

Have you found gold at the end of the rainbow?

As the Government tests the happiness of the nation, DICK LUMSDEN takes it all with a pinch of salt

NOW here's a question that many of you will find hard to answer... are you happy? I mean, really happy?

Like me, you'll probably find it a difficult one to answer, because the definition of happiness is so woolly. Personally, I'd be happy if Ipswich Town were promoted to the Premiership this season, but would I still be happy next year if we were on the wrong end of a hiding at Old Trafford again?

One person's happiness is another person's misfortune. If you found a pound coin lying in the street you might be fleetingly happy, until you think it could have been a small child's pocket money fallen from their pocket.

That's why Government plans to test our national happiness level are so flawed...by the time the results are announced, everyone who said they were happy at the time might well have become totally miserable – or vice versa if their £20Millions Lottery numbers have come up.

To recap... for the last six months there has been a national debate going on (what, you didn't take part?) about our collective state of "well-being".

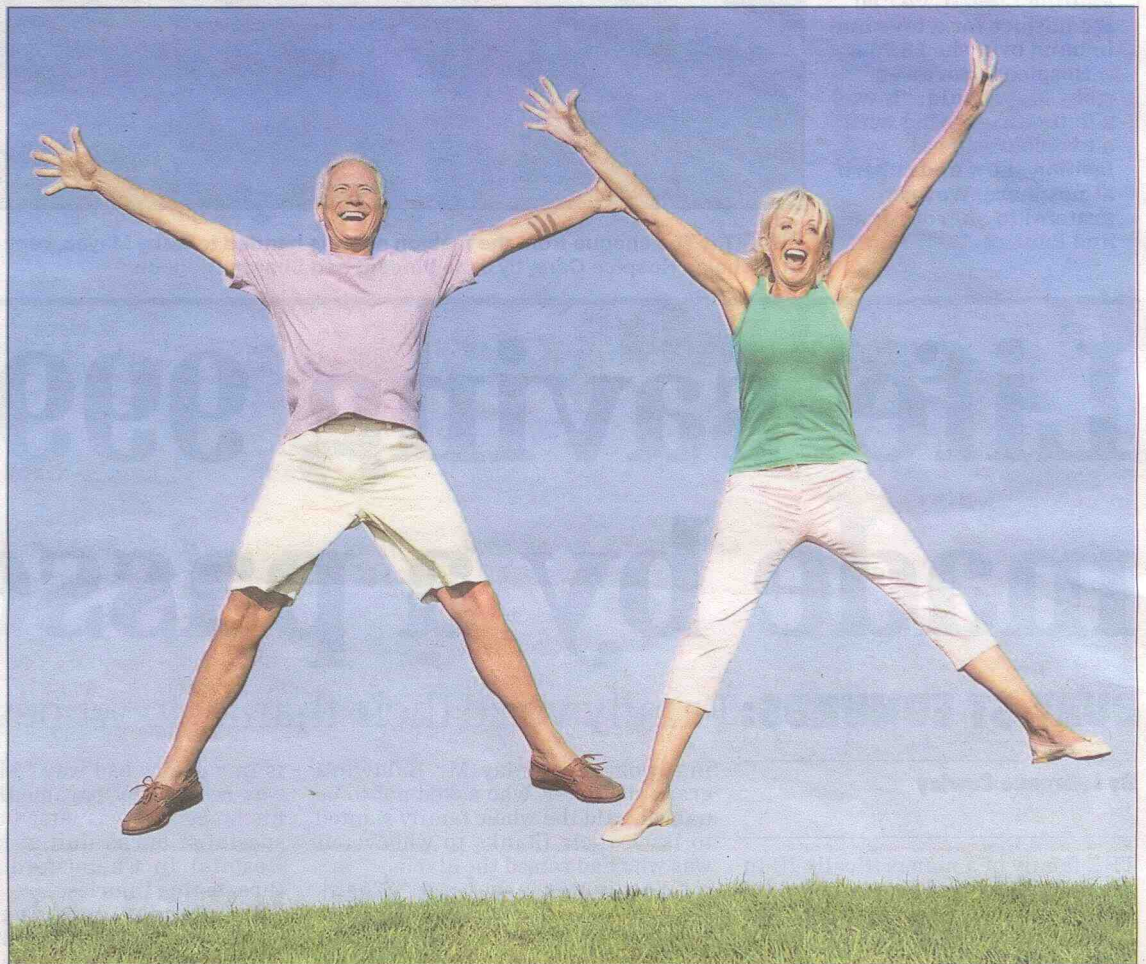
The next stage is that the Office of National Statistics is now embarking on a massive piece of research, asking 200,000 people to rate their "life satisfaction" (happiness), with the results being published in a year's time.

Unless you take part in the Integrated Household Survey, you probably won't get asked, but just for fun, take a couple of minutes now and answer their four questions to yourself, rating each one on a scale of one to ten.

- How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- How happy did you feel yesterday?
- How anxious did you feel yesterday?
- To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life worthwhile?

I am almost 100 per cent certain that if you ask yourself these questions again in a week's time you will get a completely different set of answers because your circumstances will have changed.

So the exercise is as futile as the search for the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe and Everything in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy*.



HAPPINESS: Is this how you feel? Really? Lucky you!

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suicidal, what can the Government do about it?

Can David Cameron wave a magic wand and make everyone's problems go away? No, of course not.

Throughout the course of this year we have seen a number of studies coming out which claim that older people are happier than younger people. Really?

Just because older people complain less doesn't mean they are happier. Enjoying happy memories is not the same as being young again and doing the things that made the memories in the first place.

Looking back on "the good old days" is not about comparing the way things are done now compared to when we were young, it is about remembering times when we were happy and having fun.

Not that we don't have

of hindsight to know that we'll never be 21 again.

For most of us, true happiness remains as elusive as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Although one person appears to have found it, and has been dubbed The Happiest Man in the World.

64-year-old Matthieu Ricard is a French academic who turned his back on science and became a Buddhist monk, moving to live in Nepal. He claims that happiness is a skill that can be learned if you apply yourself properly.

To back up his claim he has subjected himself to hours and hours of clinical testing and MRI scanning to track his brain patterns. His scores for tests to identify brain activity related to happiness were consistently off the scale.

Hmmm... Sounds to me like his way to create happiness is to remove yourself from all areas of

can ever be truly happy every single moment of every single day of their lives. The best any of us can hope for is that we navigate a path through life which is free from major heartbreak or debilitating illness and we have a few good times along the way.

I'm thinking of carrying out my own little experiment over the next year alongside the ONS happiness survey. I'm going to get 365 matches and two boxes. At the end of every day I'll put one in either the "happy" box or the "unhappy" box and I'll let you know in a year how it goes.

Happy days!

■ Dick Lumsden is managing director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some