



# Cultural well-being

## Introduction

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:

- Cultural well-being;
- The impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit on well-being; and
- Well-being and equalities.

This policy briefing summarises WCPP's findings on cultural well-being.

## Defining and conceptualising 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 – although it is not defined.

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.

One way to understand cultural well-being is to distinguish between cultural well-being outcomes for individuals and cultural well-being as a feature of communities. The evidence is discussed in relation to these two concepts and is summarised in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The four areas covered by the briefing

## Features that contribute to cultural well-being in a community

The role of **intangible cultural assets** is key to understanding how cultural well-being is expressed in communities. These include traditional activities and practices; language and cultural expression; cultural knowledge, skills, norms and activities; festivals, beliefs and rituals; traditional sports; and arts and crafts.

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.

**There are geographical variations in attendance or participation in cultural activities across Wales**

## How participation in cultural activities affects subjective well-being

Participation or attendance in **arts, cultural or heritage events** is associated with higher levels of subjective well-being, although this varies depending on the activity.

**Listening to music** can increase the well-being of young adults and participation in **group singing activities** can be particularly beneficial for older people.

**Visual arts participation** can increase well-being in those suffering from mental health issues through developing 'bonding' social capital. This suggests that group activities may be more effective than individual ones.

**Heritage activities** are associated with higher subjective well-being. Additional benefits are associated with practical heritage activities.

## Evidence suggests that not all groups access cultural activities equally

**Volunteering** can aid social cohesion and connection as well as improve the subjective well-being of volunteers by through factors such as a sense of purpose, confidence in one's own abilities, and new social connections.

Regular **participation in sports** is associated with improved physical and mental health, with the greatest increases seen in those who take up sports from a low baseline and when participants are involved at least weekly.

Participating in **outdoor recreational activities** is associated with better subjective well-being. **Nature-based recreational activities** increase well-being when controlling for a range of demographic factors, suggesting that time in nature is beneficial by itself.

The **ability to speak Welsh** is associated with higher subjective well-being, participation in arts and sports events, and life satisfaction. It is not clear why this should be – research suggests an 'underlying factor' is responsible.

## Well-being outcomes across groups

Some evidence suggests that not all groups access or participate in cultural activities equally. In general, participation is higher in families with children (aged 5–10) and in households where one member already engages in cultural activities. Participation also varies according to:

- Age (with rates increasing up to those aged over 75, who are least likely to participate);
- Financial status (with those on low incomes least likely to participate); and
- Ethnicity (with people from Black or Asian backgrounds least likely to participate).

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.

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.

## Evidence gaps, uncertainties, and areas to explore

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

- **Future trends** in this area is a key issue, as the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the arts, culture and heritage sectors.
- **Robust evidence and data** are not always available for specific interventions, activities or types of well-being.
- **Ongoing evaluation and assessment** might help to further determine the drivers of cultural well-being for individuals.
- Ensuring that high-level findings are effectively **translated into and connected with practice**.

## Conclusion

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.
4. Maximising opportunities to **foster cultural well-being through participatory activities** which develop social capital and a sense of place and togetherness.

## Next steps for Public Services Boards

We recommend that PSBs:

1. Identify **local expertise** to facilitate community connections, identify local intangible cultural assets and support place-based and interest-based groups.
2. Identify **local providers of arts, culture, heritage activities and sport**.
3. **Map local providers against areas of deprivation or lower participation** and implement **place-specific and community-grounded responses**.
4. Ensure that cultural well-being forms **part of economic and public health strategies** to maximise the potential for cross-cutting benefits.
5. Think about **problems from the perspective of cultural well-being**, as supporting community well-being can provide solutions to other problems.
6. Consider **integrating their well-being goals** with broader Welsh Government strategy and objectives.

## Find out more

For the full briefing, see Price, J. (2021). **Cultural well-being evidence briefing paper**. Cardiff: WCPP.

## About the Wales Centre for Public Policy

Here at the Centre, we collaborate with leading policy experts to provide ministers, the civil service and Welsh public services with high quality evidence and independent advice that helps them to improve policy decisions and outcomes.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Welsh Government, the Centre is

based at Cardiff University and a member of the UK's What Works Network.

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