



## **Dissemination, impact and engagement**

### **EUCCONET Scientific Meeting, Edinburgh, Scotland, 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> June, 2012**

Organised by Paul Bradshaw, Project Director, Growing Up in Scotland study (ScotCen Social Research) and Lesley Kelly, GUS Dissemination Officer (Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh)

#### **1. Summary**

In the current financial climate, where difficult choices need to be made, the need for good evidence has come to the forefront. However, research evidence – including that available from cohort studies – is not always fully understood by its intended audience nor utilised to its full extent. Studies face challenges in getting their findings and data understood and used by the many varied audiences it is intended for, including research participants. The impact, and often the future, of a study will depend on the dissemination of the findings and the use of findings by policy makers and practitioners.

As longitudinal projects, demonstrating impact presents a particular challenge for child cohort studies. Often the true value of these studies and their data is not realised until many years after the project is launched. This means that any impact can be quite distant from the project's initiation and first data collection. Thus it is particularly hard to demonstrate impact in the short term.

Nevertheless, clear plans for research dissemination and evidence of impact are increasingly being requested by research funders. For example, the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) require impact to be considered in all funding applications. The ESRC categorise impact in three ways:

- Instrumental – for example, influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation or altering behaviour
- Conceptual - for example, contributing to the understanding of these and related issues, reframing debates
- Capacity building – for example, through the development of technical or personal skills

To achieve these kinds of impact, dissemination is increasingly required to go beyond publication of the research findings in a peer-reviewed journal. Instead, new and innovative methods and technology are required in order to reach out to a wider audience and to increase the influence of research in these – and other – ways. Such impact requires identifying and engaging with the right stakeholders and ensuring they are involved with the study from as early as possible.

This meeting aimed to be a platform for EUCCONET members to learn about and share examples of effective dissemination and engagement with stakeholders and participants, and making an impact on policy and practice. Attendees were invited to give presentations covering a range of related issues. For example: who their key stakeholders are and how they were identified, what information is disseminated to stakeholders and what methods are used to do this. Those attending the meeting heard about examples of novel and innovative ways of disseminating to different audiences, including the use of new media. Participants were also asked to illustrate



how they influence policy makers and practitioners as well as demonstrate (or estimate) the extent to which they feel this has been successful, describing how they measure and demonstrate impact and the challenges this brings.

The meeting sought to result in shared learning on dissemination strategies by providing examples that other cohort studies could usefully adopt, including the potential offered by new media. In addition, through the participation of guest speakers – from beyond the realm of cohort study research – the meeting aimed to provide expert input on a range of related issues.

This workshop brought together those involved in the dissemination and engagement elements of longitudinal studies around the world in order to share experiences and best practice in relation to these issues. A key value of EUCCONET lies in promoting common skills and common standards across the many teams involved in child cohort research. As such the programme included substantive presentations from cohort studies based in the UK, US and other countries as well as expert input on assessing research impact, communicating research to policy and practice, effectively translating research for the mass media and using the arts to disseminate and engage.

## **2. Scientific content and discussion**

This section provides a summary of the scientific content of the presentations delivered during the meeting. These presentations took two main forms: overviews of dissemination, engagement and impact activities on active cohort studies or expert contributions on a specific relevant area of interest.

### ***2.1 Study reports***

Representatives from eight cohort studies presented a brief overview of their study and described the dissemination and impact activities they had undertaken or planned.

The study presentations addressed broadly similar issues and showed that a range of activities and challenges were shared amongst the different studies. However, the studies represented at the meeting encompassed a varied range of research populations, substantive content, geographic coverage, and research duration – all of which had a bearing on dissemination, engagement and impact specific to that study. Nevertheless, some key themes emerged including: dissemination and impact activities with stakeholders, research participants and the general public; dealing with and maximising opportunities presented by the news media; how to define and measure impact; issues of confidentiality and consent; ensuring engagement at different stages of the research process; and making the best use of ‘new’ media, including social media.

#### ***Growing Up in Scotland***

[www.growingupinScotland.org.uk](http://www.growingupinScotland.org.uk)

Lesley Kelly presented information about the dissemination programme on the Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS), a longitudinal project involving around 14,000 Scottish children in three nationally representative cohorts born in the last ten years. Being a government-funded study, and set up to provide evidence for policy, key study stakeholders are those concerned with the development of Scottish policy on children and families, though practitioners in health and education are also a key audience. A full range of dissemination activities have been undertaken from annual conferences to regular Twitter updates. The impact of GUS was described via its ‘contribution’ – an approach to be more fully discussed later by guest speaker Sarah Morton – and detailed information presented on the many different ways in which the study data and

findings are used to provide context, benchmarking, to support evaluation of policies and as motivation for policymakers and practitioners

### ***Millennium Cohort Study (UK)***

<http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/>

Lucinda Platt described a recent independent impact evaluation commissioned by the ESRC undertaken on the Millennium Cohort Study – a multidisciplinary cohort of around 19,000 children living across the UK and born during 2000/01. The categories of impact defined by the ESRC – instrumental, conceptual and capacity building – were discussed and challenges related both to definition and measurement were raised. The evaluation found MCS to have impact in all three categories. For example, instrumental impact was achieved through MCS being mentioned in policy and related documents; conceptual impact because most research outputs are policy relevant and will therefore inform future debate; and capacity-building impact through analysis of the MCS data. However, the process raised some issues around what actions and events did and did not constitute impact for the purposes of the evaluation and, more broadly, where responsibility for impact lay – with those who produce the data or those who analyse it?

### ***Growing Up in Ireland***

[www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie)

James Williams discussed engagement, dissemination and impact on the Growing Up in Ireland study, a government-funded general purpose study involving two cohorts of children - 8,500 in the child cohort (who were aged 9 at first contact in 2007) and 11,000 in the infant cohort (who were aged 9 months at first contact in 2009). The presentation described the early engagement activities to inform the development of the study. This process involved stakeholders including policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and academics, and families and children. This was realised through a range of methods including a Children's Advisory Forum and expert panels. The study's many dissemination activities were discussed, and the importance of the news media highlighted – as was the pivotal role of the Communications Officer. The study's impact was described in relation to raised awareness, particularly among policymakers, of issues related to childhood and children, but also in relation to the capacity building potential offered by the data.

### ***Longitudinal Study of Young People in England***

[www.education.gov.uk/ilsype](http://www.education.gov.uk/ilsype)

The policy impact of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England - a youth cohort funded by the UK Department for Education involving 15,000 young people from age 13-19 – was the focus of Helen Wood's presentation. Findings have been published in various government publications and the data is used routinely both within government and by external researchers. However, keeping track of who was using the data was raised as a key challenge. Two specific examples of the impact of study findings were discussed – related to youth policy and a review of vocational qualifications. The difficulties in measuring impact were acknowledged. A key challenge to ensuring the data is used across government was maintaining good relationships with policy experts ensuring they are aware of the data and the potential it offered.

### ***Born in Bradford (England)***

[www.borninbradford.nhs.uk](http://www.borninbradford.nhs.uk)

Ann Barratt gave a very interesting insight into the innovative programme of participant and community engagement that has been undertaken on the Born in Bradford study (BiB). BiB is a health-focussed cohort involving 13,500 children born in the city between 2007 and 2010. A key aim of the engagement programme has been to ensure that people involved truly feel part of the

research. One particularly successful way this has been achieved has been through the use of photographs. A photographic documentarian has been capturing the lives of particular children and their families since the studies launch. These pictures have been widely used in study literature and the local press. BiB has also organised a range of engagement events, to involve both participants and the local community. These have included visits to local nurseries and an annual ‘Teddy Bears Picnic’ held in a local park. Plans are in place to produce a film documenting some of the childrens’ lives. The following discussion addressed issues of consent and anonymity, as many cohort studies seek to ensure that their participants identities are not revealed, and few organise events for the participants themselves.

### ***Young lives (Ethiopia, India, Peru, Vietnam)***

[www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

Catherine Knowles introduced the Young Lives project, a study involving 12,000 children in four countries – Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. The study has two age cohorts in each country, around 2000 born in 2000-01 and 1000 born in 1994/95. The study is collaborative involving a number of organisations in the UK and several in each host country. This had implications for dissemination as outputs need to have both a national and international focus, and are required to meet a wide range of needs – with different requirements and different approaches necessary both between countries and within countries for different agencies. A key focus of ongoing communication and engagement is on building relationships with key interest groups and encouraging use of the data in order to increase impact.

### ***The US National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (USA)***

[www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls)

Paula Baker discussed research dissemination in relation to the multiple cohorts involved in the multi-purpose and long-running National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, particularly the 1979 and 1997 cohorts. Study dissemination is made through individuals, organisations and networks using articles and reports, newsletters, press releases and other modes including social media (such as Facebook) and blogs. Study findings have attracted a lot of press interest that is often carried over onto the web via blogs and news sites. A series of ‘policy videos’ have also been produced in which researchers talk about the study’s impact. Data workshops are also delivered and a teaching dataset has been produced as well as other resources for data users. The presentation concluded by considering both the consequences of dissemination (e.g. on participants) and who should assume the responsibility for dissemination.

### ***ALSPAC (England)***

[www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/)

Dara O'Hare provided an insight into communications and public engagement on ALSPAC, an area-based, health-focused cohort study of 14,500 children born in the Bristol area in the early 1990s. Successful dissemination used outputs and approaches which avoided jargon, got basic information - like sample size – right, and tailored the output to an intended audience were seen as key. A key theme of the presentation was around the use of ‘hooks’ to publicise a story. The hooks included external events either directly or indirectly related to the study team and content – e.g. Father’s Day, the Olympics, Awards (for members of the study team) or Anniversaries (of the cohort or funders) – to publicise study results and emphasise their relevance. The media coverage ALSPAC has received – on radio and television – was discussed as well as ways in which cohort members participation in the Olympics was used to publicise the study. A unique example of a large-scale public engagement event – funded through the MRC’s 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary programme - was described. This event invited study participants, and members of the local



community, to a hands-on day where they could find out more about the study and how the data is used, meet and talk with researchers and try out experiments imitating those undertaken on biological data. This event was amplified through social media – Twitter and Storify

***Guest speakers:***

***Understanding and utilising the press media***

Nigel Hawkes, a Contributing Editor to Straight Statistics provided a learned insight into how journalists approach and use research findings, how to better guarantee press coverage and avoid misinterpretation by the press. It is important that good research is widely publicised. In order to have research findings picked up by the press and accurately represented, it is necessary to give journalists the information they want in a timely manner. A good story provides novelty, impact, interesting subject matter – findings which disprove conventional wisdom are of particular interest to journalists – and is available. The press release is very important in securing interest as is having good, established relationships with journalists. Blogging and social media were each routes which could by-pass journalists altogether, but presented other challenges. Web-based media required constant updating and refreshing and was therefore time consuming to produce and manage.

Straight Statistics (<http://www.straightstatistics.org/>) is a campaign established by journalists and statisticians to improve the understanding and use of statistics by government, politicians, companies, advertisers and the mass media. Through exposing bad practice and rewarding good, they aim to restore public confidence in statistics.

***Assessing the impact of research: exploring the issues***

Sarah Morton is a Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh. She has responsibility for Knowledge Exchange at CRFR, facilitating ways in which research on families and relationships can be widely used. Sarah provided an overview of the main, broad approaches to assessing research impact such as forward and backward tracking, and evaluation of initiatives. Challenges common to these various approaches were identified including whether to assess actual or potential impacts, dealing with attribution and moving away from linear models of research through to impact. A more detailed overview of a ‘contribution’ approach to assessing impact was described. This approach acknowledges that research does not directly cause change but, instead, contributes to it. Impact is therefore measured by identifying the contribution. Assessing contribution uses a ‘pathway to impact’ approach which is based on logic modelling. It details the inputs, outputs and outcomes at each stage and assesses the associated risks and assumptions (i.e. what needs to happen in order to achieve a particular outcome).

***Research and Practice at IRISS***

The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS – <http://www.iriss.org.uk/>) is a charitable company which seeks increase the capability of social service practitioners to access and use evidence (taken from research) to innovate in and improve what they do. Ellen Daly talked about the work they do to promote evidence-informed practice. IRISS make considerable use of online and multi-media resources including a web-based evidence repository - the ‘Learning Exchange’ – which contains a host of information on key social service topics in various formats including video interviews with researchers, scripted case studies and animations. IRISS use data visualisation to improve the appeal and interpretation of evidence among the social service workforce, a data visualisation toolkit is also available. They co-ordinate a

‘Champion Network’ which includes representatives of each of the social service sectors who publicise the evidence generated by IRISS and encourage its use.

### ***The Wellcome Trust Science Engagement programme***

Tom Ziessen, a Senior Public Engagement Adviser at the Wellcome Trust outlined the Wellcome Trust’s commitment to exploring medicine in a cultural context and valuing the public’s role in science. Part of the aim of the public engagement programme was to demonstrate to the public how science is not something which exists outside of their daily lives. Indeed, a by product of large-scale public engagement may be increased response to research by the public. Wellcome Trust fund a range of different engagement activities including individual awards (supporting the work of specific people), Arts Awards (which fund the production of creative new work) to Broadcast Development Awards (used to support the development and pitching of ideas for a television programme or film production based on research findings). Part of the evaluation of engagement grants involves an impact assessment. Their approach draws on quantitative and qualitative data with the latter considered important in providing a richness of understanding and better idea of the range of impacts. Nevertheless, they face difficulties in defining, understanding and measuring impact.

### **3. Scientific impact and future directions**

The aim of this meeting was to allow EUCCONET members to learn about and share examples of research dissemination, engagement and impact.

All of the study presentations described the dissemination and engagement activities which are undertaken to share emerging research findings. Whilst many of these activities are similar across different studies – such as paper-based reports or summaries, seminars and conferences, websites - a range of different, innovative ideas for sharing results with a range of audiences were described. The area studies – Born in Bradford and ALSPAC – in particular demonstrated how they increase local awareness of, and interest in, their research – e.g. through local press and events - and establish it as a recognised part of the local community. For both of these studies, much of this was done by making use of the research participants themselves, using photographs of them or events happening in their lives to generate awareness of the research.

Social media – such as Twitter and Facebook - and the web more generally, for example, via blogs - was recognised as playing increasingly larger roles in dissemination and the presentations and discussion demonstrated how they can be used in different ways for different purposes. Examples of audio-visual methods – such as podcasts or video interviews - and broadcast media approaches, including television and radio programmes, were also demonstrated with the pros and cons of these approaches discussed.

Many of the studies have resource dedicated to dissemination and impact in the form of a Dissemination or Communications Officer. This was considered essential for maximising reach and impact. Yet, at least one study had already lost this resource due to funding cuts. Some wider discussion was had around where responsibility should lie for dissemination and impact – with the team responsible for producing the data or with external analysts or an external ‘knowledge broker’ such as IRISS. This also raised the issue of whether it was always necessary for researchers to be demonstrating and thinking about impact.

A number of presentations discussed, specifically, the challenges associated with defining, measuring and demonstrating impact. These challenges were present both amongst research

teams - either in having to measure impact themselves or being subject to an external evaluation which was attempting to do so – and amongst funders. The definitions of impact provided by funding bodies were helpful, to some extent, but left considerable scope for interpretation. Overall, the notion of impact and its measurement was still felt to be elusive. Nevertheless, the details and merits of a number of methods for impact assessment were shared and discussed, with particular consideration given to the contribution approach.

Feedback from participants indicates that the meeting overall was found to be both interesting and useful by all. As the above detail has demonstrated, the cohort studies were actively involved in the programme, which also benefitted from expert input from others not directly involved in child cohort research. New collaborative links have been established, particularly between those individuals responsible for the dissemination activities of each of the studies, and a full range of potential opportunities for new and innovative dissemination activities designed for different audiences, was shared between the studies and the relative merits of each discussed. Participants left the meeting aware of new methods for dissemination and with new ideas for their own studies. For example, for some there was a need to consider whether cohort members and other research participants should be more involved in dissemination and engagement activities. It would be helpful to maintain links between those who met via an email network so that new findings, new ways of engaging audiences and other news can be shared. Steps have already been taken to establish this virtual network.

This is an important, emerging topic which will continue to grow in importance as the many newer cohort studies begin to analyse and publish their data, and as that data, and the opportunities to exploit and share it, increase.

*“Longitudinal studies are generating a wealth of learning and evidence which is highly relevant for policy debates. There is a wealth of experience in communicating research and engaging with stakeholders – it’s great to see and hear how others are working. Networking, peer support, sharing and learning is invaluable for good practice. Assessing impact is a challenge- but planned approaches can improve the things we do.”*

Quote from meeting participant

## Annex – Final Programme and meeting participants

### Programme: Monday 25<sup>th</sup> June

09:30	10:00	Registration
10:00	10:15	Welcome and Introduction <i>Paul Bradshaw, ScotCen Social Research, UK</i>
10:15	10:45	Engagement, dissemination and impact – the Growing Up in Ireland Study <i>James Williams, Economic and Social Research Institute, Ireland)</i>
10:45	11:15	Growing Up in Scotland: Dissemination and Impact <i>Lesley Kelly, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh, UK</i>
11:15	11:45	Making an Impact - the Millenium Cohort Study <i>Lucinda Platt, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, UK</i>
11:45	12:05	Coffee
12:05	13:00	Guest speaker: Understanding and utilising the press media <i>Nigel Hawkes, Contributing Editor, Straight Statistics, UK</i>
13:00	14:00	Lunch
14:00	14:30	Creating policy impact: Making the most of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England <i>Helen Wood, Department for Education, UK</i>
14:30	15:00	Family and community engagement on the Born in Bradford study <i>Ann Barratt, Bradford Institute for Health Research, UK</i>
15:00	15:30	**Young lives: A 4-country study of childhood poverty <i>Catherine Knowles, University of Oxford, UK</i>
15:30	15:50	Coffee
15:50	16:50	Guest speaker: Assessing the impact of research: exploring the issues <i>Sarah Morton, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh, UK</i>
16:50	17:30	Closing discussion
19:30		Group evening meal

\*\*Note: The programme was changed at short notice. John Bynner, of Longview and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, had intended delivering a presentation on “Communicating findings *from Cohort Studies*”. However, he agreed to offer his slot to Caroline Knowles who was only able to attend due to a last minute change of plan. John’s slides are available.



## Programme: Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June

09:00	09:30	Registration
09:30	09:40	Welcome and Introduction <i>Paul Bradshaw, ScotCen Social Research, UK</i>
09:40	10:30	Guest speaker: Research and Practice at IRISS <i>Ellen Daly, Institute for Research in Social Science, UK</i>
10:30	11:00	The US National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth: Research Dissemination <i>Paula Baker, Ohio State University, UK</i>
11:00	11:20	Coffee
11:20	11:50	
		How a hook can help: Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children Dara O'Hare, University of Bristol
11:50	12:40	Guest speaker: The Wellcome Trust Science Engagement programme <i>Tom Ziessen, Wellcome Trust, UK</i>
12:40	13:00	Closing discussion
13:00	14:00	Lunch and close

## Participants

First Name	Surname	Post	Organisation
Helen	Wood	Senior Research Officer	Department for Education
Ellen	Daly	Project Manager	IRISS
James	Williams	Principal Investigator	Growing up in Ireland
Lesley	Kelly	Dissemination Officer (Growing up in Scotland)	CRFR
Ann	Barratt	Family Liaison Officer	Born in Bradford
Dara	O'Hare	Communications Manager	ALSPAC (Children of the 90s)
Lucinda	Platt	Director Millennium Cohort Study	Centre for Longitudinal Studies
Laure	Gravier	Communications Officer	INED
Tom	Ziessen	Senior Public Engagement Adviser	Wellcome Trust
Wendy	van Rijswijk	Senior Research Officer	Scottish Government
Paula	Baker	Senior Research Associate	The Ohio State University
Nigel	Hawkes	Contributing Editor	Straight Statistics
Tessa	Hill	Researcher	ScotCen Social Research
Judith	Mabelis	Senior Researcher	ScotCen Social Research
Paul	Bradshaw	Research Director	ScotCen Social Research
Eva M	Loomans	Public Health Service Amsterdam	Nieuwe Achtergracht 100
Henri	Mougeot-Damidot	Communication Assistant	Unite mixte Elfe (Ined-Inserm-EFS)
Esther	Nzali	EUCCONET Co-ordinator	EUCCONET-INED
Simon	Anderson	Director	ScotCen Social Research
John	Bynner		LCLS IoE
Sarah	Morton	Co-Director	CRFR
Louise	Marryat	Research Assistant	IHW, University of Glasgow
Caroline	Knowles	Communications Manager	Young Lives