

Statistical bulletin

Personal well-being in the UK: April 2016 to March 2017

Estimates of life satisfaction, whether you feel the things you do in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety at the UK, country, regional and local authority level.



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1 . Main points

- We continue to see small year-on-year improvements in average life satisfaction ratings.
- There has been a slight increase in average happiness ratings over this period. This comes after ratings leveled off between the years ending March 2015 and 2016. Earlier years saw regular increases.
- For both anxiety and feelings that the things we do in life are worthwhile, ratings continue to remain level. These measures last saw small improvements between the years ending March 2014 and 2015.
- People in Northern Ireland continue to give higher average ratings across each of the personal well-being measures, when compared with the other UK countries.
- This publication also presents estimates of personal well-being for UK local authorities between the years ending March 2012 and 2017.

2 . Statistician's comment

"Today's figures may surprise some, showing a small increase in both reported happiness and life satisfaction during a period that has seen political change and uncertainty. It's worth noting that employment rates rose during the period covered by this report, and other ONS analysis showed people perceiving an improvement in their own financial situations and in the overall economy. These are factors we believe may account for some people's increased sense of personal well-being."

Matthew Steel – Office for National Statistics

3 . Average life satisfaction and happiness ratings reach highest levels since 2011

The average (mean) ratings across the four measures of personal well-being in the year ending March 2017 were:

- 7.7 out of 10 for life satisfaction
- 7.9 out of 10 for feeling that what you do in life is worthwhile
- 7.5 out of 10 for happiness yesterday
- 2.9 out of 10 for anxiety yesterday

Comparing the years ending March 2016 and 2017, there have been statistically significant improvements in average ratings of life satisfaction and happiness for the UK overall. There was no change in average ratings of anxiety and the sense that things done in life are worthwhile.

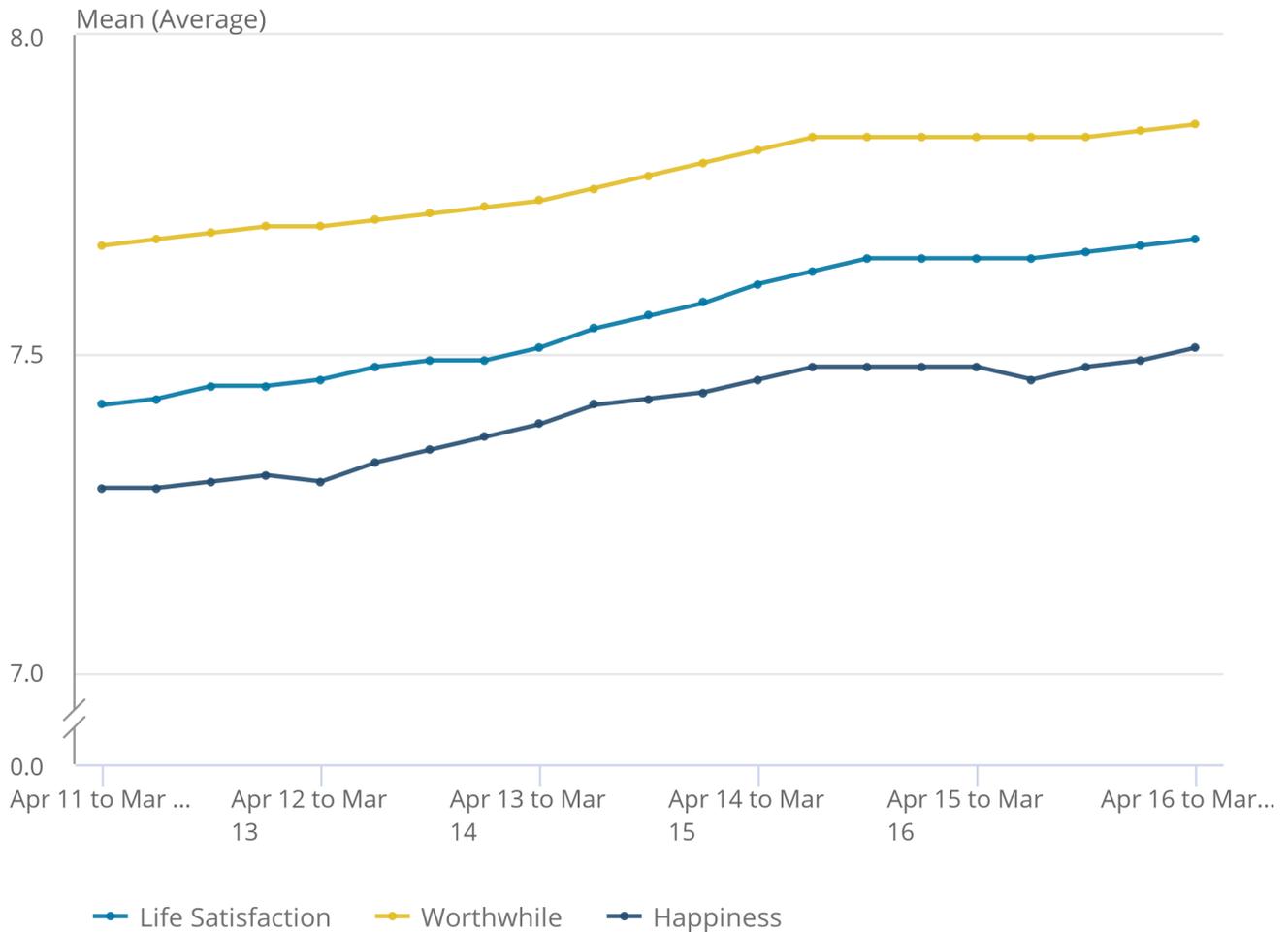
Figures 1a and 1b display the changes in personal well-being between the years ending March 2012 and 2017. Average ratings of life satisfaction and happiness were at their highest levels in the year ending March 2017 since we began measuring personal well-being in 2011. Despite no statistically significant change in average worthwhile ratings between the years ending March 2016 and 2017, levels remain at their joint highest since 2011. For anxiety, average ratings reached a low in the year ending September 2015 but subsequently rose. They have since levelled off and were unchanged between the years ending March 2016 and 2017 and remain lower compared with the years ending March 2012 and 2013.

Figure 1a: Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK

Figure 1a: Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

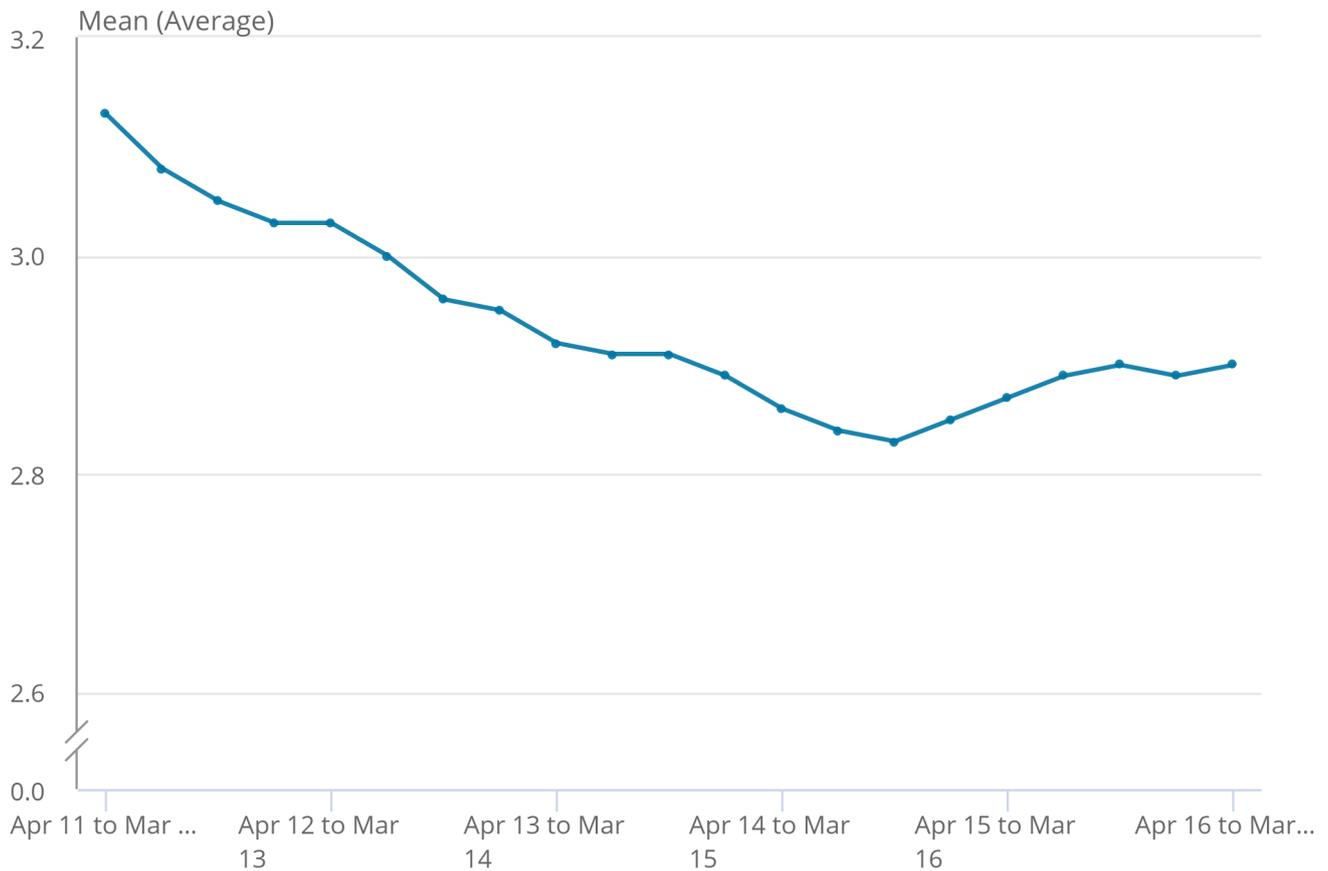
1. Chart axis does not start at 0.

Figure 1b: Average anxiety ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK

Figure 1b: Average anxiety ratings, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Chart axis does not start at 0.

4 . More people report very high levels of life satisfaction and worthwhile ratings

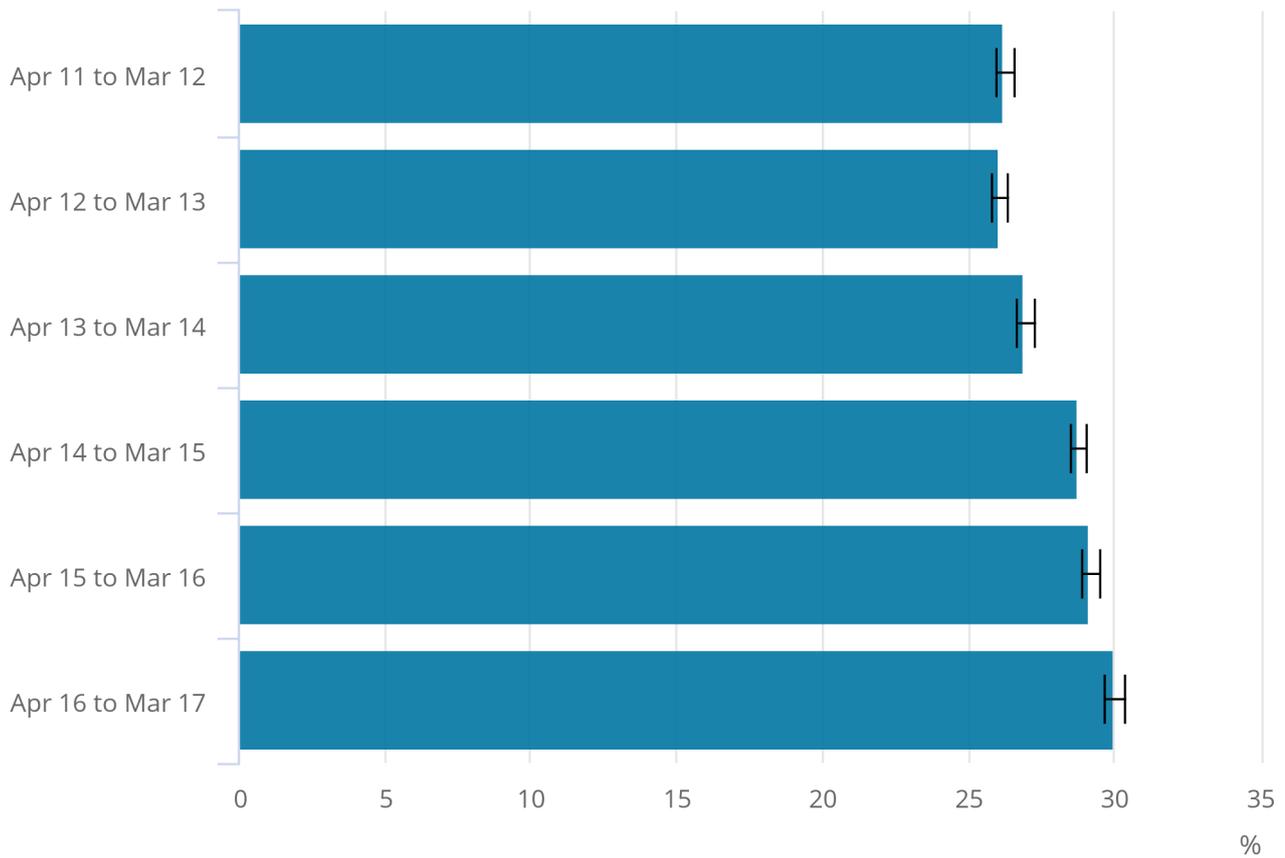
Between the years ending March 2016 and 2017, there has been a statistically significant increase in the proportion of people reporting very high levels of life satisfaction and feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, as shown in figures 2a and 2b.

There were no changes in the proportion of people who reported their ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile or happiness as low. This indicates that increases in mean life satisfaction are being driven by more people reporting the highest levels of well-being, rather than a decrease in those reporting the lowest levels of well-being.

Figure 2a: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of life satisfaction - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK

Figure 2a: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of life satisfaction - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

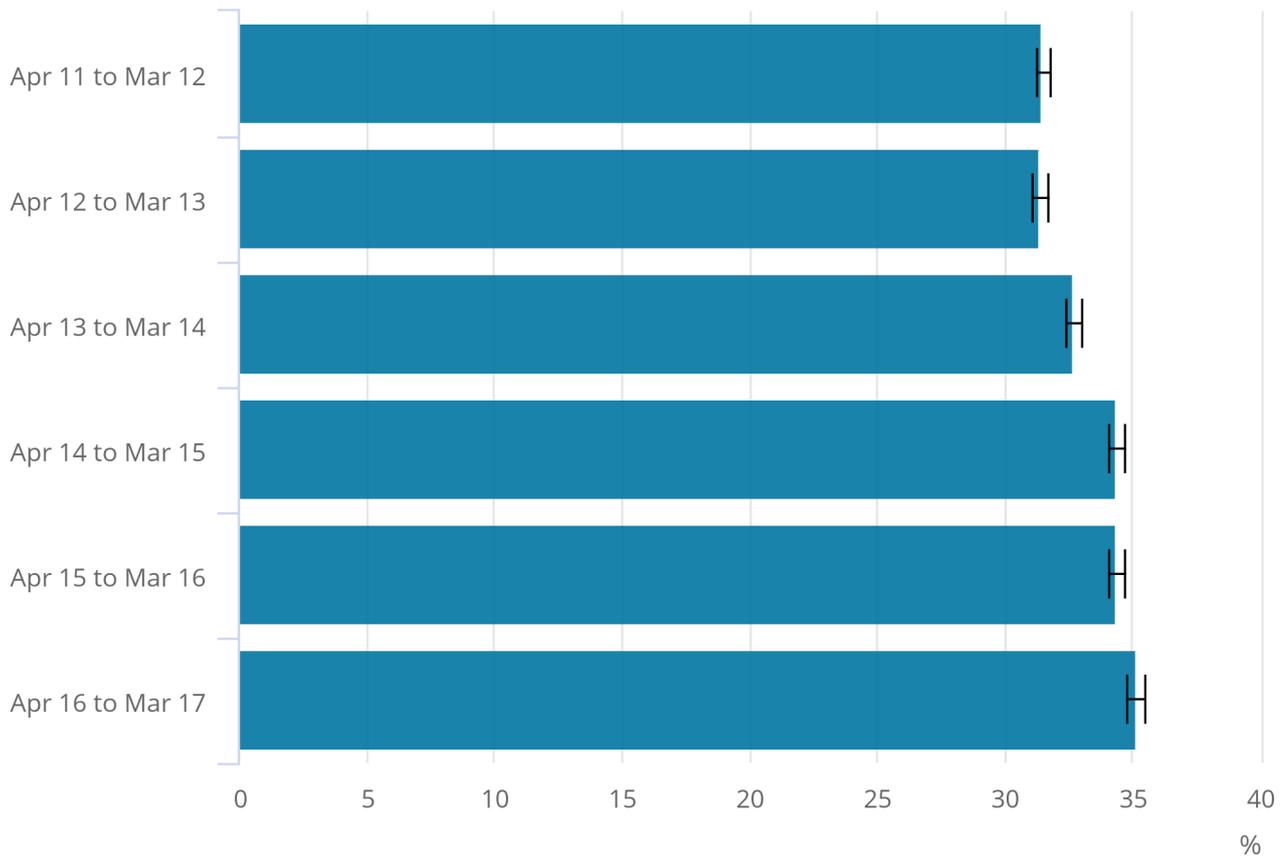
Notes:

1. Very high life satisfaction is defined as those reporting 9 or 10 out of 10.

Figure 2b: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of worthwhile - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK

Figure 2b: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of worthwhile - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

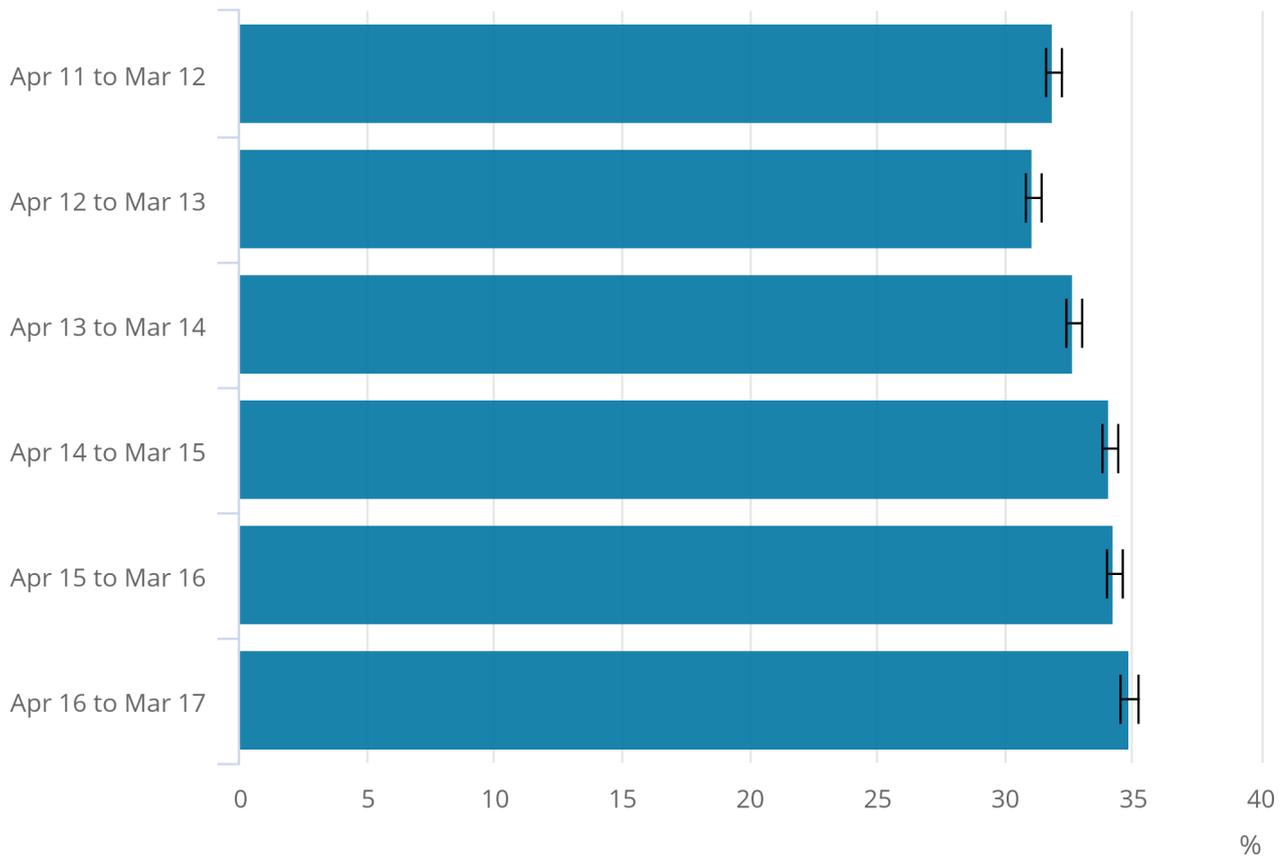
Notes:

1. Very high worthwhile is defined as those reporting 9 or 10 out of 10.

Figure 2c: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of happiness - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK

Figure 2c: Proportion of respondents reporting very high ratings of happiness - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

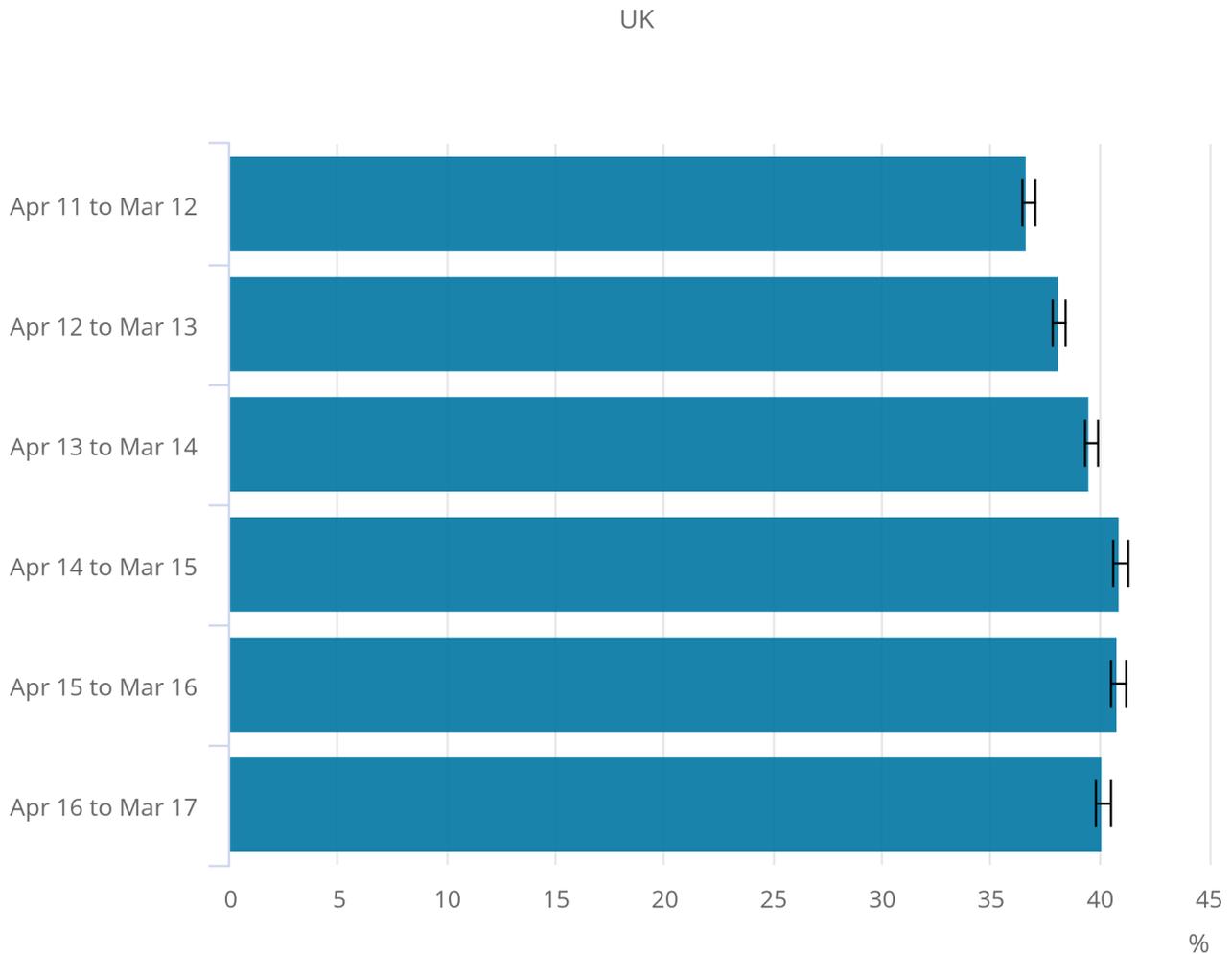
Notes:

1. Very high happiness is defined as those reporting 9 or 10 out of 10.

Figure 2d: Proportion of respondents reporting very low ratings of anxiety - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

UK

Figure 2d: Proportion of respondents reporting very low ratings of anxiety - year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017



Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Very low anxiety is defined as those reporting 0 or 1 out of 10.

5 . People in Northern Ireland report the highest personal well-being

At a country level, average (mean) ratings of life satisfaction and happiness have increased slightly in England between the years ending March 2016 and 2017. There were no other changes in any aspect of well-being for the rest of the countries in the UK over this period.

In the year ending March 2017, people in Northern Ireland continue to report the highest average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings, and the lowest anxiety ratings, when compared with the other constituent countries of the UK.

6 . What may explain these results?

Considering some of the changes discussed previously, it is important to reflect on factors that could be influencing them. Research shows that a number of factors influence our quality of life and well-being. Employment or job satisfaction, our health, the quality of our relationships and our personal financial security are just some of the aspects of our lives shown to have an effect. Over time, changes and differences between areas could be related to these factors.

Over the year that this publication covers, various situations of uncertainty, not least in political terms have unfolded in the UK. For example, the UK public voted on the EU referendum and there was a new prime minister appointed. Considering this, it is interesting to see that the latest figures covered by [Economic Well-being \(Office for National Statistics\)](#): show that, “between Quarter 4 2016 and Quarter 1 2017, consumers reported perceived improvements in their own financial situation and the general economic situation over the last year”.

In addition to this, the UK employment rate is at its highest since comparable records began in 1971. The unemployment rate is at its joint lowest since 1975.

Taking this into account, some of the events mentioned previously may not have caused any sudden changes. If we consider the public’s own perceptions and experiences over the last year, there was perhaps relatively little change in terms of day-to-day experiences, which may explain why employment and economic well-being remain high.

In line with this, [Ipsos MORI’s Political Monitor](#) asked the UK population: “Now that Britain has voted to leave the EU, to what extent do you think it will be better or worse for your own standard of living, or will it make no difference?” Of the population, 40% reported in March 2017 that it will make no difference, which is up from 24% in October 2016.

Our next release, which will be published later this year, will be the first that will include a year’s worth of data post-EU referendum; thus, allowing direct comparisons pre- and post-EU referendum. The dataset associated with this release will also include the general election.

We are always looking for ways to improve our releases and make them more useful and helpful. Please contact the Quality of Life team via email at QualityOfLife@ons.gsi.gov.uk with any comments or suggestions, including your views on improvements we might make.

7 . How do people rate their personal well-being in your area?

The interactive tools in this section provide the opportunity to compare average ratings of personal well-being across UK local authorities. The most appropriate comparisons are progress over time within the same local authority, or across local authorities that share a similar demographic composition to one another. Simply ranking local authorities by their numerical scores can be misleading.

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing have also recently published a [local well-being indicators set and guidelines](#). These provide a helpful starting point for looking at issues that contribute to well-being in local areas.

Personal well-being Explorer, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

Comparisons between areas should be done so with caution as these estimates are provided from a sample survey. Confidence intervals should be taken into account when assessing differences.

Personal well-being interactive maps, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2017

Comparisons between areas should be done so with caution as these estimates are provided from a sample survey. Confidence intervals should be taken into account when assessing differences.

8 . Links to related statistics

Recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) publications related to well-being:

[Personal well-being in the UK: Jan 2016 to Dec 2016](#)

[Measuring national well-being in the UK, domains and measures: April 2017](#)

[Measuring National Well-being: At what age is Personal Well-being the highest?](#)

[Measuring National Well-being. What matters most to Personal Well-being?](#)

[Economic Well-being: Quarter 1, Jan to Mar 2017](#)

[Social capital in the UK: May 2017](#)

9 . Quality and methodology

1. The Personal Well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information report contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data
- the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users
- how the output was created

2. How we measure personal well-being

Since 2011, we have asked personal well-being questions to adults aged 16 and over in the UK, to better understand how they feel about their lives. This release presents headline results for the financial year ending 2017, along with changes over the last six years. It provides data at a national level and at a local authority level.

The four personal well-being questions are:

- overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

People are asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”. We produce estimates of the mean ratings for all four personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions, using thresholds.

For more information on personal well-being please see the [personal well-being user guide](#).

3. **Table 1: Labelling of thresholds**

Life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness scores		Anxiety scores	
Response on an 11 point scale	Label	Response on an 11 point scale	Label
0 – 4	Low	0 – 1	Very low
5 – 6	Medium	2 – 3	Low
7 – 8	High	4 – 5	Medium
9 – 10	Very high	6 – 10	High

Source: Office for National Statistics

4. The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are approximate because they are determined on the basis of non-overlapping confidence intervals.

5. Comparisons have been based on unrounded data.

6. We are able to compare with the same period last year (April 2015 to March 2016) to identify any changes that may have occurred. However, we are not able to reliably compare with the preceding period (January 2016 to December 2016) as they include overlapping time periods that contain the same data.

7. Personal well-being data is now included within the main Annual Population Survey (APS) dataset rather than released as a separate dataset. As part of this transition, personal well-being estimates now go through the regular APS re-weighting timetable. For the series published in this release the estimates for the years ending March 2013 through to 2017 have been weighted to 2015 mid-year population estimates (MYPEs). For more information see [Impact of transition to Annual Population Survey dataset](#). (Please note that this was incorrectly referred to as 2017 MYPEs but corrected 24 October 2017)