WELL-BEING RESEARCH NETWORK NEWSLETTER

February 2024

Why has the well-being network been set-up?

In July 2021 WISERD launched a wellbeing Research Network, headed by Professor Steve Smith, at The University of South Wales. The network is focussed on well-being research and has been set-up recognising two main factors which have profoundly affected well-being research in recent years.

- The increasing academic importance of well-being research for understanding civil society and its goals, coupled with the growing political significance, in Wales and elsewhere, of using well-being as a key measure of social and economic progress.
- The increasing range of well-being research undertaken, from a variety of often disparate disciplines and settings, across a wide range of subject areas, and for a number of different purposes.

What are the aims of the well-being network?

Given the above developments in well-being research, WISERD thought it timely to set-up a well-being network with the following aims in mind:

To champion interdisciplinary well-being research, drawing from a range of disciplines, for example, (but not exclusively and in no particular order): social policy, sociology, economics, social geography, political science, psychology, criminology, health sciences, pedagogy, creative arts and cultural industries, business studies, and applied social and political philosophy.

To facilitate cross-organisational and intra/inter-institutional exchanges and partnerships, concerning well-being research across a wide range of subject areas, within and between the WISERD partners, other relevant research centres, individual researchers, and including those from outside the WISERD partner institutions.

To systematically engage in co-productive research reflecting the agendas, knowledge and experience of key non-academic stakeholders in well-being research, with a view to including these stakeholders in the research process, working alongside academics, and within various professional and policy-based contexts.

To inform and positively impact the development of policy and practice across statutory and non-statutory settings, for example (but not exclusively and in no particular order), in social services, health, education, housing, income maintenance, education, youthwork, workplaces, community groups and activities, businesses and social enterprises, and other public, private, and third sector settings.

The network's register

- We have collated a *register* of those researchers who have become members of the well-being network, with presently 51 members, representing 8 universities in Wales and England, and 6 other organisations which variously engage with well-being research and policy development.
- Members have been sent a copy of the register which shares what kind of well-being research members of the network are presently engaged in, with details about relevant organisation(s) or institution(s) that members are affiliated to and partner with, including contact details, weblinks, and so on.
- The network updates the register periodically, and with a view to using this register as a basis for supporting the above aims.
- Members are encouraged to promote the network and recruit new members, inviting potential new members to contact Steve Smith, the network lead, at steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk.
- The network's leadership team has also developed a strategy to provide a framework for implementing the above, and which includes producing a newsletter.

The purpose of this newsletter

The newsletter is intended to advertise the work we have done and will do, including the individual research members are engaged in. So, building on a series of seminar/workshop events we organised during the 2021-2022 academic session (both online and face-to-face), the delivery of an ambitious programme of activities for the 2022-2023 session, in the 2023-2024 session we have been engaged in completing and developing the 2022-2023 programme, and devising further online and potentially face-to-face activities as forums to share further our work across the network, and with others. These activities and programmes are discussed and devised at an annual meeting with the leadership team held in November (details about the leadership team can be found in the network's register), alongside suggestions from members about what the network might usefully 'do next'.

Sharing some of our current research and other activities of the network

Evaluation report on The Social Services Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, and network workshops discussing the findings and more besides

Two members of the network were involved in delivering this report published in March 2023, Jen Lyttleton-Smith (Cardiff Metropolitan University), and Gideon Calder (University of Swansea). This report was commissioned by the Welsh Government, and included researchers from the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of South Wales, Swansea University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, and Bangor University. For more details of the report's findings see link below:

https://www.gov.wales/final-report-evaluation-social-services-and-well-being-wales-act-2014

Following the publication of the report, the network organised two workshops. The first discussed the report, and the second looked at the relationship between *The Social Services Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014*, and *The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. Building on issues which arose from the first workshop, the second workshop explored four topic headings, addressing key questions under each heading. Ten-minute presentations were given by members of the network under each heading, Steve Smith, (University of South Wales, Gideon Calder (University of Swansea), Jen Lyttleton-Smith (Cardiff Metropolitan University), and Susie Ventris-Field (Welsh Centre for International Affairs) - which then prompted the workshop discussions:

Defining well-being: Recognising that the meaning of well-being is often multi-layered and complex, so, how is well-being defined, either explicitly or implicitly in each of the Acts, given that the types of well-being promoted may be various and not necessarily consistent?

Relating well-being to other values: Whatever definitions of well-being are used, how do these understandings of well-being relate to other social values, also regarded as worth promoting, such as sustainability, economic growth, equality, social justice, and protecting those defined as 'vulnerable' or 'disadvantaged'?

Applying the idea of well-being: Drawing from examples of good and bad practice, what kind of opportunities and barriers are apparent when practically applying certain principles or values, such as well-being, to policy/legislation/practice development? How has the 'well-being agenda' impacted organisational cultures and internal practices?

Measuring well-being: When understanding what is good and bad practice, to what extent, and in what ways, can we effectively and efficiently measure well-being outcomes, so we know that we are making a difference, both for now and for the future?

Notes were taken of the workshop and posted on line, via a Jam Board, see link below:

https://jamboard.google.com/d/1q4HwnyzQA3eH3FgmOMrLjJ89FsuCtIN0zlruucQhkuc/viewer?f=0

Developing and applying the South Wales Social Well-Being Scale (SWSWBS) to Public Health Wales (PHW) survey

Three members of the network, Megan Elliot (Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board), Carolyn Wallace (University of South Wales), and Steve Smith (University of South Wales), have been involved in developing The South Wales Social Well-Being Scale (SWSWBS). Intended to be used alongside the internationally renowned Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), SWSWBS uses 14 indicators of social well-being derived from a Group Concept Mapping Exercise (GCM) conducted in 2020. SWSWBS has been subsequently tested for statistical reliability, showing itself to be a robust scale which can be legitimately used alongside WEMWBS.

Subsequently, SWSWBS is now part of the Public Health Wales (PHW) annual collection of data measuring levels of mental well-being. So, in the 2023 survey, involving approximately 1,300 participants, SWSWBS was used alongside WEMWBS to measure the levels of mental well-being for Welsh citizens. Two other members of the network have been involved in collecting and analysing the data for PHW, Britt Hallingberg (Cardiff Metropolitan University), and Kate Isherwood (Cardiff Metropolitan University). The analysis is still being processed, and so watch this space for further details!

Other network activities

Setting-up reading groups between network members

The idea here, suggested by members, is to provide forums for discussing well-being research across different disciplines and for a range of purposes and subject areas. The first of these groups has now been set-up by four network members, Gideon Calder (University of Swansea), Kate Galvin (University of Brighton), Dave Morgans (University of Wales, Trinity St David), and Steve Smith (University of South Wales). This group explores issues concerning the application of theory to well-being research, and the importance of theory-building and philosophical reflection in understanding how notions of well-being are variously conceptualised and promoted in policy and practice. The group to date has met for two online sessions. In these sessions two journal articles were discussed, exploring the relationship between 'subjective' and 'objective' conceptions of well-being, and what might be variously understood as a 'meaningful' life over time, and as related to well-being and its enhancement.

We would also very much encourage other network members to set-up on-line reading groups, which can then be publicised via the network. Please contact steve smith (steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk) if you want to discuss this further.

Setting-up conversational interviews between network members

The idea here, again suggested by members, is to more deeply and actively engage in each others' work, but in ways which are accessible to wider audiences (both within and outside the network). To achieve this, an interview format will be used to facilitate members reading each others' work, and then having conversations with each other about their research, which will recorded and disseminated accordingly.

The first of these interviews will be between Sarah White (Co-Founder of The Relational Wellbeing Collaborative), and Steve Smith (University of South Wales, and author of *The Ontology of Well-Being in Social Policy and Welfare Practice.* Springer Publications, 2022). The interviews will take place sometime in 2024.

We would also very much encourage other network members to set-up similar interviews, which can then be publicised via the network. Please contact steve smith (steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk) if you want to discuss this further.

Group Concept Mapping Exercise, to identify common research questions, and exploring the potential for joint grant applications

An online Group Concept Mapping (GCM) exercise has been organised, which will systematically explore (with the help of GCM software), what research questions are most important to members of the network, as related to their personal interests and motivations. These research questions have now been identified and listed by members during the first stage of the GCM which are presently being 'cleaned' by the data collection team from within the network, Steve Smith (University of South Wales), Carolyn Wallace (University of South Wales). In the second stage, members will then be asked to group or 'sort' these questions thematically, providing a data platform to explore the relationship between these questions and their groupings. Finally, in the third stage, members will be invited to rank the relative importance or significance of these questions and groupings, that is, in relation to (a) their perceived impactfulness on policy and practice, and (b) their perceived potential for underpinning successful grant applications, across teams and a range of interdisciplinary settings. Again, watch this space!!

Production of a 'network statement' regarding well-being debates and the implications for policy and practice

After consultation within the leadership team, and in response to a discussion had at the November 2022 leadership team meeting, the above statement was produced and distributed to the network in August 2023. The aim of the statement is to give an account of the overall position of the network regarding various well-being issues. That is, summarising various debates around well-being and how these debates might be viewed within multi/interdisciplinary research contexts, as well how these debates and subsequent research might be applied to policy and practice.

Please contact Steve Smith for more details, including a copy of the statement, steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk

What next for 2024/25?

Developing further our relationships across the network

Building on the activities of the network since its inception in 2021, and following discussion in the leadership team in our annual meeting in November 2023, the overall aim for the 2024/25 session is to consolidate and develop further productive relationships across the network. This is based on the assumption that the more communication that happens between members, the more likely fruitful relationships will develop, enhancing both the relevance and vitality of the network. In this vein, we will continue with the GCM exercise and encouraging the setting-up of reading groups and interview pairings, and focus any additional efforts on holding one or two network events in the 2024/25 session. These events will be designed to (a) better share what work individual members are doing across network, and (b) provide forums to discuss how well-being research more generally relates to policy making and practice development.

WISERD annual conference, 3rd–4th July 2024

As in previous years, there will be a network presence at the above conference, to be held at The University of South Wales, via members of the network who will be either giving papers, and/or helping to organise the event. For more details of the conference please contact network member Gary Higgs (University of South Wales) gary.higgs@southwales.ac.uk. Also see WISERD conference webpage:

WISERD Annual Conference 2024 – Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data

Last but not least, recruitment call for leadership team!!

We need to recruit new members to the leadership team, given that two have left the team (Alice Vernon, University of Aberystwyth; and Sarah White, Co-Founder of The Relational Wellbeing Collaborative). We would like to take this opportunity to thank Alice and Sarah very much for the contributions they have made to the leadership team since the network's inception in 2021.

For more details about becoming a member of the leadership team, contact Steve Smith, steve.smith@southwales.ac.uk

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