fallen outside the top 25% of pupils by the age of 16.

And grades are not the only indicator of a poor educational experience.

A report by Demos (Mind over Matter October 2015) suggests that schools are failing to support the mental wellbeing of children in their care. Their study concluded that final year students are half as likely to be happy in their lives as 14-year-olds, and considerably less likely to think their parents and teacher believe in them.

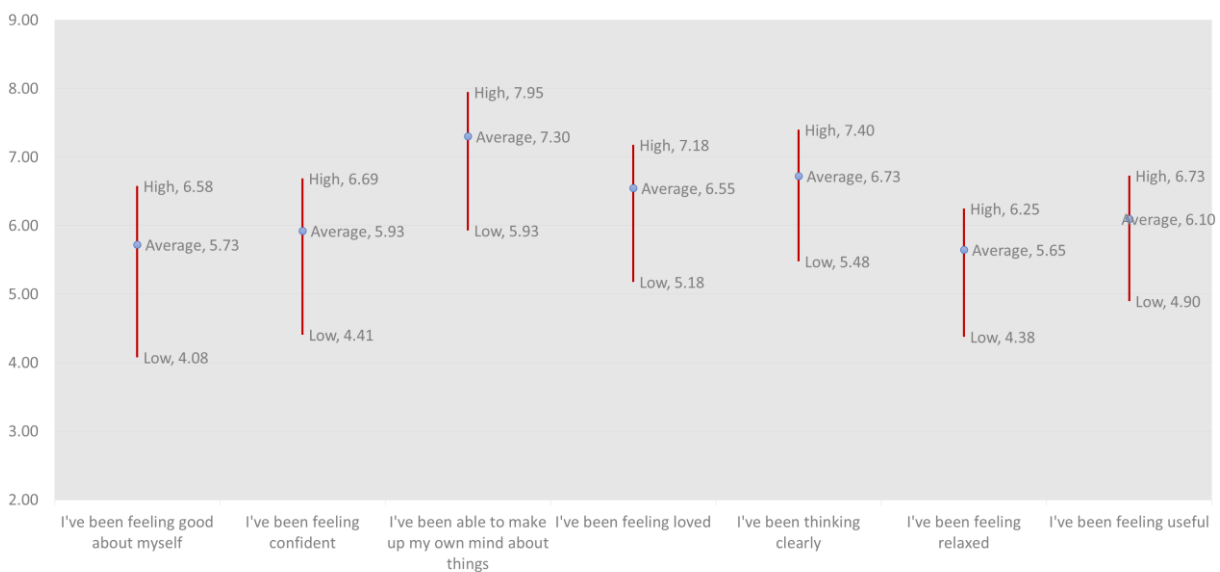
They are also three times as likely to feel their school is only focused on preparing them for exams, rather than to succeed in life more generally. Such issues are particularly acute for girls who are much less likely than boys to feel happy and are more likely to experience feelings of frustration, or give up on tasks when they fail.

There is also evidence that schools are failing to do enough to tackle the impact of bullying. For example, a study by Stonewall found more than 55% of LGB pupils have experienced direct bullying and almost all had heard the 'use of the word gay as a negative'.

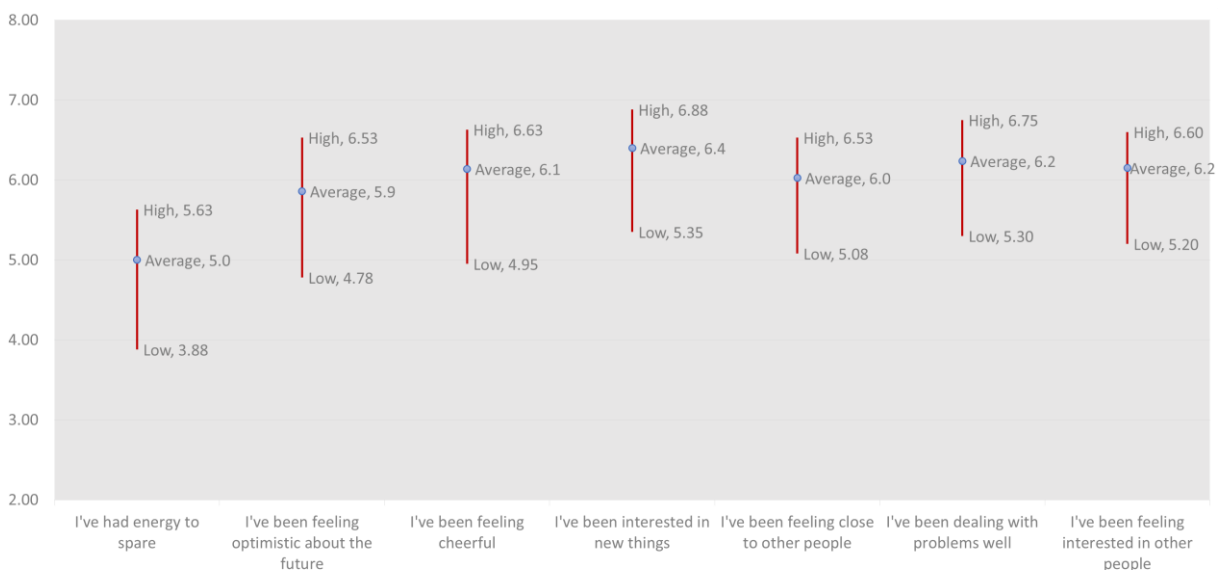
Perhaps we should not just be ranking school performance by academic achievement, but also by the wellbeing of the children in their care.

**Individual wellbeing scores - highest and lowest positive educational experience**

Aspects of wellbeing where having positive educational experiences has most impact:



Aspects of wellbeing where having positive educational experiences has least impact:



## Tackling different aspects of wellbeing - what changes have most impact?

Our research also allows us to take a diagnostic approach to improving wellbeing. Based on our own scores - looking at what is above and below the national average - which changes to our lifestyle and circumstances are likely to have most impact on our scores?

	Most impact on wellbeing	Second most impact on wellbeing
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	Financial confidence	Quality of relationships
I've been feeling useful	Financial confidence	Mental stimulation
I've been feeling relaxed	Financial confidence	Quality of relationships
I've been feeling interested in other people	Quality of relationships	Activity levels
I've had energy to spare	Activity levels	Quality of relationships
I've been dealing with problems well	Financial confidence	Mental stimulation
I've been thinking clearly	Financial confidence	Mental stimulation
I've been feeling good about myself	Financial confidence	Quality of relationships
I've been feeling close to other people	Quality of relationships	Financial confidence
I've been feeling confident	Financial confidence	Mental stimulation
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	Financial confidence	Mental stimulation
I've been feeling loved	Quality of relationships	Financial confidence
I've been interested in new things	Mental stimulation	Financial confidence
I've been feeling cheerful	Financial confidence	Quality of relationships

## When do we feel wellbeing is at its highest?

	On holiday	Spending time with family	Socialising with friends	Exercising / playing sport	Home	At work / place of study	Using social media
% of people for whom increases wellbeing	66%	56%	49%	44%	44%	22%	20%

We then asked our sample to tell us the situations when they felt their current wellbeing was at its highest.

The top responses show the importance of finding free time for leisure, family time, and socialising. Creating a healthy work/life balance is therefore crucial to our wellbeing, it seems.

Despite this, recent studies show that the average British worker puts in the equivalent of 38 working days over and above their contracted annual hours.\* A report from Family-Friendly Working Scotland published this year, revealed that as many as nine out of 10 people say they are unhappy with their current work-life balance.

These long hours are a cause of stress according to other reports. Another 2016 study carried out for National Work Life Week, found that 29% of workers said long hours were causing them significant stress.\*\*

The Mental Health Foundation is one of the organisations attempting to highlight the importance of this issue to employers. It advocates a number of steps employers should take to help promote worker wellbeing.

\* Survey of 2,000 people conducted by SPANA, October 2016

\*\* Survey conducted by CV Library



Ten steps employers should take to promote worker wellbeing	
1	Promote the messages about work-life balance to individuals in the workplace
2	Develop policies that acknowledge the association between work related stress and mental health. These policies should also describe the roles and responsibilities of employees at all levels in the organisation in promoting mental health, and describe mechanisms to support staff who experience mental health problems
3	Encourage a culture of openness about time constraints and workload. Employees must feel able to speak up if the demands placed on them are too great
4	Give better training to managers so that they can spot stress, poor work-life balance and its effect on the individual. They should also be trained to develop better systems to protect everyone in the workplace
5	Promote a culture of 'working smart, not long', as outlined above
6	Ensure that employees' jobs are manageable within the time for which they are contracted
7	Audit their work environments to identify elements of practice, policy or culture that may be detrimental to a healthy work-life balance
8	Regularly monitor and evaluate policies against performances indicators such as sickness, absence and improvements in staff satisfaction
9	Allow staff to attend counselling and support services during working hours as they would for other medical appointments
10	Encourage activities that promote good mental health, for example lunchtime exercise or relaxation classes

Source: Mental Health Foundation

**Anthony Painter, RSA Director of the Action and Research Centre, speaking at our Eudaimonia! event**

**“Stress is bad, but it’s even worse if you have no control over it. A lot of changes we’ve been making over the past 20 years have created situations where people have less power and more stress.”**

## The link between wellbeing and social media

One of the most intriguing elements of our findings was the impact of social media on wellbeing scores.

There was an almost even split of those who felt engaging on social media either significantly improved or decreased their feelings of wellbeing.

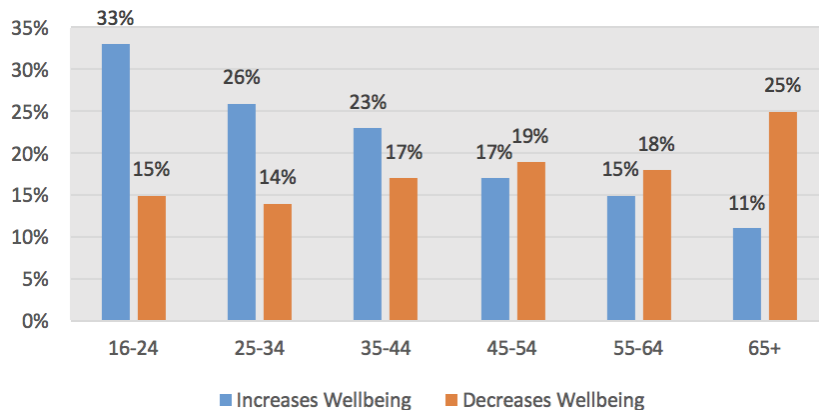
Understandably there were differences based on age – with younger generations having grown up with social media. However, even for those aged 16 to 24, the ratio of those who felt social media was good or bad for wellbeing was almost 2:1.

Your view of social media's impact on wellbeing is also likely to be influenced by how you are currently feeling.

Those recording high wellbeing scores were most likely to feel social media improved wellbeing, while those with low scores were most likely to feel it has a negative effect. This suggests that the use of social media often amplifies your current mood in most cases, rather than helping to lift your spirits when feeling down.

% for whom social media significantly increases wellbeing	% for whom social media significantly decreases wellbeing
20%	18%

### Impact of social media on wellbeing – by age



	Those with already high wellbeing scores	Those with already low wellbeing scores
Increases wellbeing	36%	9%
Decreases wellbeing	13%	35%

### Web Psychologist and Author Nathalie Nahai speaking at our Eudaimonia! event

“Sometimes we’re not mindful that technology can undermine our search for deeper connections. The quick hit of responding to an alert or update is easier to manage.”

## Supporting Eudaimonia and helping humans to flourish

So, what can we learn to support the mission to help humans flourish?

- We need to achieve a healthy balance of positive levels of physical activity, mental stimulation, and relationships – all which have a significant impact (for better or worse) on our feelings of wellbeing.
- Growing financial inequality that is causing people serious financial concerns is enormously corrosive to the wellbeing of those affected.
- Employers have a major role to play in supporting the wellbeing of the nation - helping to make the workplace an environment that is supportive of wellbeing, and taking steps to avoid overworking.
- It is vitally important to give people a positive experience of education. Feeling that you've failed to achieve your full potential in education can create a negative impact on wellbeing, which we carry with us into later life.
- We need to be aware of the role of emerging habits, such as the growing use of social media and our 'always-on' society. By educating ourselves about how using such tools affects our wellbeing, we can feel their benefits, but avoid their potential to cause harm.

How can Central YMCA help humans flourish in today's world?

- Looking back, what YMCA started with was equilateral. It was about mind, body and spirit. As well as inventing sports such as basketball and focusing on our bodies, we welcomed all faiths and held regular seminars - one seminar alone attracted more than 3,000 people and sold 171,213 transcripts.
- But, somewhere along the way, our equilateral triangle changed. We have to start questioning whether the fitness industry we created is really fit? Only 13.7% of the population belong to a gym and approximately 67% of those never use it\*. Have we all created too much emphasis on body image? Anorexia is manifesting in even younger people. Some 39% of 21-year-old women are unhappy with their bodies and Steroid use on the rise in young men.
- So, what are we going to do about it? A few years ago, we launched the body image campaign, which today is 'Be Real' and now we've launched the Eudaimonia! movement. This started with us asking questions about what it means to be well in the 21st century. We're running events and workshops and we've partnered with The School of Life to help turn the outcomes of these workshops into something tangible. As well as the YMCA Club incubator project to transform the club into a centre for wellbeing, we're planning to launch training and awards for the mind. We hope to introduce classes that improve mental stimulation and help people to work on their minds again as much as their bodies. We'll be introducing touch points into every class to improve relationships and social interaction and we'll be doing more research to consider how we can improve the education of young people - giving them greater access to careers advice and the paths to success.

**Philosopher and Business Consultant Robert Rowland Smith, speaking at our Eudaimonia! event**

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**“You can't be properly well unless the system you're in is well. When we talk about wellness, let's shift the focus from the individual to the system.”**

## Comments

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### Rosi Prescott, Chief Executive, Central YMCA

*“The modern epidemics of loneliness, obesity and mental health require a real shift in response. Unlike the Victorian epidemics, mostly eradicated through advances in sanitation and science, the modern day equivalents of rickets, polio and malaria require different measures.*

*“And while 80% of these modern epidemics can be reduced or prevented through re-connecting with our recumbent bodies, I feel the fitness industry has, in part, failed as only 13% of the population belong to a gym (8.71% pay for a gym but do not use it, leaving 4.28% actually active).*

*“Many people have a desire to functionally improve their bodies, lose weight, get bigger biceps, or train for a marathon. We do not recognise the need to work on our mind. “What about if I want to be better at envy?” as Alain De Botton asked at our recent Eudaimonia! event. The scientific evidence is abundant that engaging our bodies brings huge benefits to our minds, and good mental wellbeing in turn helps us to form good habits in exercise, in our relationships and in our work - and significantly improves our overall feeling of wellbeing.*

*“We have undertaken this research as part of our commitment to starting a movement towards Eudaimonia! or human flourishing. I am excited by the opportunities we are discovering, through working with public and private partners to develop environments and programmes where people are encouraged to focus on their mind and body in tandem. I see in the future these advances being practised in colleges, on apprenticeships, as well as in gyms, community centres and the work place - leading to massive benefits for individuals, businesses and society as a whole.*

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### A spokesperson from Alain De Botton's The School of Life

*“The latest research from Central YMCA illustrates what philosophers have known for some time: that we need to keep both mind and body active in order to be well.*

*“This would not have surprised the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. He believed that if the body wasn't kept in good condition, the mind would be “invaded by forgetfulness, despondency, irritability, and insanity.” Nor would the findings have come as a shock to Aristotle, who deeply valued the idea of Eudaimonia, or human flourishing and wellbeing. For Aristotle Eudaimonia wasn't just about being “happy” or even “healthy”; it was about finding meaning in your life and living more wisely. Eudaimonia was for him—and remains for us—a practical and theoretical project, one we engage in by going out into the world, stretching ourselves, and discovering where we excel and what we enjoy. Both the mind and the body are needed develop this understanding and to reach full human flourishing.*

*“Mental exploration—an often under-examined activity—is key to this concept of well-being. Perhaps one of the most striking finds in the Central YMCA study is that those who reported having a mentally unstimulating lifestyle saw their overall wellbeing score drop by an alarming 35%. This suggests that we need mental and emotional exercise just as much as physical movement. In the future, we’ll exercise our minds in the same deliberate, regular way as we do our bodies— not just passive enjoyment in front of a page or screen, but active engagement with the world through conversation, group activities, play, and creative work.*”

*“We applaud this project for helping to ignite an important conversation. Central YMCA’s research highlights how crucial it is to have a wider concept of well-being. We are now posed to continue the work of the great philosophers in our own age – and create a future of work and play that supports true human flourishing.”*

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**Dr Carole Easton, Chief Executive, Young Women's Trust**

*“Isolation and a lack of mental stimulation can have a significant and lasting impact on young people’s wellbeing. That’s why it’s so important there are opportunities for all young people to be active and get involved in activities that interest and excite them. It’s also why support needs to be available for young people who may be struggling and who are unsure about the future. We know from our own Work It Out service, which supports young women with confidence, wellbeing and employability, that the right support can make a big difference.”*

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**Steven Ward, Executive Director, ukactive**

*“It’s no secret that being physically active makes you happier and significantly boosts your mood. That’s why ukactive is dedicated to championing the fun and enjoyment it brings, working to get more people, more active, more often.*

*“This new research shows that leading an active lifestyle brings a 13 per cent increase in average wellbeing scores and we know from previous evidence that exercise brings a multitude of benefits to many areas of our lives. From the boardroom, right through to the bedroom, physical activity has been shown to help improve our performance and our wellbeing.*

*“One of the cornerstones of happiness is health, and this is arguably where exercise has the biggest impact. Physical activity has been hailed as a miracle cure, able to help treat, manage and prevent more than 20 lifestyle-related diseases. If more GPs were to prescribe activity it would bring huge benefits to people’s physical and mental health.”*

*“Conversely, Central YMCA’s research indicates that leading an inactive lifestyle reduces the average wellbeing score by 19 per cent – meaning there’s a 32 per cent gap in average wellbeing scores between the most and least active. Clearly, this is something we must address and the key will be helping people to overcome the barriers to exercise. Britain is currently in the grip of a cradle to grave physical inactivity crisis, so it’s vital that we place greater effort into inspiring movement and offering targeted exercise interventions to those who need it most.”*

**Peter Fitzboydon, Chief Executive, London Sport.**

*“Central YMCA’s work in exploring factors that contribute to wellbeing in the UK is both welcome and timely, coming at a time when the sport sector is actively exploring the ways it can deliver lifelong benefits to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.*”

*“Indeed, while the 32% gap in wellbeing scores between those that lead an active lifestyle and those that are significantly less active highlighted in this report comes as no surprise, it starkly sets out the importance of developing physical activity and sport programmes that work for those people that are most likely to experience low levels of personal wellbeing.*”

*“For London Sport, our target of helping 1,000,000 Londoners to be more physically active by 2020 is not just about ‘sport for sport’s sake’; it is about something much bigger: the potential to definitively and positively impact people’s lives from childhood right through to older adult life. It also means taking seriously the realisation that demographics that are less likely to take part in physical activity and sport are also therefore far more likely to experience lower levels of personal wellbeing – this is a situation that we must address, and quickly.*”

*“For most of us working in sport, the benefits to people’s lives that go hand-in-hand with taking part in physical activity and sport are clear. Central YMCA’s research goes a long way to reinforcing the importance of using physical activity as an intervention for a comprehensive range of issues confronting people across the country in 2016.”*



