

## Language Centre



ut happiness data  
what is important  
are not thinking  
things are ”

ention you give to your health and weight compared  
other things.

We need more research – and obviously more research  
ney – to relate behaviour to happiness. Perhaps some  
he best behaviour-changing policies will be the ones  
t improve happiness – a direct feedback between  
aviour and happiness. We have recently been doing  
ne work looking at the intrusive thoughts that people  
ve about their health, finances, etc. These “pop-  
” (sometimes good, sometimes bad) affect people’s  
ppiness and they explain people’s preferences – for  
mple, the frequency and intensity of health pop-ups  
d the value of health states. So they could be used  
oin up behaviour and happiness.

With support from the ESRC, we are going to  
k at the happiness impacts of the 2012 Olympic  
mes in London, Paris and Berlin. And through the  
ce of National Statistics, we are now measuring  
ppiness more systematically and widely on samples  
could have only dreamed of a few years ago. We  
ed more good research and evidence that will allow  
to establish causality and to control for selection  
ects, so as to properly tell the chicken from the  
g in happiness research.

To use happiness data in economic appraisal, we  
uld ideally like to monetise the impacts so that we  
uld say how much money changing health status is  
rth compared to, for example, crime rates or parks.  
rder to do that, we need accurately to attribute the  
ects of income on happiness and on the determinants  
happiness. We need to show the direct effects of  
ome on happiness but also its indirect effects on  
alth, etc, which then affect happiness. We have been  
veloping methods that allow us to do this.

Ultimately, we need to think about how to design  
icy in ways that give us the best chance to make  
selves and other people happier, as we experience  
lives. ■

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behavioural science in the Department  
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inaugural lecture “Absolute beginners:  
behavioural economics and human  
happiness” (8 February 2011) is available  
at [lse.ac.uk/events](http://lse.ac.uk/events)

We also have data to show that as individuals put on weight they shift attention away from the domains of life that are associated with weight, like health, towards domains of life where their weight is less important, like work. So this might help to explain some of the things we actually observe in the real world. Not everybody loses weight and the effort needed to lose weight may be greater than the effort required to shift the

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