



**Wales Centre for Public Policy**  
**Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru**



**Evidence briefing paper**

# **Cultural well-being**

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# Cultural well-being



How can we define and conceptualise cultural well-being?



What features contribute to well-being in a community?



How does participation in cultural activities affect subjective well-being?



The role of intangible cultural assets



General findings and rates of participation



The impact of specific activities on subjective well-being



Natural heritage and outdoor recreation



Welsh language and cultural well-being



Do well-being outcomes differ for different groups?



What are the evidence gaps, uncertainties, and areas to explore?



How can cultural well-being be used to achieve well-being objectives?

# Introduction

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Public Services Boards (PSBs) are required to carry out well-being assessments for their local areas every five years, in line with local election cycles. The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) has been asked to support this process by preparing briefings looking at national trends and evidence across the areas of **well-being and equalities, cultural well-being**, and **the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit on well-being**.

**This briefing focuses on cultural well-being.** It should be read alongside the other two briefings in the series. This briefing will aim to answer six key questions:

1. How can we define and conceptualise cultural well-being?
2. What cultural features contribute to well-being in a community?
  - 2.1 The role of intangible cultural assets
3. How does participation in cultural activities affect subjective well-being?
  - 3.1 General findings and rates of participation
  - 3.2 The impact of specific activities on subjective well-being
  - 3.3 Natural heritage and outdoor recreation
  - 3.4 Welsh language and cultural well-being
4. Do well-being outcomes differ for different groups?
5. What are the evidence gaps, uncertainties and areas to explore?
6. How can cultural well-being be used to achieve well-being objectives?

# Key findings and recommendations

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Cultural well-being is an emerging research area, with a number of specific aspects that PSBs may wish to focus on when considering how to address this theme:

1. The status of **intangible cultural assets** in the community, their role in community well-being, and the ways in which they can be leveraged to increase well-being.
2. The **rates of participation in arts, culture, heritage and sports** and any known inequalities, and how they can be addressed.
3. **Cross-cutting opportunities** to use cultural activities or a cultural well-being 'lens' to drive well-being improvements in other areas such as health or economic development.
4. Maximising opportunities to **foster cultural well-being through participatory activities** which develop social capital and a sense of place and togetherness.

In terms of specific next steps, we recommend that PSBs:

1. Identify **local expertise** (which could include, for instance, town clerks; parish priests; local historians and historical societies) to facilitate community connections and identify local intangible cultural assets and support place-based and interest-based groups. This approach has also been recommended in Havers et al. (2021) as a way to tackle loneliness and social isolation following the Covid-19 pandemic, and thus offers cross-cutting benefits.
2. Identify **local providers of arts, culture, heritage activities and sport**, particularly those that are closely connected to local communities. It will be very important to assess need following the Covid-19 pandemic, and offer support where possible.
3. **Map local providers against areas of deprivation or lower participation** to see where there are gaps in coverage, and implement **place-specific and community-grounded responses** to ensure that provision meets need and tackles inequalities.
4. Ensure that cultural well-being, including cultural and natural heritage, form **part of economic and public health strategies** to maximise the potential for cross-cutting benefits. This could include using broader valuation methods that capture non-use values or broader social benefits associated with culture and heritage assets (Bakhshi et al., 2015; Sagger et al., 2021).
5. Most importantly, think about **problems from the perspective of cultural well-being**, as supporting cultural activities and community well-being can provide solutions to other problems. For instance, supporting intangible cultural assets can build stronger communities, which can provide resources to tackle loneliness, social isolation and other community problems.

# 1. How can we define and conceptualise cultural well-being?

Cultural well-being is an emerging subject of consideration. In Wales, 'cultural well-being' is listed in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 as one of the areas that public bodies are to improve in Wales. The well-being goals 'A Wales of cohesive communities' and 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language' appear to include themes of cultural well-being – although the term is not defined in the Act ([Welsh Government, 2015](#)).

A number of national well-being indicators are associated with 'cultural well-being', including those relating to: participation in arts, culture and heritage activities; Welsh speaking ability; sense of belonging to the local area; the protection and accreditation status of heritage assets; and participation in sports ([Welsh Government, 2019](#)). Other national indicators associated with cultural well-being in Welsh Government publications include those relating to individuals' perceived influence over local decisions; volunteering rates; and the status of natural assets and ecosystems. This offers a very broad initial understanding of cultural well-being. A more focused definition will be needed to ensure that cultural well-being can adequately be considered by PSBs.

In New Zealand, where local government is required to promote cultural well-being, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage defines it as:

**“The vitality that communities and individuals enjoy through participation in recreation, creatives and cultural activities [and] the freedom to retain, interpret and express their arts, history, heritage and traditions.”**

[New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, n.d](#)

This definition suggests some of the main features of cultural well-being that will be a focus of this briefing, including some of the main types of activity that are considered. But it also points to some of the ways in which cultural well-being can be understood, both in terms of individual and group participation in certain forms of activities, and in terms of cultural well-being as a feature of communities with shared heritage and traditions.

One way to understand this is to distinguish between **cultural well-being outcomes for individuals** and **cultural well-being as a feature of communities**.

Well-being outcomes for individuals can be changes in subjective well-being driven by, or associated with, attending or participating in 'cultural' activities; these are among the more well-studied and evidenced aspects of cultural well-being. But there are also certain ways of 'living well together' that manifest on a community level, as a result of the relationships between individuals, place, heritage and culture ([Atkinson et al., 2017](#)).

This could be understood as taking a less 'instrumental' view of culture – seeing it as having value over and beyond its impacts on individuals. For instance, promoting Welsh language and culture may result in better well-being outcomes, but is an important goal (and statutory requirement) regardless of this.<sup>1</sup>

Part of addressing cultural well-being will therefore need to go beyond individual well-being outcomes and look at the communities and cultures in which individuals are embedded and through which the flourishing of individuals and communities can be realised.

A community is often assumed to consist of a 'geographically bounded group of people at a local scale who are subject to direct or indirect interaction with each other' (Atkinson et al., 2017). This definition is likely to be the most appropriate concept of community for PSBs. However, there are other forms of community to which people can be said to belong, including sub-groups within populations based around employment, shared characteristics or interests. Each of these will influence the subjective well-being of individuals (Atkinson et al., 2017). Likewise, the ties that bring people together may differ across communities. Rural communities can be bound by social ties more than larger, urban communities, where infrastructure or organised activity may be more likely to bring people together (Havers et al., 2021).

Turning towards a recognition of the relationships and interactions that can be said to precede the very idea of separate 'individuals' (who are in part defined through these relationships) allows us to understand communities as something greater than the sum of the individuals who participate in it (Atkinson et al., 2020). Especially relevant to the purposes of this briefing is the 'neglected' dimension of community continuity and change over time.

There are two different ways of framing well-being: 'eudaimonic' and 'hedonic'. Adopting a 'eudaimonic' approach prioritises the achievement of meaning and purpose as key to well-being. This approach could thus emphasise the ways in which places are 'endowed with meaning', including through ensuring that local heritage and culture are preserved (Atkinson et al., 2020). This contrasts with a 'hedonic' view of well-being, which emphasises the maximisation of pleasurable experiences and the avoidance of painful ones.

It is important to note that in practice, measures of subjective well-being generally conflate hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Disabato et al. (2015) found that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being were highly correlated – suggesting that both form part of an overall well-being construct, although this may be a result of how these types of well-being are measured.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Deborah Hardoon (What Works Wellbeing) for suggesting this clarification.

For instance, it is common to measure hedonic well-being in terms of how satisfying an individual finds their life ([Disabato et al., 2015](#)). In practice, individual assessment of life satisfaction is likely to incorporate feelings of meaningfulness and purpose. The distinction is thus difficult to measure.

However, it may remain useful as a frame for understanding how to promote well-being, particularly as there are indications that eudaimonic motivations 'relate more strongly to well-being' than hedonic ones ([Disabato et al., 2015](#)). There are also indications that eudaimonic motivations result in higher long-term well-being, while hedonic motivations promote short-term affect and feelings of life satisfaction ([Henderson et al., 2013](#)).

By integrating all these ideas, it is possible to approach cultural well-being from a number of angles (see [Table 1](#)).

While this briefing paper will not address each of these angles, it will look at both community-focused well-being, through the lens of intangible cultural assets, and individual well-being outcomes associated with specific activities. The briefing also covers the role of natural heritage, outdoor recreation and supporting the Welsh language and culture. Each can be understood through the lens of individual or community well-being, but is important to consider in its own right.

**Table 1: Different ways to understand cultural well-being**

How culture is understood	
How well-being is understood	<p><b>Individual and eudaimonic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture is understood in terms of discrete activities that individuals participate in.</li> <li>• Well-being is defined in terms of feelings of meaning and purpose.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Communitarian and eudaimonic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture is seen as a feature of community life emerging from the interactions between individuals, place and heritage.</li> <li>• Well-being is defined in terms of feelings of meaning and purpose.</li> </ul>
How well-being is understood	<p><b>Individual and hedonic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture is understood in terms of discrete activities that individuals participate in.</li> <li>• Well-being is defined in terms of subjective pleasure.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Communitarian and hedonic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture is seen as a feature of community life emerging from the interactions between individuals, place and heritage.</li> <li>• Well-being is defined in terms of subjective pleasure.</li> </ul>

## 2. What features contribute to cultural well-being in a community?

### 2.1. The role of intangible cultural assets

Cultural well-being in communities can be expressed through a number of features, including community participation in events, shared rituals, volunteering and heritage, and interactions with the built environment. Many of these things can be expressed and understood through the role of intangible cultural assets. These include 'traditional activities and practices, language and cultural expression, and cultural knowledge and skills that are an important part of people's lives' (Mansfield et al., 2019). Other assets falling under this definition may include cultural norms and activities; festivals, beliefs and rituals; traditional sports; and arts and crafts.

The link between intangible cultural assets, communities and well-being is that intangible cultural assets are intrinsically communal properties. This means that in almost all cases they cannot be reduced to individual participation, as they are transmitted and reproduced through communities. For instance, the Welsh language is an intangible cultural asset that requires a community of Welsh speakers, or it will not be spoken.

Promoting these assets can improve community well-being and enhance feelings of community pride, cultural and national self-confidence, and a sense of togetherness and purpose (Aydemir et al., 2019; Liu and Li, 2020). This may be because such assets build on existing social identities and community context. So exploring these assets can reinforce group connections and create stronger community bonds. Promoting intangible cultural assets can therefore play a role in fostering cohesive and thriving communities through promoting belonging to Wales and Welsh culture. Evidence shows that 'a sense of belonging to a common heritage' can support well-being (Mansfield et al., 2019). Promoting and sharing a common heritage is, therefore, an inclusive activity:

**"Because it is recognised as inherently universal, regardless of cultural differences, heritage encourages a broader sense of the collective, through the reciprocal respect for, and interest in, the other." (Aydemir et al., 2019)**

Similarly, participation in and sharing traditional arts and cultural activities within minority communities or with a broader group can improve well-being for ethnic minority groups (Mansfield et al., 2019).

From a subjective well-being perspective, there is moderate evidence to suggest that participation in intangible cultural activities enhances social connections and provides resources to cope with life's challenges ([Mansfield et al., 2019](#)).

Some research suggests that participation in intangible cultural activities can also improve resilience, particularly for communities and individuals who have experienced trauma ([Mansfield et al., 2019](#)). This could include refugee populations and people who have been victimised (for instance, victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse).

There is likewise some evidence from Naples in Italy that local culture and history can play a role in how residents respond to adversity and that 'shared meaningful experiences and culturally specific forms of resilience' can support well-being ([Cocozza et al., 2020](#)). Research in New Zealand suggests that adherence to culturally-specific forms of social memory and intangible cultural assets has been a key factor in resilience among certain Māori groups ([Pomeroy, 2016](#)). Closer to home, 'enjoyment of [my] community's culture and traditions' is associated with lower rates of mental illness in Wales, including for adults who have experienced one or more adverse childhood experiences ([Hughes et al., 2018](#)).

### **Box 1: 'A sense of place': how intangible cultural assets can inform economic strategy**

Urquhart and Acott (2014) found an interconnection between historic local industries and cultural self-understanding in fishing communities in Cornwall. Fishing is perceived as the heart of local communities and a key determinant of cultural identity and physical heritage, as well as providing a way for social interaction to take place and maintaining cohesive communities. Even in areas where fisheries are no longer major employers, the cultural importance of these industries brings communities together. In Wales, well-being objectives could identify similarly culturally important industries – which may include, depending on the local context, fisheries, agriculture and heavy industry – and ensure that cultural well-being is considered as part of the future economic strategy.

With the evidence showing that participation in intangible cultural activities also reinforces a sense of hope for the future, it could also play a key role in regenerating and reinforcing economically depressed or deprived communities more broadly. An example of this is the town of Pleternica in Croatia, which has chosen a development strategy around the traditional folksong form of bećarac associated with the region ([Aydemir et al., 2019](#)). This includes a museum established in collaboration with local people and a series of events designed to maintain the relevance and viability of the tradition, while also aiming to provide well-being benefits for local communities. In addition to the well-being benefits and retention of intangible cultural assets, the museum and associated heritage strategy are also intended to attract investment and promote economic development.

Finally, there are links between intangible cultural assets and the built heritage environment which can contribute to individual and community well-being. Church buildings, for example, host a repository of local cultural knowledge, belief and traditions – in some cases dating back many centuries. Weekly participation in acts of worship has well-being benefits for individuals, possibly through attitudinal changes, a sense of purpose, and social connections ([Gramatki and Watt, 2021](#)).

At the same time, church buildings as institutions provide large amounts of social value and well-being benefit to communities through services such as food banks, volunteering opportunities and worship activities ([Gramatki et al., 2020](#)). Attending to the well-being benefits of intangible cultural assets will therefore also require a focus on the interaction of intangible and tangible, and how the built environment can be used to facilitate community well-being. This could draw on the recognised benefits of heritage assets to communities, social cohesion and cultural life, as well as to individual well-being ([Historic England, 2020](#)).

Intangible cultural assets are therefore important parts of community cultural well-being that deserve attention. This will be important for all parts of Wales, but in particular historically underserved or neglected communities, notably since the beginning of deindustrialisation. These communities could therefore draw on intangible cultural assets to improve subjective well-being outcomes for individuals, build and maintain thriving communities, and provide opportunities for economic growth and resilience.

## 3. How does participation in cultural activities affect subjective well-being?

### 3.1. General findings and rates of participation

Moving towards subjective well-being and away from a community-level focus, research has been conducted on the effect of attendance and participation in certain cultural activities on individual well-being.

When assessing the impact of cultural activities on subjective well-being it is important to distinguish between **attending** cultural activities and **participating in** cultural activities, because these may have different effects on subjective well-being: for instance, the difference between attending a gallery exhibition, and creating an artwork.

In general, people in Wales who regularly attend or participate in cultural activities are more likely to report higher subjective well-being and less likely to report low subjective well-being ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)). Wheatley and Bickerton ([2017](#)) also found that participation or attendance in arts and cultural events is associated with higher levels of subjective well-being, although this varied depending on the activity. However, it is important to view such results in conjunction with other demographic factors that may influence subjective well-being. This is discussed further [below](#).

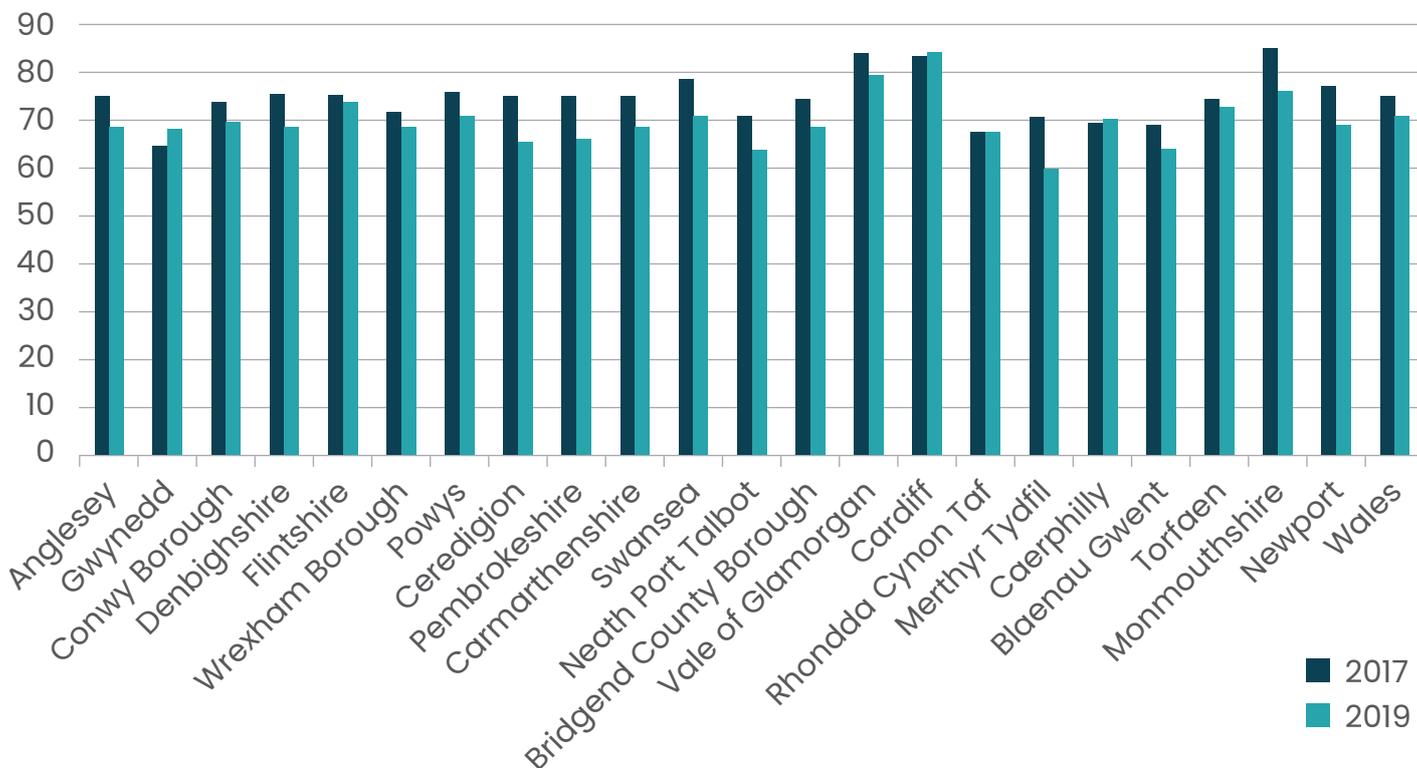
Data are collected as part of the National Survey for Wales in accordance with the national indicators put in place under the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

In terms of participation, this is measured as the percentage of people who attend arts, culture or heritage events three times a year or more ('regular attendance') and the percentage of people who participate in sports events at least three times a week ([Welsh Government, 2016](#)). [Figure 1](#) shows the percentage of people who regularly attended in both years that data have been collected for this indicator, 2017 and 2019, by local authority.

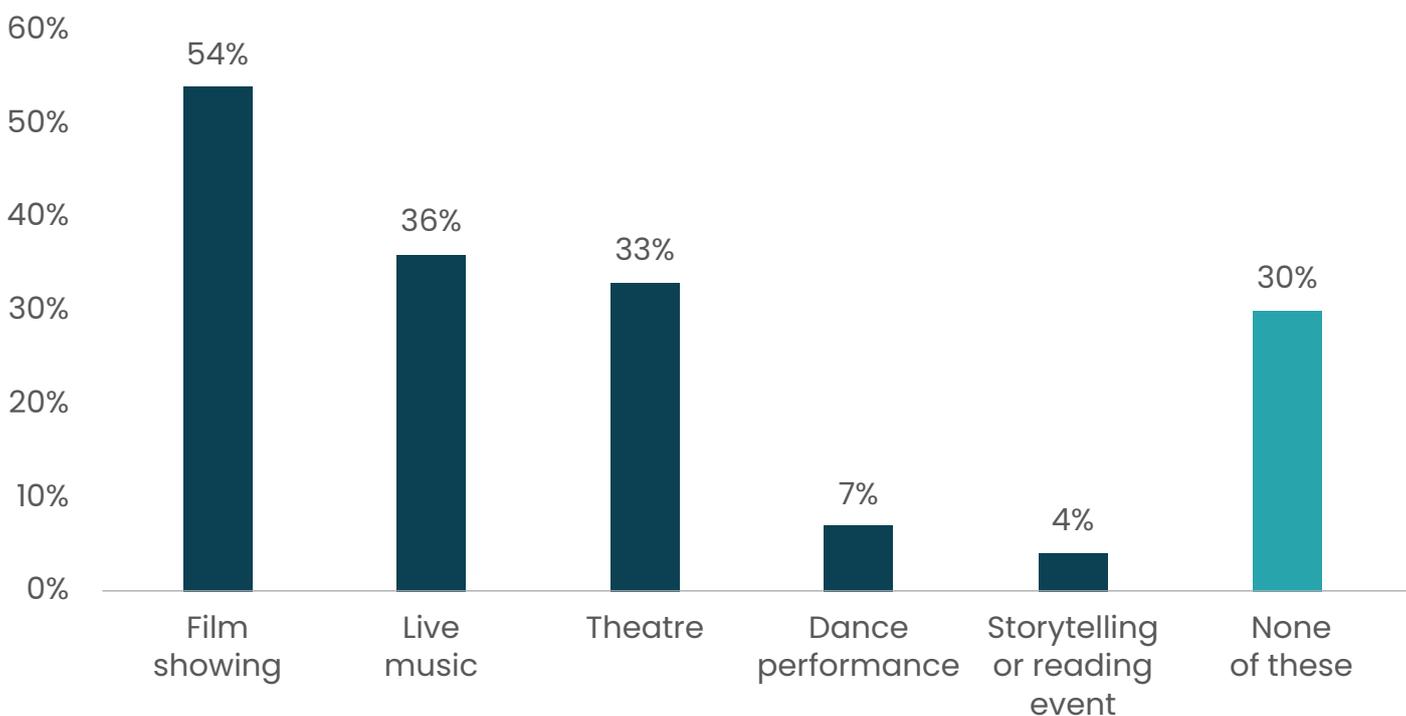
In 2019–20, 71% of people regularly attended arts, culture or heritage activities, and 32% of people regularly participated in sports activities ([Welsh Government, 2020](#)). [Figure 2](#) shows the types of activity that were most frequently attended, with film showings being the most popular (attended by 54% of people), and theatre and live music both also showing popular responses.

In 2017–18, 68% of people attended events whereas 22% participated in events, although those who participated did so regularly, with 52% doing so once a week or more ([Welsh Government, 2018](#)). In 2019–20, 19% participated while 70% attended events ([National Survey for Wales, 2019–20](#)).

**Figure 1: Percentage of people who regularly attended arts, culture or heritage activities by local authority and in Wales, 2017 and 2019** (Data Cymru, 2021)<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 2: Percentage of people attending types of arts events, excluding spontaneous responses, 2019-20** (National Survey for Wales, 2019-20)



<sup>2</sup> For more information on data sources and availability see the [Annex](#).

Geography and/or the availability of events locally appear to play a factor, with 51% agreeing (strongly or tending to agree) that they would attend more frequently if events were closer ([National Survey for Wales, 2019-20](#)). This suggests that in areas where there are currently lower levels of attendance (see [Figure 1](#)), more could be done to attract events and opportunities.

In terms of sport, the 2017-18 figures also show that 32% participated three times a week or more, with 50% taking part at least once a week ([Welsh Government, 2018](#)). The most common sports included walking, swimming, the gym or fitness activities, jogging, football and cycling ([Welsh Government, 2018](#)). Fifty-five percent of Welsh people wanted to do more sport or physical activity, and less than half felt they have good access to health or sport clubs ([Welsh Government, 2018](#)).

### 3.2. The impact of specific activities on subjective well-being

There is some evidence on the impact of participating in different cultural activities on individual subjective well-being. Studies have been conducted across a spectrum of activities, although, given the breadth and scope of possible participation, the quality of evidence does vary and tends to focus on particular activities more than others. Additionally, research often focuses on the benefits of participation for population subgroups, and there is a lack of specific robust evidence on attendance at cultural events compared to participation in cultural events and activities ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)).

What Works Wellbeing has carried out systematic reviews on the impact of participation in musical events such as group singing, and on the impact of participation in the visual arts on mental health.

High-quality evidence shows that listening to music can increase the well-being of young adults; that participation in group singing activities can be particularly beneficial for older people; and that structured music therapy can reduce negative well-being outcomes for pregnant women ([Daykin et al., 2016a](#)). The same study suggests that participation in music can reduce depression (but not anxiety) in healthy people.

The potential mental health benefits of participation in arts, culture and heritage activities are reinforced by a separate systematic review looking at the impact of visual arts participation on people suffering from mental health issues ([Tomlinson et al., 2018](#)). Notably, this review was confident that visual arts participation can increase subjective well-being in this group through developing 'bonding' social capital that can increase self-confidence, social contact and a greater sense of self ([Tomlinson et al., 2018](#)). These improvements to well-being may stem from the social connections and opportunities for developing bonds that result from the sessions. This suggests that group activities may be better than individual ones for driving well-being improvements.

Heritage activities are associated with higher subjective well-being, and community-based activities. Living in 'historic' areas can contribute to community well-being by increasing levels of social capital, connectedness and a 'sense of place' ([Pennington et al., 2019](#)).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the discussion above on how promoting intangible cultural assets and heritage can help promote community cultural well-being.

## Box 2: Using music to support adults with health conditions: improving well-being and health outcomes

There is some evidence that listening to music and participating in music can improve mental health and well-being outcomes for people with chronic health conditions, as well as for older adults ([Daykin et al., 2016b](#)).

Interestingly, there is moderate-quality evidence that participatory music programmes can assist in rehabilitation for adults with a variety of conditions ([Daykin et al., 2016b](#); [Batt-Rawden and Tellnes, 2011](#); [Batt-Rawden, 2006](#)). A longitudinal study in Norway found that (self-selected) music could support adults to increase the intensity and frequency of their physical activity, such as walking or other forms of exercise, and thus contribute to rehabilitation ([Batt-Rawden and Tellnes, 2011](#)). But it can also support mental well-being and the determination to change habits and focus on self-improvement and self-care. Batt-Rawden suggests that the act of selecting music and using it to support rehabilitation can enhance feelings of personal responsibility and participation in treatment, and can contribute to overcoming the sense that 'medicalization is ... seen to impinge on people's lives' ([Batt-Rawden, 2006](#)). Incorporating cultural participation into recovery could therefore have benefits for public health and assist in meeting overall well-being objectives.

This can be through visiting heritage sites. Practical heritage activities such as social engagement and inclusion projects and community heritage projects are associated with additional benefits. This means that promoting the value of intangible cultural assets (see above) should also include opportunities for volunteering.

Volunteering can aid social cohesion and connection as well as improve the subjective well-being of volunteers ([Boelman, 2021](#)). The well-being effect of volunteering seems to be related to eudaimonic factors such as a sense of purpose, confidence in one's own abilities, and the social connections formed through volunteering ([Stuart and Abreu Scherer, 2020](#)). However, this will depend on how the volunteer experience is managed, as if volunteers do not feel that their work is valued or effective they will not receive the same well-being benefits.

In Wales, the experience of community groups during the Covid-19 pandemic suggests that place- and interest-based groups can help to alleviate loneliness and provide a sense of purpose ([Havers et al., 2021](#)).

Outreach programmes can have a positive impact on health and well-being: in a study based around museums in London and Kent, socially isolated older adults reported feeling mentally stimulated and being more physically active by having something to motivate activity ([Todd et al., 2017](#)).

Regular participation in sports is (perhaps unsurprisingly) associated with greater physical health, with the greatest increase seen in those who took up sports from a low baseline ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)). Sports participation also improved self-reported mental health ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)). The well-being benefits of sports participation are highest when participants are involved at least weekly (as with worship activities, described above), suggesting that steps should be taken to facilitate regular or habitual activity in communities ([Gramatki and Watt, 2021](#)).

While the evidence is often limited, there is a consistent association of participation in arts, cultural, heritage or sporting events with higher levels of subjective well-being. As there is some evidence that the physical location of events can be a barrier, PSBs should act to support local arts, culture, heritage and sports events, ensuring that these are reasonably accessible. Furthermore, providing resources to support community groups, networks and interest groups in engaging and connecting with people can be a good way to support well-being and increase participation rates ([Havers et al., 2021](#)).

### 3.3. Natural heritage and outdoor recreation

Natural heritage – including the countryside, a particular geographical situation, and the interaction between people and nature throughout history – is an important component of cultural well-being. In Wales, there is a long history of interaction between people and the land, from the Iron Age through the Industrial Revolution to the present day.

This means that natural heritage is strongly associated with historical memory and use, particularly in areas where the landscape was formerly dominated by industry (such as the South Wales Valleys), and across rural Wales, where agriculture is culturally important and often protects Welsh-speaking communities.

Evidence suggests that participating in outdoor recreational activities is associated with better subjective well-being. A study across linguistic regions in Switzerland found that having nearby access to high-quality outdoor recreation has positive effects on the well-being and resilience of people living in urban settings ([Buchecker and Degenhardt, 2015](#)). Spending at least 120 minutes per week outdoors in natural environments, including parks, correlates with better self-reported health and well-being, regardless of most demographic factors including age, rurality and overall health ([White et al., 2019](#)). The quality of this evidence will be limited to the extent that it relies on self-reported well-being, which could be determined by other factors, and there will be a need for further studies. However, participation in nature-based recreational activities is shown to increase well-being when controlling for a range of demographic factors, suggesting that time in nature is beneficial by itself ([Wolsko et al., 2019](#)).

There is limited evidence to suggest that spending time outdoors with family and friends can improve well-being, particularly with partners ([What Works Wellbeing, 2018](#)).

Further research will be needed to establish these findings more precisely, due to concerns over the adequacy of the existing evidence and methodology ([Mansfield et al., 2018](#)).

Natural heritage can include the interactions between communities and their landscapes. [Urquhart and Acott \(2014\)](#) discuss the relationship between cultural history and physical landscape in the context of Cornish fishing villages, where communities have developed according to the physical characteristics of the landscape such as coves, bays and natural harbours.

In Wales, there are rich natural heritage opportunities, ranging from heritage sites, protected landscapes like natural parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, and landscapes showing the effects of past and present industrialisation. These could be used to develop a well-being strategy that connects natural heritage, cultural heritage and physical well-being. For instance, heritage trails such as the North Wales Pilgrim Trail offer opportunities to connect cultural and spiritual heritage with natural beauty and physical activity, providing a range of perceived benefits to individuals ([Scriven, 2021](#)). While trails of this nature could be used to connect religious sites across Wales, there are also opportunities to do this with industrial heritage (for instance, the [Machen Forge Trail](#) in Caerphilly) or in urban and peri-urban areas across Wales.<sup>4</sup>

### **Box 3: Changing perceptions of natural heritage: economic, social and cultural opportunities**

The South Wales Valleys were formerly extensively industrialised areas. But since the mass closure of coal mining and associated industrial activities (such as steel manufacturing) in the 1980s and into the 1990s, hillside and mountainside areas have been 'recolonised' by nature and through intentional 're-greening' activities, such as afforestation ([Llewellyn et al., 2017](#)). Some evidence suggests that aspects of this landscape shift are being embraced by local residents who appreciate the renewed aesthetic and the recontextualisation of the industrial past ([Llewellyn et al., 2017](#)). Renewing and improving natural heritage areas could increase access to physical activity and provide economic opportunities for local communities. However, a sense of ownership and control will be necessary as there is also evidence of alienation from the landscape, not least in the form of fly-tipping and intentional fire-setting ([Llewellyn et al., 2017](#)). Project Skyline is a feasibility study conducted to investigate the potential opportunities for the Valleys communities to take control of local landscape issues ([Project Skyline, n.d.](#)). If the project is continued, it could offer a model for increasing economic, social and well-being outcomes in similar communities.

<sup>4</sup> Peri-urban areas in Wales include the South Wales Valleys where there is significant urbanisation without a single urban 'core' and substantial rural areas (e.g. on valleys' sides).

### 3.4. Welsh language and cultural well-being

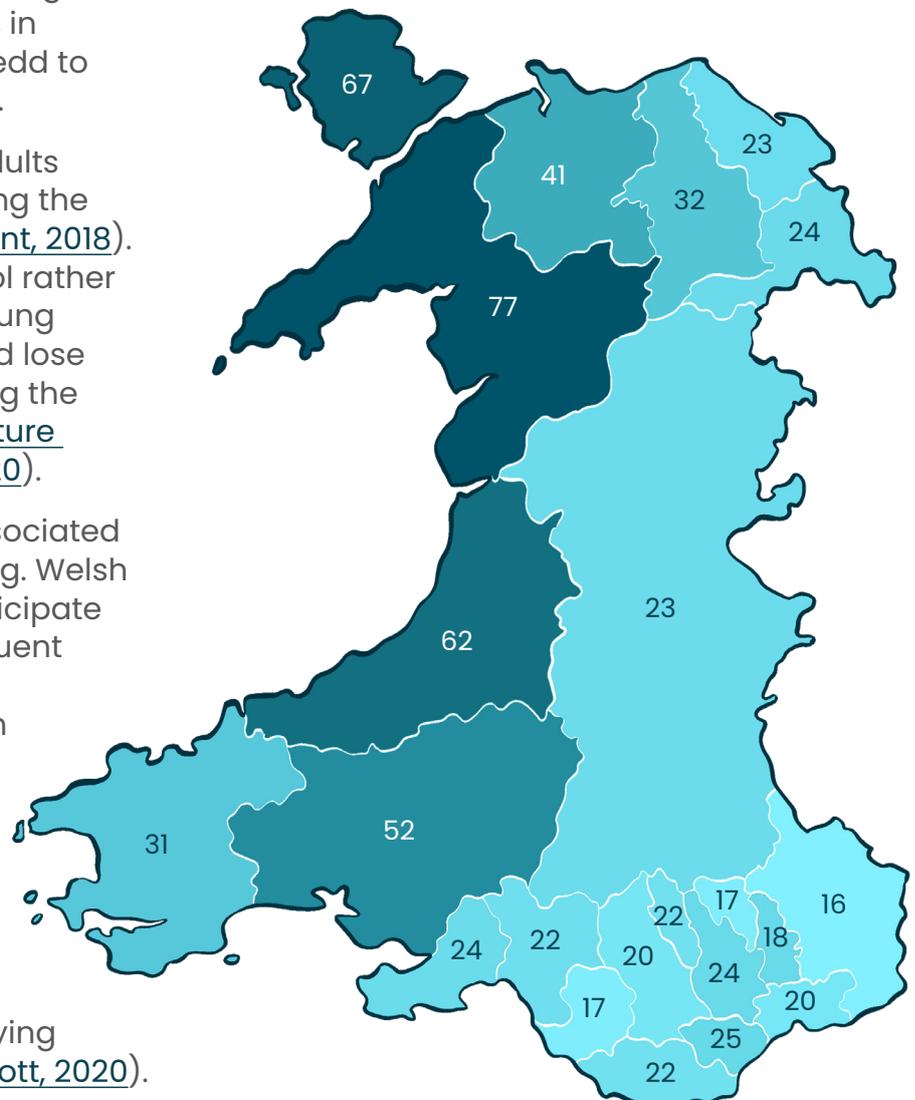
The Welsh language forms an important part of cultural well-being and an overall well-being strategy in Wales. The numbers of Welsh speakers remains relatively stable at around one-fifth of the population, but there has been a recent increase in those who have 'some' speaking ability ([Welsh Government, 2020](#); [Stats Wales, 2019](#)). A broader question on Welsh speaking ability suggests that 29.1% of people can speak Welsh, with a high level of variance among local authority areas – from 16% in Monmouthshire to 77% in Gwynedd to (see [Figure 3](#); [Stats Wales, 2021](#)).

Children are more likely than adults to speak Welsh, with 40% showing the ability in 2018 ([Welsh Government, 2018](#)). This may be due to use in school rather than more broadly, as many young people stop speaking Welsh and lose their language skills after leaving the statutory education system ([Future Generations Commissioner, 2020](#)).

The ability to speak Welsh is associated with higher subjective well-being. Welsh speakers are more likely to participate in arts and sports events, and fluent speakers are far more likely to attend events delivered through the Welsh language ([Welsh Government, 2018](#)). Welsh speakers report higher life satisfaction than non-Welsh speakers ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)). It is not clear why this should be, with research suggesting an 'underlying factor' is responsible ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)).

It may be that geography plays a role, as areas with higher proportions of Welsh speakers (per [Figure 3](#)) tend to have higher average well-being scores and somewhat lower well-being inequality than less Welsh-speaking areas (see the [well-being and equalities briefing](#)). Rural areas tend to have higher numbers of Welsh speakers (in West Wales) and higher average well-being.

**Figure 3: Ability to speak Welsh by local authority** ([Stats Wales, 2021](#)).



There have been recent improvements in how public services promote the Welsh language and facilitate the use of Welsh, but more will need to be done to ensure that Welsh speakers can use the language throughout Wales (Future Generations Commissioner, 2020). It is likely that this will differ by PSB area, with different challenges existing in the 'Fro Gymraeg', compared to areas of South Wales with a lower proportion of Welsh speakers.<sup>5</sup>

Improving the ability of Welsh speakers to use Welsh will require a community-focused approach, because the ability to use the language depends on the number of Welsh speakers and Welsh-speaking services in a local area. Promoting and increasing access to Welsh language classes (particularly for groups less likely to access these by themselves such as ethnic minority groups and people living in deprived areas) could help to increase the importance of the Welsh language in some communities (Future Generations Commissioner, 2020). But a broader strategy for increasing Welsh language use might consider the ways in which it can feed into broader well-being activities, including the promotion of intangible cultural assets, community well-being, and drawing a wider audience to cultural activities including the Urdd and the Eisteddfod.

#### Box 4: Social networks and language use

Longitudinal research into new Welsh speakers in the Rhymney Valley, a predominantly English-speaking community, suggests that there are a number of factors that influence language use beyond the ability to speak the language (Hodges, 2021). These can include the level of confidence in using the language in family and workplace settings, as well as interactions with others, such as family members responding only in English. Some Welsh speakers report feeling discouraged from using the language at work, in education or at home by a perceived lack of command in the language.

The presence of younger family members seems to encourage the use of Welsh in family settings, and access to Welsh-speaking networks and communities can encourage language use. Understanding the 'mudes' (transition points that determine the trajectory of language use) could help PSBs foster more cohesive community and workplace support for the Welsh language, and encourage 'bottom-up' language use in local areas (Hodges, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> The 'Fro Gymraeg' is the area of Wales where there has historically been a majority of Welsh speakers, traditionally including Anglesey/Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire and parts of adjoining counties.

## 4. Do well-being outcomes differ for different groups?

Some evidence suggests that not all groups access cultural activities equally, and likewise, some communities will not have access to the same opportunities as others. Evidence from England also suggests that participation in arts activities differs according to demographic factors ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)).

In general, participation is higher in families with children (aged 5–10) and in households where one member already engages in cultural activities ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)). However, participation varies according to age (with those over 75 least likely to participate, but rates steadily increasing until then); financial status (with those on low incomes least likely to participate); and ethnicity (with people from Black or Asian backgrounds least likely to participate) ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)). This differs according to the exact activity, with Black African and Caribbean people at least as likely to participate in dance or music as White people ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)).

It is possible that some of the variation may be the result of differing cultural emphases and interests among different groups ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)). Supporting this is evidence showing that lack of interest is a major factor in disengagement from cultural activities for around 19% of the population in Wales ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)).

However, other elements are likely to result from inequality – for instance the relationship between deprivation or poor health and attendance at cultural events.<sup>6</sup>

There is a relationship between higher participation and attendance at cultural events and better subjective well-being. But this may not be causal. Those who are more likely to attend cultural events regularly are also more likely to undertake physical exercise; own their house; not be in deprivation; and to be in good health – all factors that are also linked to higher subjective well-being ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)). Longitudinal data do suggest, however, that increased involvement with arts, culture, heritage and sports over time increases subjective well-being, while decreased involvement reduces subjective well-being. This suggests that there is a connection between subjective well-being and cultural engagement ([Lakey et al., 2017](#)). Some research suggests that certain activities such as religious attendance and participation in sport can positively affect well-being, controlling for a range of demographic factors ([Gramatki and Watt, 2021](#)).

<sup>6</sup> See the briefing on equalities and well-being for more on the relationship between inequalities and well-being.

On a community level, there are geographical variations in attendance at or participation in cultural activities across Wales. These are in need of further study as they may reflect a lack of access to local opportunities or other factors such as local deprivation. But this is uncertain at present ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)). It is perhaps worth noting that those who own their own personal transport are much more likely to have attended or participated in cultural activities ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)).<sup>7</sup>

Improving the accessibility of cultural spaces and activities, including by public and active transport (such as walking or cycling), may help to increase participation rates. Programmes like the Arts Council of Wales' 'Night Out' scheme, where performances are taken to smaller community venues across Wales, also offer an opportunity to maximise participation ([Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, 2019](#)).

It is also likely that changing perceptions of cultural activities for groups who do not participate could help to improve access – for instance, challenging the view of arts, culture and heritage as an elitist activity. This will require ongoing, targeted and sensitive engagement work ([Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, 2019](#)). Social prescribing, where individuals are recommended activities to participate in as a means of addressing health issues, could be used as a way to broaden access while also improving well-being and health outcomes for vulnerable people ([Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, 2021](#)).

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<sup>7</sup> This variable may, however, be explained in terms of deprivation or housing tenure rather than access to transport ([Browne Gott, 2020](#)).

## 5. What are the evidence gaps, uncertainties, and areas to explore?

It will be important for PSBs to bear in mind the gaps and limitations of evidence in this area, in order to inform their strategy and adapt these findings to local conditions.

A key issue surrounds **future trends** in this area. The evidence discussed pre-dates the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had known impacts on the arts, culture and heritage sectors. Lockdown restrictions in particular have meant that many venues have been shut for long periods of time. This has had a severe impact on arts, culture and heritage organisations in terms of lost income and commercial opportunities, and on individuals who were more likely to fall through the gaps in Covid-19-related support ([Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee 2020a](#), [2020b](#)). Some providers are likely to have closed permanently during the pandemic, and many workers are likely to have left the industry, particularly in areas overlapping with the hospitality and live events sectors. This is likely to compound problems and issues such as those relating to sustainability and unequal geographical spread – as has been the case for live music venues, for instance – that were present before the pandemic ([Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee 2020c](#)).

However, at the time of writing it is unclear what the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will be on the arts, culture and heritage sectors. Issues such as labour force shortages could prove to be relatively elastic, with workers increasingly returning to the sector, or they may become long-term problems. On the other hand, while the pandemic will have accelerated some negative trends, it may also offer new opportunities. For instance, lessons learned from the volunteer experience during the pandemic could help to improve community and cultural well-being in the future ([Havers et al., 2021](#)).

Future trends are also difficult to predict due to the relative recentness of data collection on some aspects of this theme. Data for national indicators are not collected every year, for instance, so comparable data for regular participation are only available for 2017 and 2019. These data will need to continue being collected.

As discussed above, **robust evidence and data** are not always available for specific interventions, activities or types of well-being. This limits the extent to which interventions for specific purposes or that are targeted at specific groups can be based on pre-existing evidence bases. Given the relationship between higher rates of participation and higher subjective well-being, and given the relationship between community and cultural well-being, this should not prevent action in this area. However, the ongoing evaluation and assessment of programmes will be important both to build the evidence base and to determine what is most effective.

Ongoing evaluation and assessment might also help to further determine the **drivers of cultural well-being** for individuals. It will be important to try to identify the factor(s) which account for well-being in this area. These could involve both eudaimonic factors such as finding meaning or purpose through cultural participation, and hedonic factors such as enjoyment of arts, culture, heritage and sporting activities.

This is because cultural participation is associated with a range of socioeconomic factors also associated with high subjective well-being, but there does also seem to be a causal connection between participation and subjective well-being. This means that finding the specific aspects of participation which affect well-being will be important.

Finally, ensuring that high-level findings are effectively **translated into and connected with practice** will be an important component of improving cultural well-being. Implementing improvements to cultural well-being will require careful prioritisation. This will depend on local needs and awareness of the local context, including how opportunities and assets are distributed across PSB areas.

## 6. Conclusion: How can cultural well-being be used to support well-being objectives

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This briefing paper has covered the ways in which cultural well-being can be understood and how it can support individual and community well-being more generally. It has also signposted ways in which adopting a cultural well-being-focused approach can help to achieve other well-being objectives – including in relation to health, the economy and the Welsh language and culture. Cultural activities are also an important component of community well-being and can be used to support the flourishing of communities across Wales.

There are a variety of approaches which could be taken to support cultural well-being. It will be beneficial to bear in mind the benefits of individual participation alongside wider notions of community cultural well-being. The role that participation in interest- and place-based groups can have in building stronger communities is particularly important. Enabling the enjoyment and reproduction of culture, including intangible cultural assets, can have a range of benefits for individuals and communities. Natural heritage can be supported both for the well-being benefits it provides in its own right and because of the opportunity for cross-cutting connections with other aspects of cultural well-being. And supporting the Welsh language and culture intersects with all aspects of cultural well-being, while being a statutory aim in itself.

Access to cultural opportunities will vary across Wales and the right strategy for each area will depend on place-specific factors. These include the current participation rates, the status of natural and cultural heritage in local areas, and demographic factors. However, as a set of general principles, PSBs may wish to consider the following in future well-being assessments and setting their well-being objectives:

1. The status of **intangible cultural assets** in the community, their role in community well-being, and the ways in which they can be leveraged to increase well-being.
2. The **rates of participation in arts, culture, heritage and sports** and any known inequalities, and how they can be addressed.
3. **Cross-cutting opportunities** to use cultural activities or a cultural well-being 'lens' to drive well-being improvements in other areas such as health or economic development.
4. Maximising opportunities to **foster cultural well-being through participatory activities** which develop social capital and a sense of place and togetherness.

In terms of specific next steps, we recommend that PSBs:

1. Identify **local expertise** (which could include, for instance, town clerks, parish priests, local historians and historical societies) to facilitate community connections and identify local intangible cultural assets and support place-based and interest-based groups. This approach has also been recommended in Havers et al. (2021) as a way to tackle loneliness and social isolation following the Covid-19 pandemic, and thus offers cross-cutting benefits.
2. Identify **local providers of arts, culture, heritage activities and sport**, particularly those that are closely connected to local communities. It will be very important to assess need following the Covid-19 pandemic, and offer support where possible.
3. **Map local providers against areas of deprivation or lower participation** to see where there are gaps in coverage, and implement **place-specific and community-grounded responses** to ensure that provision meets need and tackles inequalities.
4. Ensure that cultural well-being, including cultural and natural heritage, form **part of economic and public health strategies** to maximise the potential for cross-cutting benefits.

This could include using broader valuation methods that capture non-use values or broader social benefits associated with culture and heritage assets (Bakhshi et al., 2015; Sagger et al., 2021).

5. Most importantly, think about **problems from the perspective of cultural well-being**, as supporting cultural activities and community well-being can provide solutions to other problems. For instance, supporting intangible cultural assets can build stronger communities, which can provide resources to tackle loneliness, social isolation and other community problems.

Finally, PSBs will also need to consider integrating their well-being goals with broader Welsh Government strategy and objectives. Examples are the well-being objectives contained within the Programme for Government 2021-26 (Welsh Government, 2021a) and the strategic framework of the Economic resilience and reconstruction mission (Welsh Government, 2021b). The Future Generations Commissioner's Art of the Possible series also contains suggestions for goals that could contribute to better cultural well-being, and a series of case studies offers examples of how to translate these into practice (Future Generations Commissioner, 2019).

# Author Details

**Jack Price** is a Research Officer at the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

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# Annex: Data sources and availability

Data in this document have been primarily collected from Data Cymru ([2021](#)), the [National Survey for Wales](#) and [Stats Wales](#). Data relating to the Welsh National Well-being Indicators are also available from the Welsh Government ([2019](#)).

Many indicators and other data available at a national level are available at different geographical levels, including at a local authority level. The table below summarises the data that have been drawn on or consulted in preparing this briefing, with an indication of their geographical breakdown, how they have been presented in the briefing and how often they are updated. The datasets are presented in the order in which they are referenced in the briefing.

Data	Source	Breakdown	Time period	Location of data breakdown in the briefing	Release frequency
Percentage of people who regularly attend arts, culture or heritage activities	<a href="#">Data Cymru</a>	National and local authority	2017, 2019	<a href="#">Figure 1</a>	Ad hoc
Public Services Board Well-being assessments Core dataset	<a href="#">Data Cymru</a>	National and local authority	Dependent on dataset	-	One-off collection
National Survey for Wales – Percentage of people attending types of arts events	<a href="#">National Survey for Wales 2019-20</a>	National	2019-20	<a href="#">Figure 2</a>	Ad hoc
National Survey for Wales 2019-20	<a href="#">National Survey for Wales 2019-20</a>	National	2019-20	Data referenced in text	Annually
Well-being of Wales series	<a href="#">Welsh Government</a>	National	2017-2020	Data referenced in text	Annually
Annual Population Survey – Ability to speak Welsh by local authority and year	<a href="#">Stats Wales</a>	National and local authority	2001-2020	Most recent release presented in <a href="#">Figure 3</a>	Quarterly
Culture, sport and well-being: Findings from the Understanding Society Adult survey	<a href="#">NatCen, based on Understanding Society data</a>	England	2017	Data referenced in text	One time analysis



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Cardiff University, 10/12 Museum Place,  
Cardiff CF10 3BG

 [www.wcpp.org.uk](http://www.wcpp.org.uk)

 029 2087 5345

 [info@wcpp.org.uk](mailto:info@wcpp.org.uk)

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