

Great Britain – Or Is It?

If someone asked you how happy the people in your country are, what would you say? The British government recently asked the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to carry out a survey to find out if people in the country are, in general, happy or not. Most Britons report being satisfied with life, with concerns over work and finances overtaken by happiness gained from children, relationships, and where people live.

The government survey was released just days after economists made one of the most depressing forecasts of recent times about long-term economic growth. (— 1 —) Not only that, but it would leave the public worse off than they were ten years ago. Despite this, the survey paints a picture of the country largely emotionally unaffected by the crisis.

The survey of 4,200 adults is part of the British Prime Minister's £2 million drive to get a better idea of how the country is doing, rather than just focusing on budgets and figures. People were asked various questions about their lives and were asked to give marks out of ten about how they felt about these areas. The ONS's work showed that on average people rated their life satisfaction at 7.4 out of 10. When asked whether things they did in life were worthwhile, people on average gave a score of 7.6. (— 2 —) Happiness with people's financial situation had the lowest average score of 6.2 out of 10, followed by work situation, with 6.7 out of 10. When asked specifically about satisfaction with the balance between time spent on work and on other areas of life, low scores were also given, with an average of 6.4 out of 10.

The answer to the question, 'Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?' caused some worry. More than a quarter rated this 5 out of 10 – where 10 was feeling 'completely anxious'. (— 3 —) These areas of life had the highest average scores, with both scoring at 8.3 out of 10.

Lord Richard Layard, professor at the London School of Economics, said it was likely that life satisfaction would fall as the situation gets worse. (— 4 —) And when things are going badly and times are hard, people start to feel less happy with their lives.

The professor, who founded the Action for Happiness group to promote well-being, said policymakers – the people who make important financial decisions – could use the data to lessen the pain of recession. But they would need to first identify how to measure happiness, then work out what makes people 'miserable or happy'. Lastly, they ought to assess how much happiness one can create by spending taxpayers' cash. (— 5 —)

Paul Allen of the ONS said another big factor in happiness was health. He said they saw that people who responded when their health was bad, reported anxiety. He added that they were trying to build up a picture of how people rate happiness. 'One of the most revealing aspects of the emerging science around happiness is about language. Britons associated happiness with being 'calm, relaxed, and peaceful' rather than 'energized and excited'. So, perhaps it pays in more ways than one to follow the great

- A However, there were also signs of stress in British society.**
- B This could be used on supporting childcare, parenting, or help for mental health.**
- C He added that we know from other European countries that this is sensitive to how businesses reach highs and sink to lows.**
- D However, a lot of young people think that wealth and celebrity will make you happy.**
- E The experts predicted that the financial decline would be deep and long.**
- F People were happiest, however, with their personal relationships and mental wellbeing.**