



Deanery Digests are short, plain language summaries of the Department of Education's research outputs. This Deanery Digest is based on the following three open-access reports: Ingram, J.; Stiff, J., Cadwallader S., Lee, G. & Kayton, H (2023) *PISA 2022: National Report for England*. Department for Education. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pisa-2022-national-report-for-england> ; Ingram, J.; Stiff, J., Cadwallader S., Lee, G. & Kayton, H (2023) *PISA 2022: National Report for Northern Ireland*. Department for Education. Available from <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/programme-international-student-assessment-pisa> ; Ingram, J.; Stiff, J., Cadwallader S., Lee, G. & Kayton, H (2023) *PISA 2022: National Report for Wales*. Welsh Government. Available from <https://www.gov.wales/achievement-15-year-olds-programme-international-student-assessment-pisa-national-report-2022>

What do students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland tell us about their wellbeing? Analysing student questionnaire data from PISA 2022

What is this research about and why is it important?

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study of 15-year-old students. Primarily, it assesses students' knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading and science, but it also gathers valuable information about their experiences, attitudes and beliefs through a questionnaire. They are asked questions about their sense of life satisfaction, their sense of belonging and safety in school, and their experience of bullying. This information provides an insight into the student experience, allowing us to make cautious comparisons between students in the different education systems that participate in PISA (these are usually different countries). Such insights can often inform education policymaking.

What did we do?

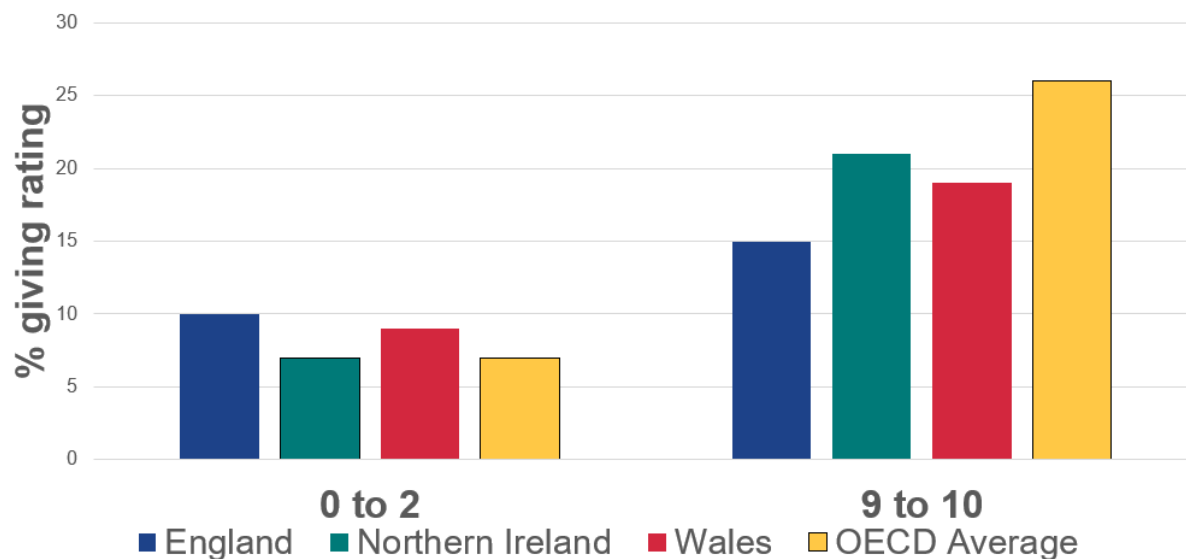
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) develops and organises PISA internationally, while Pearson delivered it in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the 2022 cycle. The University of Oxford's Department of Education analysed the data and produced national reports for each of England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
- In our recent digests about student performance in PISA 2022, we told you about how young people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland got on in the assessment. In this Digest, we will explore what the students told us about their wellbeing.

What did we find?

- Students were asked to rate their level of overall life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10, with a rating of 0-2 indicating that they were not satisfied and a rating of 9-10 indicating that they were very satisfied.

- Looking at the average scores on this scale, pupils in England (6.01), Northern Ireland (6.50) and Wales (6.16) all report significantly lower levels of average overall life satisfaction than the average across OECD education systems (6.75).
- The graph below (Figure 1) shows the percentage of students that reported the lowest (0-2) and highest (9-10) life satisfaction ratings in each nation (and for OECD countries on average).

Figure 1: Percentage of students reporting highest and lowest life satisfaction scores in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and on average across OECD countries



- Students were asked about their experiences of bullying. A fifth (20%) of students in each of England and Wales, and 16% of students in Northern Ireland, reported that they are made fun of at school at least a few times a month. This is higher than the OECD average of 12%. One of the reasons that this information is important is that students who report more frequent experiences of being bullied at school do not perform as well in PISA mathematics as those who report no or infrequent experiences of bullying.
- Students were also asked a series of questions about how safe they felt at and around their school – Table 1 summarises how they responded. Once again, we also found evidence to suggest that a greater feeling of safety is associated with better performance in PISA mathematics.

Table 1: Percentage of students in each nation and on average across OECD countries agreeing with statements about their perceptions of safety at their school

| Statement | England | Northern Ireland | Wales | OECD Average |
|---|---------|------------------|-------|--------------|
| I feel safe on my way to school | 94% | 96% | 94% | 92% |
| I feel safe on my way home from school | 90% | 94% | 92% | 91% |
| I feel safe in my classrooms at school | 93% | 95% | 92% | 93% |
| I feel safe at other places at school (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, toilets) | 87% | 90% | 84% | 90% |

- Around two-thirds of students in each of England (63%), Northern Ireland (66%) and Wales (63%) agreed that they felt like they 'belong' at their school, compared to three-quarters of

students (75%) on average across OECD countries. As with the examples above, this sense of belonging also seems to be related to performance in PISA. Students who report feeling like they belong at school have significantly higher mathematics scores on average than learners who did not feel this way.

What does it all mean anyway?

- All international study results must be considered in the context of their limitations. For PISA 2022 we found evidence that the sample who completed the questionnaire may not perfectly represent the population of students in each nation. It is also important to be cautious when interpreting responses to a questionnaire that is distributed internationally, because questions may be interpreted differently by different groups of students and in different contexts.
- Caveats aside, PISA does provide us with information about how students are experiencing their lives and their education. By providing a common measure of such sentiments, over time and across different countries, PISA provides us with a useful tool for exploring and monitoring trends over time and across contexts. This information, when combined with other sources of evidence, can be very important for understanding the student experience and is therefore useful for both policy makers and teachers. Indeed, it is important to consider how students' sense of safety and belonging in school, and their life satisfaction in general, may be bolstered in the context of the UK nations.

Open access reports: For those interested in further detail, the full national reports for England, Northern Ireland and Wales can be downloaded from the following websites:

- [Department for Education \(England\)](#)
- [Department of Education \(Northern Ireland\)](#)
- Welsh Government (Wales), [in English](#) and [Cymraeg](#)

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