



## Meeting Note: APPG on Wellbeing Economics Social Media and Wellbeing

Time and Date: 6:30-8:30pm, Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2026

Venue: Room M, Portcullis House, UK Parliament.

This is a note of attendees, new research, key discussion points and agreed actions. If you have any questions, please email the World Wellbeing Movement (Secretariat for the APPG on Wellbeing Economics): [info@worldwellbeingmovement.org](mailto:info@worldwellbeingmovement.org).

### Attendance

In attendance: Peter Lamb MP (Chair), Lord Gus O'Donnell (Co-Chair), Lord Richard Layard, Baroness Joanna Penn, Ellie Chowns MP, Monica Harding MP, John McDonnell MP, Gideon Amos MP, Kim Leadbeater MP, Helen McGuire MP, Patrick Hurley MP, Caroline Voaden MP, Darren Paffey MP, Professor Jan-Emmanuel De Neve (Wellbeing Research Centre), Peter Brietbart (Bloom Wellbeing Fund), Kate Thompson (Board Member, World Wellbeing Movement), Barry Grimes (Wellbeing Research Centre), Matt Gaffar (Office of Peter Lamb MP), Ben Wealthy (World Wellbeing Movement).

Apologies received from APPG members: Baroness Claire Tyler, Baroness Lorely Burt, Clive Lewis MP, Baroness Luciana Berger.

### Welcome and Introductions

APPG Chair Peter Lamb MP, opened the meeting:

- Welcomed colleagues to the meeting which would focus on the findings of the World Happiness Report relating to social media harms and policy action in the UK.
- Attendees were invited to introduce themselves.

### Speaker Contributions

World Happiness Report 2026 – *Professor Lord Richard Layard and Professor Jan-Emmanuel De Neve provided an overview,*

The following key points were made:

- Happiness among young people (under-25s) has declined in North America, Western Europe, and other English-speaking countries over the past 15 years. While global happiness generally remained stable, the young in these regions are less happy than older generations, contrary to historical trends.
- Life satisfaction for under-25s in Western industrial countries has dropped significantly since 2005–2010. This decline is particularly steep in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.
- Rapid increases in social media use are linked to reduced happiness among adolescents. Heavy use—rather than moderate use—is associated with a significant drop in wellbeing, affecting mental health.

- Social media often replaces real-world connections, which are stronger predictors of happiness, and suggests that the way social media is used is a key factor in this decline.
- Cars are an example of a product which was initially subjected to limited regulation. However, over time, more guidance and legislative guardrails have been developed to address evolving harms and growing use.
- Similar, the UK government needs to catch up with the new social media environment and introduce a social media ban for under 16s, alongside other systems to support behaviour change and limit harms.

***Professor Jonathan Haidt described how social media is harming adolescents at a scale large enough to cause population level changes.***

The following key points were made:

- [Chapter 3](#) of the World Happiness Report seeks to address two questions 1) what the trends in relation to social media harms are and ii) what does the evidence tell us regarding the “product safety question.” Evidence is increasingly showing that the rapid adaption of social media by children and adolescents in the early 2010s (2012 being a ‘turning point’) is a substantial contributor to population-levels increases in mental illness in many Western nations.
- The evidence of harm can be found in several forms: 1) surveys of young people; 2) surveys of parents, teachers and clinicians; 3) contents from corporate documents; 4) findings from cross-sectional studies; 5) findings from longitudinal studies; 6) findings from social media reduction experiments; and 7) findings from natural experiments.
- Children themselves are clear about the harms they are experiencing. There is now evidence of severe and widespread direct harms, from sextortion and cyberbullying, as well as evidence of indirect mental health harms in the form of depression and anxiety. There is also a significant recent [legal case](#) in Los Angeles.
- There are seven lines of evidence which reveals evidence that the major social media platforms are designed and used in a way that causes harm.
- JH and his policy team continues to engage with the UK government, as well other governments around the world. In the UK, ministers are concerned about a range of impacts from social media, including how anxiety is affecting people’s ability to seek and sustain employment.
- Liberal democracy needs an immune system against social media infection from global technology and social media companies based in countries in which they sell their harmful products abroad but do not allow their own populations to use them.
- The UK government needs to take policy action from design changes to age limits on use, with strong enforcement from regulators. Ravi Iyer has written [guidance](#) for regulators. [The case](#) for 16 being the appropriate minimum age for social media accounts is clear.

## **Discussion**

Here is a summary of the points raised:

- There can be positives to social media use, however addiction is a major downside. Some groups can be more vulnerable to these negative experiences.
- ‘Doomscrolling’ could be subject to a cap, to limit the time spent by users and the development of addictive behaviour.

- Should we not be flipping the framing of a ban – i.e. rather than banning children from using social media preventing social media companies from causing harms on their platforms.
- Lessons from around the world suggest forging consensus across party divides is easier than expected, this includes the USA. Voters are often ahead of politicians in terms of the need for action.
- Statements from main UK parties suggest a degree of consensus about the need for intervention and urgency, although there is some variation in what that looks like.
- It was noted that some children use their mobile phone for homework and changes would need to be mindful on unintended consequences on education.
- There is a question as to the capacity of Ofcom to effectively enforce additional regulation.
- A wider discussion took place about children’s wellbeing and a suggestion that social media policy should be viewed in this context. For instance, investment is needed to provide alternative sporting, leisure and cultural opportunities for children and young people. Policies also needed to address inequalities, housing provision and access to green space to promote a healthy childhood.
- A recent campaign led by BeeWell, with support from a coalition of charities and Parliamentarians, has sought to improve the measurement of children’s wellbeing at a national level so we can more effectively monitor what works.
- One idea that emerged, also in respect of measurement and monitoring of wellbeing, was a great role for wellbeing within the work of Ofsted. It is important that the education system supports wellbeing and helps children develop critical thinking skills to navigate the new social media landscape.
- A greater case must be made for the economic benefits of wellbeing. There is appetite inside government for a more preventative approach, but this has yet to be translated into a cross-government approach.
- A discussion took place about the role of the APPG in relation to the live government consultation. It was suggested that a submission could be collated with a concise articulation of the evidence and representing the consensus view in favour of swift action to reduce social media harms, restrictions on phone use in schools, a wider programme to measure children’s wellbeing and the adoption of policies across government that promote children’s wellbeing overall.

### **Closing Remarks and Actions**

- Professor Lord Richard Layard highlighted his efforts to establish a campaign to promote youth wellbeing and recommended that it could be a topic for a future APPG meeting.
- The World Wellbeing Movement, on behalf of the APPG, will draft a submission to the government’s social media policy consultation, and circulate for comments.
- The Chair and Co-Chair thanked attendees.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact [info@worldwellbeinmovement.org](mailto:info@worldwellbeinmovement.org).