

Growing Up in Scotland – Sweep 2 – Topic Research Findings

Summary of findings from Year 2

The Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) is an important longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of a cohort of Scottish children from the early years, through childhood and beyond. Its principal aim is to provide information to support policy-making, but it is also intended to be a broader resource that can be drawn on by academics, voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties. Focusing initially on a cohort of 5,217 children aged 0-1 years old and a cohort of 2,859 children aged 2-3 years old, the first wave of fieldwork began in April 2005. This document is one of a series that summarise key findings from the second sweep of the survey which was launched in April 2006. At the second sweep, interviews were successfully completed with 4,512 respondents from the birth cohort and 2,500 from the child cohort.

Methods

GUS is based on a cohort or longitudinal design involving the recruitment of a 'panel' of children (and their families) who will be revisited on a number of occasions over an extended period of time. Members of the panel were identified in the first instance from Child Benefit records. For the second year of the study, interviews were sought with the person who had responded at sweep 1. In virtually all cases (98%), this proved to be the child's mother. As well as the main interview, at sweep 2, interviews were also undertaken with the resident partner of the main respondent, where applicable. A total of 2,975 partner's interviews were successfully completed in the birth cohort and 1,541 in the child cohort. The interviews covered a wide range of topics including parenting, formal and informal sources of support for parents, childcare, child health and development, food and nutrition, activities and, for the older children, transition to pre-school.

Characteristics and circumstances of children and their families

Childhood circumstances and life chances are not static. As the following data demonstrates, even in the space of a year, important changes can take place in the life of families and the children within them.

Family type

- There had been little overall change since sweep 1 in the proportion of children living in couple or lone parent families. On an individual level, only 6% of children had witnessed a change in family type, mainly through a lone parent starting to live with a partner.

Number of children in the household

- The number of cohort children who were the only child in the household fell in both cohorts from 47% in the birth cohort at sweep 1 to 41% at sweep 2, and in the child cohort, from 34% to 27%. Relatedly, the proportion of two-child families grew, whilst the proportion of larger families remained the same.

Non-resident parents

- Overall, around two-thirds of children with a non-resident parent were in contact with that parent, similar to sweep 1.



- There had, however, been some changes between sweeps, with a fifth of those who had no contact with their non-resident parent at sweep 1 now having contact, while conversely, of those children who did have contact at sweep 1, just over one in ten were not in contact with their non-resident parent at sweep 2.

- The majority of children in both cohorts still saw their non-resident parent at least once a week.

- Non-resident parents were also slightly more likely to be making maintenance payments, either through the Child Support Agency or through some other arrangement, than they were at sweep 1, particularly in the child cohort, where non-resident parents making no payments fell from 49% to 40%.

Employment and NS-SEC

- Households with lone parents at sweep 1 were significantly more likely than couple households to become unemployed or to remain unemployed between sweeps.

- As may be expected, change in family type was often closely related to change in income or socio-economic classification for the family involved. In a large number of cases, parental separation was accompanied by a drop in income and a lower socio-economic classification. In contrast, many households in which a lone parent had partnered between sweeps experienced a simultaneous increase in household income and a higher socio-economic classification.

Housing, neighbourhood and community

This section considers data collected from the birth cohort on a range of issues related to housing and accommodation, facilities and services in the local area and involvement in the community.

Housing and material goods

- The majority of families owned a wide range of material goods. However, computer ownership and internet access in the home showed a clear 'digital divide' between less affluent and more affluent households, carrying implications for access to information for parents and educational opportunities for children.

- The likelihood of having access to a car was linked to key family characteristics: couple (90%), higher income (99%)

and higher social class families (95%) were more likely to have access to a car. In addition, families in rural areas were more likely than those in urban areas to have access to a car (92% compared with 76%).

Moving home

- Mobility was low between sweeps, with less than one in six families in both cohorts moving.

- Lone parents and lower income families were more likely to have moved than were couple families and those with higher household income, and parents in the former groups also had different reasons for moving than those in the latter groups reflecting the different needs and situations of all of these groups.

- The most common reason overall for moving was to have a larger home (49%), although this was more common among couple families for whom having a better home or living in a better area were also important. Lone parents, on the other hand, were more likely to say they had moved because they wanted a place of their own, a reason which reflects the predominant younger age of mothers in this group.

Neighbourhood and community

- As may be expected, families living in urban areas had access to a wider range of facilities and services in their local community than those living in rural areas.

- Local facilities for young children, housing provision and crime levels were the issues most commonly cited as in need of improvement by parents in the birth cohort.

Food and Eating

This was a new topic at sweep two which explored the eating habits of children in the birth cohort. On a positive note, the majority of children ate fruit and vegetables on a daily basis, however, a significant minority of children frequently consumed unhealthy foods and drinks.

Eating habits and special diet

- The majority of respondents found it very or fairly easy to feed their child (80%), with only 12% finding it very or fairly difficult.

- Only 6% of children followed a special diet of any kind. Special diets were mainly followed because of allergies or intolerances, religious reasons, or because the children were vegetarian, vegan or pescetarian.

Main and evening meals

- Virtually all children had a main evening meal, normally at a regular time. The majority of children ate with other family members, although 6% ate on their own. Meals normally took place in the kitchen, dining or living room.

Healthy foods

- It was encouraging to see that almost all children in the birth cohort ate at least one type of fruit a day, with 59% having two or three types a day and a further 25% having four or more.
- Children who ate four or more types of fruit a day were more likely to have mothers with higher educational qualifications, to live in a higher income household, and to have a parent in a managerial or professional occupation.
- Most birth cohort children also ate some vegetables (not including potatoes) on a typical day, although a quarter had only one type of vegetable and 6% had none. The characteristics of those children who ate a greater variety of vegetables were similar to those who ate a greater variety of fruit.

Unhealthy foods

- For a significant proportion of children, sugary foods and drinks are an established part of their daily intake, even at 22 months. Ninety percent of children ate sweets or chocolates once a week or more often, including 43% who ate sweets or chocolates once a day or more.
- Although four-fifths of respondents reported that their child had a soft drink which was not low-calorie or diet less than once a month or never, more than one in ten had such a soft drink at least once a day.
- Higher consumption of sugary soft drinks was closely related to more frequent consumption of sweets and chocolates. Parents on lower incomes and with fewer educational qualifications reported giving their children more sugary foods and drinks.

Effects on what children eat

- Eleven percent of respondents said their knowledge of cooking affected what they gave their child to eat 'a lot' whereas the things the child will and won't eat had a lot of effect for 8% of parents. The cost of food was the factor which had least impact on what the child was given to eat.

Advice on healthy eating and children's diet

- Most respondents (85%) reported having received information or advice on children's diets and healthy eating. The most popular source of this information was

paper literature (books, magazines and newspapers) followed by family and friends, and health professionals.

Activities

The results showed a positive picture on the whole, with children participating in a wide range of educational and leisure activities, both within and beyond the home. However, stark differences between socio-economic groups were present in the birth cohort particularly in relation to educational activities, a difference that was greatly diminished in the child cohort, undoubtedly due to the almost universal up-take of free pre-school places in this age group.

Visiting other families

- A high value was placed on children socialising with peers at home and elsewhere. Sixty-five percent of children in both cohorts were taken to visit other families with young children at least once a week.

Educational activities

- Books played an important part in many children's lives: 79% of children in both cohorts had looked at books every day, while 64% in the child cohort and 46% in the birth cohort had been to the library in the past week.
- However, children in certain households were more likely to have looked at books every day than others. For example children in couple households and those whose mothers had more educational qualifications read books more often than those in lone parent households and those whose mothers had fewer or no educational qualifications. (In the birth cohort, 82% in couple households looked at books every day compared with 68% in lone parent households.)
- Educational activities were reported more among the child cohort (95% having done these in the past week), although even in the birth cohort, where the children were just under 2 years old, these activities played an important role for many, two-thirds having played at recognising shapes, letters or numbers in the previous week. Again differences between sub-groups could be seen.

Television

- Watching TV every day is the norm, even at 22 months: 81% of children in the younger cohort had watched television in the last week including 63% who watched it every day.
- In the child cohort 84% of children had watched TV every day in the last week; 3% had not watched any television.

- There were no marked variations by sub-group in the child cohort. However, in the birth cohort, children in more disadvantaged circumstances were more likely to have been reported as watching TV every day.

Outdoor activity

- More than half of children had played outdoors in the week prior to the interview.
- As may be expected, Scotland's climate had a clear effect; children were considerably more likely to have played outside in the summer months than in the winter months. For example, 85% of parents in the birth cohort who were interviewed in July reported the child had played outdoors every day in the last week, whereas just 19% of those interviewed in January said the same.
- Accessibility was also a key issue here, with 55% in the birth cohort and 58% in the child cohort, who had access to a private or shared garden, playing outdoors every day in the previous week, in contrast to 35% and 33%, respectively, who did not have access to a garden.

Places and events

- Popular places to visit for both cohorts were the swimming pool and a zoo, aquarium or farm.
- There were considerable differences in the types of places visited by younger and older children. One in five of the older cohort had been to the cinema in the past year, compared with just one in twenty in the birth cohort and 62% of children in the child cohort had also been to a live performance of some kind, compared with 25% of those in the birth cohort.

Child health and development

In similarity to sweep 1, the health of children in the cohort was generally perceived to be good. However, health gaps between socio-economic and gender groups, which were visible at sweep 1, continued and, in some cases, widened.

Parental perceptions of child's health

- The vast majority of respondents in both sweeps thought that the health of their child was good or very good. Respondents at sweep 2 were slightly less likely to rate their child's health as being 'very good' and slightly more likely to rate it as fair or very bad.
- Differences in the health of children from different sub-groups appear to be widening as the children get older.

For example, at sweep 2, in the child cohort, 57% of lone parents said their child's health was very good compared with 69% of parents in couple families – a difference of 12 percentage points. The corresponding figures for sweep 1 were 66% and 75%, a difference of 9 percentage points.

Long-standing illness and disability

- Eleven percent and 16% of the birth and child cohorts respectively were reported as having a disability or long-standing illness at sweep 2, a slightly higher prevalence than at sweep 1. Less than 10% of children in the child cohort, and less than 5% in the birth cohort were reported to have a disability or long-standing illness at both sweeps.
- In similarity to sweep 1, respondents from low income households were more likely to report their child having a disability or long-standing illness than those from higher income households. In both cohorts, long-standing illness was also more common in boys than girls.

Health problems since Sweep 1 interview

- Most children (95%) had experienced some form of minor health problem or illness since the sweep 1 interview. These were mainly coughs, colds or fevers.

Accidents and injuries requiring NHS contact

- Data from the two sweeps suggest that accidents amongst young children are most common between the ages of 2-3 years. At sweep 2, parents of boys continued to be more likely to report their child had had an accident than parents of girls (in the birth cohort: 21% of boys versus 16% of girls).
- The most common injury requiring a visit to A&E was a bang on the head.

Anthropometric measures, overweight and obesity

- Height and weight measures were taken for the child cohort and were used to calculate the child's Body Mass Index (BMI).
- The majority of children (77%) of both sexes were of 'normal weight' (i.e. fell below the 85% percentile). Twenty-three percent were overweight (including obese).
- Girls were more likely than boys to be overweight (19% compared with 16% of boys) and more likely to be obese (7% compared with 5% of boys), as were children from lone parent families (26% vs. 23% in couple families). There were no significant differences by other key sub-groups.

Contact with health professionals

- Nine out of ten parents in both cohorts had been in contact with a health professional in relation to their child's health at least once in the six months prior to their interview, and around two-fifths had done so on two or more occasions.

Sources of help, information and advice on children's health

- GPs continued to be parents' main source of information or advice on child health. Some key differences were observed across the sample in the extent to which this, and other, sources of information were likely to be used. For example, those in higher income households were more likely to say that they had sought help from books, leaflets, the internet (both cohorts) and their GP (birth cohort only) compared with those in lower household income groups.

Child's development

- The majority of parents in both cohorts had no concerns about their child's development. As was the case in sweep 1, parents in the child cohort were more likely to express some concern about their child's development and behaviour than were parents in the birth cohort (19% versus 12%).
- Parents of boys, lone parents and those in lower income households were more likely to express concern about their child's development.
- Data from the more detailed child development scales illustrated some stark differences in levels of communication skills and problematic behaviour by gender, household income and maternal education. Boys, children in lower income households and those whose mothers had fewer or no qualifications were reported, on average, to have poorer communication skills and more problematic behaviour.

Parenting styles and parenting responsibilities

High levels of awareness of different parenting and disciplining techniques could be seen in both samples, although the use and perceived usefulness of various techniques depended heavily on the age of the child. Parenting responsibilities appeared slightly more even at this sweep but gendered differences between types of activities could still be seen.

Parenting techniques

- Parents generally had a high awareness of a range of discipline techniques including traditional strategies such as 'ignoring bad behaviour' and strategies popularised by recent television shows (e.g. 'the naughty step').
- Use of different techniques was dependent on the age of the child: parents in the birth cohort were most likely to have ignored bad behaviour and raised their voice and shouted at their child whereas parents of children in the older cohort were more likely to use removing treats or privileges (74%), the naughty step (or room/corner/area) (65%) and 'time out' (60%) in addition to ignoring bad behaviour or raising their voices.

Parent-child activities

- The vast majority of male and female carers take part in 'bonding' activities like cuddling, playing with their children and just talking and chatting to them on a daily basis.
- Gender divisions are more apparent with respect to activities like bathing children, getting them dressed and getting them ready for bed, with women doing these activities more often than their male partners.
- Men with qualifications at Higher grade or above were more likely than men with no qualifications to be involved with bath time, dressing the child, getting them ready for bed and reading to them.

Household division of labour

- At the overall level, there was relatively little change in main respondents' perceptions of the household division of labour between sweeps 1 and 2. For all the child-related and household tasks covered, the respondent (usually the child's mother) was most likely to say they did most.
- Overall, the views of main respondents and their partners on the division of child-related and household tasks are fairly similar. However, partners (mainly fathers) are somewhat more likely to believe that these tasks are shared equally, while the main respondent believes they are mainly responsible for them, especially with respect to childcare-related tasks.

Parental Support

Informal social networks

- Most parents had good relationships with family and friends, were part of a wide and strong informal social network and as a result felt they received enough support

from this network. Almost no-one said they didn't have any close relationships, although a fifth said they didn't get enough or any help.

- Mothers aged over 40, those with no qualifications and those living in lower income households all appear to have weaker informal social networks and were also more likely to have support deficit.

Access to informal support

- The majority of parents in both cohorts continued to find it very or fairly easy to organise someone to look after their child at short notice either for a few hours during the day (74% birth cohort, 77% child cohort), a whole day (60% and 64%) or overnight (56% and 59%). In each case, there was a slight drop relative to the findings at sweep 1.
- In similarity to sweep 1, the most common source of support of this kind by far were grandparents, and especially maternal grandparents. Friends or neighbours of the respondent, and parents' siblings remained the next most common sources of informal support in this context.

Attendance at groups and classes for parents and children

- Attendance at parent and toddler/child groups had increased between sweeps among parents in the birth cohort (half of whom were now attending), and decreased among parents in the child cohort (a quarter attending). As in sweep 1, in both cohorts, mothers from couple families and older mothers were more likely than lone mothers and younger mothers to say they had attended such a group in the last year.
- Reasons for non-attendance varied greatly, although the most common reason in the birth cohort was a lack of time (25%), while in the child cohort 74% did not attend due to the child attending nursery.

Use of formal support and professional advice on parenting issues

- Responses to a set of attitudinal questions on formal support indicated that most parents are not wary of the impact or connotations of receiving parenting advice or support from professionals and believe that enough support of this kind is already provided. However, a significant minority believed that receipt of formal parenting support carried certain negative associations.
- Younger mothers and parents in lower income households were more wary of professional support or intervention than were older mothers and those in couple families. Yet

respondents in the former groups were also more likely to suggest that professionals do not offer enough parenting advice and support suggesting a degree of misunderstanding around the implications of that support.

- For services where contact is service-led and targeted (such as health visitors or social work), contact is higher among younger mothers, lone parents and lower income families. Those services where the responsibility lies with the user – i.e. the parent – to make contact and seek advice see lower use from the same sub-groups.

Childcare and worklife balance

Both childcare provision and work-life balance are major foci of government social policy. This section looks at the use of both formal and informal childcare for both cohorts, and how these are related to parents' employment responsibilities and use of work-life balance policies.

Use of childcare

- A little over two-thirds of parents in the birth cohort (68%), and virtually all parents in the child cohort (99%) were utilising some form of childcare for the sample child. Use of childcare increased in both cohorts between sweeps, although clearly the rise was more dramatic in the older cohort. This was largely accounted for by the provision of free statutory pre-school education.

Types of childcare used

- Both cohorts saw an increase between sweeps in use of multiple providers and in the average time a child was likely to spend in childcare.
- There was a shift from lower use of informal care to greater use of formal care between sweeps. In the birth cohort, 53% of parents using childcare were using a formal provider at sweep 2, up from 40% at sweep 1. Notwithstanding this increase, certain groups amongst the sample continued to rely more heavily on informal provision.
- Despite almost universal formal childcare use in the child cohort, almost half of the older children were also being cared for by an informal provider. They were also considerably more likely than those in the birth cohort to have multiple arrangements in place – around 60% were using two or more childcare providers compared with 35% of babies' families.
- The child's grandparents and nursery care account for the majority of provision with childminders, playgroups and

'other informal' arrangements accounting for most of the rest. Care by grandparents and other informal providers was higher in the birth cohort whereas nursery and playgroup care were higher in the child cohort.

Number of hours and days per week

- On average, families in the birth cohort used childcare for less time than did those in the child cohort (birth cohort average of 22 hours per week, child cohort average of 26 hours per week). The average weekly duration of childcare had increased by 10 hours from the comparable figure at sweep 1 in each cohort.

Changes to arrangements, degree of choice, ease of arranging childcare and childcare preferences

- In both cohorts, the majority of families using regular childcare at both sweeps continued to use at least one provider at sweep 2 that was being used at sweep 1, although this was more likely in the younger cohort where 81% of respondents carried forward at least one arrangement compared with 72% in the child cohort.
- The vast majority of parents in both cohorts using childcare (85%) said they had found it very or fairly easy to make the necessary childcare arrangements, with only one in ten reporting it to be difficult or very difficult.
- Parents appeared more content with their childcare than at sweep 1, with 9% in the child cohort saying they would change their main childcare provider at sweep 2, compared with 18% saying so at sweep 1.

Work-life balance and family-friendly working

- Responses to a series of attitudinal statements showed that most parents who work believe that their employment is not detrimental to their enjoyment of family life nor to their ability to raise or spend time with their child(ren). Although attitudes did vary according to employment status and occupational classification.
- 80% of working parents had some form of family friendly working arrangement available to them from their employer. Two predominant policies are evident: flexible working and time off when a child is sick. Around six out of ten respondents in both cohorts could take advantage of these policies at their workplace.
- Those parents in managerial and professional occupations tended to have access to a wider range of policies than those in other occupational classifications.

Experiences of pre-school education

Up-take of the free pre-school places was almost universal in the child cohort, all of whom were eligible to attend at the time of interview. Furthermore, from what we have seen in other chapters, such as that on activities, free pre-school does appear to be having an impact on the experiences of children in the early years.

Overview of pre-school attendance

- The vast majority – 94% – of children aged just under 4 are attending a pre-school education place. Most of those who were not were due to be starting a place some time in the next year.
- Using data on pre-school attendance in combination with data about childcare, we can estimate that 85% are attending pre-school places provided via local authority nurseries, nursery classes or playgroups, compared with 15% whose pre-school places are provided via a private nursery or playgroup.
- Use of private pre-school providers was more common in large urban areas and among more affluent families, 24% of those living in the least deprived areas of Scotland compared with 11% in the most deprived used private pre-school providers.

Advice and support needs

- Six in ten parents had sought some kind of advice or support before enrolling their child in pre-school, most commonly from pre-school staff themselves (32%) or friends (31%). Respondents were more likely to seek advice or support if the sample child was their first born. More highly educated respondents were also more likely than those without qualifications to have sought advice.
- Only a minority of parents (8%) felt they or their child had needed support adjusting to pre-school, and the majority of those who needed it felt they had received it (77%), again, primarily from pre-school staff themselves.

Feelings about pre-school in the first 2 months

- Attending pre-school appears to be a positive experience for most three year-olds, with 81% saying their child said good things about it at least once a week and 81% that they looked forward to going in their first two months.
- Only a small proportion of parents report that their child regularly said things that might indicate difficulties with their pre-school place during the first two months.

However, parents of boys and respondents who were only using informal childcare at sweep 1 were slightly more likely to say their child had said things which may indicate difficulties.

Parental perceptions of children's 'readiness' for pre-school

■ While the majority of parents had no or few concerns about their child's readiness to start a pre-school place, a substantial minority had some concerns, particularly around whether their child would find being apart from

them difficult (31% having this concern) and whether the child would be reluctant to go (34%).

- Again, parents of boys and those who had only used informal childcare at sweep 1 were more likely to have some concerns about their child's readiness for pre-school, as were parents who were not working compared with parents who were working full time.
- Partners were less likely to be concerned about the child finding separation from them difficult (19% compared with 30% of main respondents).

If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any queries about the GUS project, please contact:

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