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for Education

# **PISA 2018 additional analyses: What does PISA tell us about the wellbeing of 15-year-olds?**

**Research brief**

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## Background to research

Recent national and international evidence suggests that the wellbeing of young people in the UK has decreased. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 national reports for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Sizmur *et al.*, 2019a; Sizmur *et al.*, 2019b; Sizmur *et al.*, 2019c) identified cause for concern for 15-year-old pupils. Pupils' wellbeing in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was significantly lower than wellbeing in the other OECD countries on average. The comparison with PISA 2015 was also worrying; the proportion of 15-year-olds in the UK that reported being satisfied with their lives dropped at a faster rate than anywhere else, a 13 percentage point drop since 2015 (OECD, 2019).

Based on PISA 2015 and 2018, this research brief summarises the key findings from the analysis of pupils' wellbeing data in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as three OECD comparator countries, France, Finland and Korea.

The full report is available to download from the NFER's website:

[PISA 2018 additional analyses: What does PISA tell us about the wellbeing of 15-year-olds?](#)

## Research questions

This analysis focused on a variety of wellbeing questions from PISA 2015 as well as 2018 in order to answer the following questions:

How has life-satisfaction in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and comparator countries changed between 2015 and 2018, and what could be the potential drivers for this?

What is the relationship between life-satisfaction and other measures of wellbeing?

What is the relationship between wellbeing and reading attainment, and can wellbeing moderate the relationship between attainment and ESCS?

# Report structure

The report is structured as follows.

- Chapter 1 introduces the research questions and an overview of how they are addressed in the analysis.
- Chapter 2 defines wellbeing, and the aspects of wellbeing that PISA seeks to measure. The policy context in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are outlined, along with relationships between wellbeing and attainment, and wellbeing and socioeconomic status from PISA 2018.
- Chapter 3 provides detail on the motivation of the research, the choice of comparator countries, and the broad range of wellbeing measures we can analyse with PISA data that are internationally comparable and linked to attainment.
- Chapter 4 explores the relationship between life-satisfaction and other measures of wellbeing used in PISA 2018.
- Chapter 5 identifies the aspects of wellbeing most strongly associated with life-satisfaction.
- Chapter 6 looks at the relationship between aspects of school culture and wellbeing, specifically sense of belonging in school and teacher feedback.
- Chapter 7 looks at the relationship between parental support and wellbeing, together with findings around the relationship between parental support and attainment.
- Chapter 8 explores the relationships between self-doubt and sensitivity to failure (called 'fear of failure' in PISA) with wellbeing, and with attainment.
- Chapter 9 draws together the key findings and recommendations for policy.

## Key findings

- England, Wales and Northern Ireland showed a significant decrease in life-satisfaction between 2015 and 2018.
- For England, Wales and Northern Ireland, life-satisfaction was lower for pupils from low socioeconomic backgrounds than those from high socioeconomic backgrounds.
- In 2018, the strength of personal relationships was the most important factor linked to pupils' perceived life-satisfaction and wellbeing. As such, sense of belonging had the highest correlation with life-satisfaction, followed closely by parental- and then teacher-relationships.

- Between 2015 and 2018, sense of belonging in school as well as perceived parental support has decreased in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Between 2015 and 2018, pupils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland reported increased teacher feedback.
- For England, there was no statistically significant relationship between fear of failure and reading attainment.
- For England, perceived parental support was not associated with attainment.
- For England, there was no evidence that wellbeing affected the relationship between attainment and socioeconomic status.

## Recommendations

Throughout this report, wellbeing in young people seems to be first and foremost linked to personal-, then parental- and lastly teacher-relationships. As such, the report highlights several policy recommendations that might support wellbeing in young people:

- Develop inclusive whole-school approaches, where the wider school community is fully committed to improving pupils' wellbeing.
- Explore what schools and others can do to support positive relationships with friends and family.
- Increase pupils' perceived sense of belonging by ensuring their voices are being heard.
- Continue to reinforce positive relationships between pupils and staff by encouraging positive teacher feedback, as well as positive relationships between pupils.
- Programmes such as peer-support / mentoring can help to create a positive school climate and therefore support pupils' wellbeing, as long as they are implemented carefully and monitored well.

## References

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