

Institution: Aberystwyth University		
Unit of Assessment: 14: Geography and Environmental Studies		
Title of case study: Transforming Behavioural Public Policy Delivery and Practitioner Practices through the MBBi Programme		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: October 2008-July 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Mark Whitehead	Senior Lecturer; Reader; Personal Chair	1 October 2007- present
Professor Rhys Jones	Reader; Professor	1 November 2006- present
Rachel Lilley	Research Assistant	1 September 2013- 28 February 2015
Dr Jessica Pykett	Research Associate; Lecturer	1 November 2008- 31 August 2012
Dr Rachel Howell	Research Fellow	17 September 2012 - 31 March 2015
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>An MBBi (Mindfulness Based Behavioural Insights and Decision Making) training programme was developed that informed the practices of the Welsh public sector and other UK organisations. The programme was developed from research that explored the connections between age-old practices of mindfulness meditation and the modern insights of the behavioural sciences. The MBBi programme has been adopted by the Welsh public sector to support the delivery of the landmark <i>Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (WFGA)</i> (2015); and has also been used by other organisations across the UK. The programme has informed the strategic revisioning of workplace training along-side radical changes in working practices.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>There are three main phases of underpinning research associated with this case study:</p> <p>Phase 1 – Behavioural Public Policy (2008-2011) <i>Phase 1</i> was supported by funding from the Leverhulme Trust [3.6]. Research examined the emerging impacts of the behavioural sciences on British public policy and was the first study of its kind [3.1]. Analysis revealed that related policies were marked by shortcomings, including limited effectiveness and concerns over their manipulative dimensions [3.1; 3.2]. The monograph produced from this research [3.1] began to explore the potential of mindfulness to address some of the shortcomings associated with behaviourally informed public policies. Evidence from this study contributed to the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee’s report ‘Behaviour Change’ (2011), and an associated Ethics and Behaviour Change Seminar held at the House of Lords (10 February 2011).</p>		

Phase 2 – Developing and testing the MBI (2013-2016)

Phase 2 of the underpinning research was supported by two ESRC grants [3.7; 3.8]. The first [3.7] explored the global impacts of the behavioural sciences on public policies. Research revealed surprising levels of conformity in the ways in which behavioural insights were being applied to public policy and identified the need for more progressive applications of behavioural insights. This project then focused on the development of the MBI training programme. The MBI evolved into an eight-week training programme, combining mindfulness meditation with instruction in the behavioural sciences. The programme combined two-hour weekly group sessions with homeworking practices. Having read and been inspired by the monograph *Changing Behaviours* [3.1], the Sustainable Development Change Manager, Welsh Government, invited the research team to trial the MBI programme with civil servants in Wales who were beginning to think through the working challenges associated with the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* (WFGA). The results of these initial MBI trials were reported in one of the first peer-reviewed publications on mindfulness in the discipline of Geography [3.3].

The second grant [3.8] supported the development and extended application of the MBI programme. These trials focused on the application of the programme within the private sector (Ogilvy Mather), and with a new cohort of civil servants in Wales [3.4; 3.5].

Phase 3 – Senior leaders, community engagement and Covid-19 (2017-2020)

Phase 3 involved the further refinement – specifically incorporating new insights into the predictive mind and constructed emotions – and deployment of the MBI programme, and received financial support from the Welsh Government and *Active Withernsea*, a Sport England funded public health programme project run by East Riding County Council. This phase of research has seen the delivery of the programme to approximately 80 of the most senior civil servants in the Welsh Government. This period also involved an assessment of the longer-term impacts of the early MBI programmes [3.9]. As part of this phase of research, the MBI programme has also been used to train community outreach officers in East Riding Council. Most recently, the programme has been converted to an online training programme in Wales to support civil servants dealing with the complex challenges of Covid-19 [5.3; 5.4.b].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Jones, R., Pykett, J., Whitehead, M., (2013), *Changing Behaviours: On the Rise of the Psychological State*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar). DOI: [10.4337/9780857936882](https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857936882)
- 3.2 Jones, R., Pykett, J., and Whitehead, M., (2010), 'Governing Temptation: Changing Behaviours in an Age of Libertarian Paternalism', *Progress in Human Geography*, 35(4): 483-501. DOI: [10.1177/0309132510385741](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510385741)
- 3.3 Whitehead, M., Lilley, R., Howell, R., Jones, R., Pykett, J., (2015), '(Re)Inhabiting Awareness: Geography and Mindfulness', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 17(4): 553-573. DOI: [10.1080/14649365.2015.1089590](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2015.1089590)
- 3.4 Whitehead, M., Jones, R., Lilley, R., Pykett, J., Howell, R., (2017), *Neoliberalism: Behavioural Government in the 21st Century*. (London: Routledge). DOI: [10.4324/9781315684772](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315684772)
- 3.5 Pykett, J., Lilley, R., Whitehead, M., Howell, R., (2016), *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change, and Decision Making: An Experimental Trial*, (University of Birmingham: Birmingham). Available at: https://changingbehaviours.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/mindfulness-behaviour-change-and-decision-making_final-report.pdf

Grants

3.6 *The Time Spaces of Soft Paternalism in the UK*: Leverhulme Trust: (2008-2011): Grant number F/00 424/L: Award: GBP180,000. Whitehead & Jones (PI's).

3.7 *Negotiating Neuroliberalism: Changing Behaviours, Values, and Beliefs*: ESRC Transforming Social Science: (2013-2015): Grant number ES/L003082/1: Award: GBP189,992. Whitehead (PI), Jones & Pykett.

3.8 *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Psychological Capital*: ESRC Impact Accelerator Grants: (2015-2016): Award: GBP23,870. Pykett (PI), Whitehead & Lilley.

3.9 *Translating Behaviour Change: Theories, Policies and Practices*: Leverhulme Research Fellowship: (2018-2019): Award: GBP50,000. Jones (PI).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* (WFGA) (2015) places a legislative requirement on public bodies in Wales to work in more collaborative ways to identify solutions to persistent problems. The WFGA presents a significant challenge to the working practices of the Welsh Public Service. Since its first delivery in 2014, the MBBi programme has facilitated enhanced working practices within the Welsh Civil Service, which has enabled the *Five Ways of working* envisaged within the WFGA to be realised [5.1]. The impacts of the MBBi can be seen in three ways:

Firstly, it has informed the **strategic revisioning of professional service training in the Welsh Public Service**. The MBBi has become a core component of the Welsh Civil Service's *Internal Change Programme*. Through this programme, the MBBi has been delivered to approximately 200 civil servants and reoriented other staff development initiatives. For example, in response to the success of the MBBi programme, Academi Wales (the body with responsibility for training public sector workers in Wales) '*incorporated mindfulness and behavioural insights themes within its Leading in the Welsh Public Service framework*' [5.1]. The MBBi has also been used to support the Welsh Civil Service Permanent Secretary's 'Let's Talk Respect' campaign which featured the MBBi programme in a podcast series aimed at supporting the development of respect for diversity in the workplace [5.2]. Most recently, adapted versions of the MBBi programme were delivered to Welsh Government staff to support them during the Covid-19 crisis [5.3; 5.4.a]. The impact of the MBBi on the nature of professional service training in the public sector in Wales was expressed most clearly by the First Minister for Wales in a speech delivered to the Developing Mindfulness in Wales Conference (21 November 2019). While reflecting on the skills required to effectively deliver the WFGA, the First Minister reflected:

Research at Aberystwyth University used a radical combination of training in mindfulness and behavioural insights to help us see how public servants can become more effective leaders, better decision-makers, and provide better advice. And, I want to see all of these insights contribute to the kind of leadership I want to see in our public services in Wales. [5.5]

Secondly, the MBBi programme has impacted on **the working practices of civil servants**. The Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Wales describes how the programme has changed the way he related to people, and how it has made him better able to address the emotional barriers that exist to behaviour change in large organisations. He also reflected on how the programme enabled him to more effectively challenge the unhelpful working practices of the organisation, and support the goals of WFGA:

It has been hugely important for me, quite staggering actually. I thought I was too too far through my career to grow but the programme proved

otherwise ... [and] ... has enabled me to challenge the rigidity that exists in terms of how the organisation often works. [5.6]

In this context, the MBBI programme directly supported the operationalisation of the collaborative and transformative practices demanded within the WFGA. The Deputy Director of Legal Services in Wales went further, stating that the programme had been ‘*life changing*’ [5.4.b].

The Deputy Director of the *Fairer Futures Division* of the Welsh Government (2011-2020), reports:

[t]he programme has had a long-lasting impact on my working practices and management techniques. Even though it is now over two years since I completed the programme, I still reflect on it and feed its insights into my work. [5.7]

The Deputy Director of *Local Government Democracy Division* (Wales) explained that the programme enabled new ways of working within their team so that the team’s day-to-day practices were less affected by stress. Differences were noticed in the way they operated as a team. There was much less personal stress amongst the team which ‘*made the team ... more effective in the delivery of its key business*’ [5.8].

Thirdly, the MBBI has directly impacted on the **development and delivery of public policies** in the context of the requirements of the WFGA. In relation to sustainable health policy, the Deputy Chief Executive of the NHS reports that the programme directly supported the collaborative development of the *Healthier Wales* national strategy [5.6]. Additionally, learning from the programme was utilised by the Fairer Futures Division of the Welsh Government in the development and delivery of the WFGA [5.7].

The MBBI programme has also informed policy thinking and practitioner training in other jurisdictions. The MBBI was featured as a case study in the Mindfulness Initiatives (2016) *Building the Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace* report [5.9]. Most recently, the programme was used to train community outreach workers supporting East Riding County Council and Sport England’s *Active Withernsea* public health programme. In this context the MBBI programme played a key role in helping outreach workers better understand the behavioural barriers that exist to exercise in the community [5.10]. The insights gained from the MBBI programme were also used to inform the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre’s report *Understanding Our Political Nature* [5.11]. As Expert Contributors, the MBBI team helped to shape this report which is being used to inform how the behavioural sciences can most effectively shape political decision making across the EU.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Sustainable Development Change Manager, Welsh Government, confirms that the MBBI programme facilitated enhanced working practices within the Welsh Civil Service, email and letter, 14 October 2020.
- 5.2 Transcript, ‘Let’s talk respect’ podcast, used to support the Welsh Civil Service Permanent Secretary’s Let’s Talk Respect campaign, July 2019. MP3 file of podcast available on request.
- 5.3 Director of Welsh Treasury confirms that adapted versions of the MBBI programme helped to support Welsh Government staff during the Covid-19 crisis, letter, 23 December 2020.
- 5.4 Emails, Deputy Director, Legal Services Department, Welsh Government. a) 26 February 2021 & b) 14 December 2020.
- 5.5 Transcript of First Minister, Wales’ speech, 11 November 2019, minutes 11 to 13. Recording available at: <https://clyp.it/5uoqx4n5>. Quotation at 11 minutes, 52 seconds.
- 5.6 Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Wales, confirms the MBBI programme supported the development of the Healthier Wales national strategy, letter, 16 December 2020.

- 5.7 Deputy Director Housing Policy Division, Welsh Government (Deputy Director, Fairer Futures Division, Welsh Government, 2011-2020) confirms learning from the programme was used in the development and delivery of the WFGA, letter, 6 January 2021.
- 5.8 Deputy Director, *Local Government Democracy Division* (Wales) confirms the MBBi programme enabled new ways of working, letter, 8 December 2020.
- 5.9 Mindfulness Initiative, 2016, *Building the Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace*, (Oxford: Mindfulness Initiative). Available at: www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/building-the-case-for-mindfulness-in-the-workplace
- 5.10 Public Health Change Lead, East Riding of Yorkshire Council confirms the MBBi programme was used to train community outreach workers supporting East Riding County Council and Sport England's Active Withernsea public health programme, letter, 4 December 2020.
- 5.11 European Commission's Joint Research Centre's 2019 report. Raykovska, M., La Placa, G., Schwendinger, F., Pasztor, Z., Mair, D., Smillie, L., Van Bavel, R., *Understanding Our Political Nature: How to put knowledge and reason at the heart of political decision-making*, 2009, (Joint Research Centre: European Commission). DOI: [10.2760/374191](https://doi.org/10.2760/374191)