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GUI Bulletin

Growing Up in Ireland is a national study of children. It is the most significant of its kind ever to take place in this country and will help us to improve our understanding of all aspects of children and their development.

The study will take place over seven years and follow the progress of two groups of children; 8,500 nine-year-olds and 10,000 nine-month-olds. During this time we will carry out two rounds of interviews with each group of children and/or their families.

The main aim of the study is to paint a full picture of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment. This information will be used to assist in policy formation and in the provision of services which will ensure all children will have the best possible start in life.

Growing Up in Ireland is a Government study. The Department of Health & Children is funding it through the Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs in association with the Department of Social & Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office.

The Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs is overseeing and managing the study, which is being carried out by a group of researchers led by the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin.

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter by email please contact our Communications Officer Jillian Heffernan at jheffern@tcd.ie

Welcome to the first *Growing Up in Ireland* Bulletin for stakeholders and interested parties. The Bulletin is a briefing document intended to keep you informed about the latest developments in the study and will be published regularly as the study progresses.



(L to R) Pictured at the launch of *Growing Up in Ireland* last year are Georgia Lee Flynn, James Kehoe and Katie Dempsey of St. Fergal's National School, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

Message from the Minister

Growing Up in Ireland is one of the largest and most complex studies of this nature ever undertaken in Ireland. The Study has been commissioned by the Government, as part of its commitment to improving the lives of all children in Ireland. The aim of this Study is 'to examine the factors, which contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families'.

The Study is monitoring the development of two different age cohorts of children – with 10,000 children aged nine months and 8,500 children aged nine years being recruited to participate.

One of the highlights of this Study is the longitudinal element, which means that it will follow the lives of the same group of children and their families for several years. Therefore, with each wave of data collected, our knowledge and understanding of children's development will increase in breadth and scope.

Another highlight of this Study is the richness of the data being collected from the children's parents, teachers, child carers and children themselves. This will give us a well-rounded picture of the child's life and experiences.

Growing Up in Ireland has reached its first major milestone by completing the first wave of data collection for the nine-year-old cohort. Another major milestone for the Study takes place shortly when data collection will commence with the nine-month cohort.

THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

We have recently completed a qualitative study of families who had previously taken part in the quantitative study of nine-year-olds

This was a more in-depth study of 120 families who were selected from the original 8,500. The qualitative study complements the quantitative and gives children and parents the opportunity to provide, in their own words, very detailed information on the lives of nine-year-olds in Ireland today.

Explaining how the Qualitative Study worked, Elaine Harris, Research Fellow, said: "Taking part involved a further home visit from one of the research team where the parent(s) / guardian(s) of the child were asked to talk about topics such as how they spend time with their child, their views on being a parent, as well as their hopes and concerns for their child in the future".

"In a separate discussion the child was asked to talk about topics such as their hopes and dreams, family life and friendships and their community and neighbours. To make the experience more enjoyable they were asked to draw some pictures and fill out some worksheets and charts" she concluded.

The Qualitative Study with the Nine-Year Cohort took place from April to July 2008. The first report from it is due to be published early next year in conjunction with the report on the main study.

Preparation work is now also underway on the Nine-Month Qualitative Study which will take place side by side with the main quantitative study and involve 120 infants and families from the main sample of 10,000.

(contin. from page 1) I look forward to seeing the first results of this Study, which will be published in the coming months. These and subsequent results will become a major element of the evidence base for policy and practice regarding children and their families, thus ensuring that policies and services are targeted, practical and effective. I would like to thank Professors James Williams and Sheila Greene and their research team who are carrying out this Study. I would also like to thank my Office and officials from other Government Departments for their role in managing the Study. This collaboration between researchers and policy makers will ensure the research is both high quality and policy relevant.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the children, families and schools who have generously given up their valuable time to participate.

Barry Andrews TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs



GROWING UP IN IRELAND REACHES FIRST MAJOR MILESTONE

The *Growing Up in Ireland* team is delighted to announce that the study has just reached its first major milestone. In recent weeks the team has completed the first wave of data collection among the Nine-Year Cohort, which involved interviewing 8,500 nine-year-old children, their parents, teachers and school Principals.

Research with the Nine-Year Cohort began in mid-2007 and since then a team of 220 specially trained interviewers have been in the field collecting a wealth of information on each of the participant children and their families.

The Nine-Year Cohort is made up of almost 8,500 nine-year-old children selected randomly through the National School system. A nationally representative sample of 900 schools was selected from all schools across Ireland including mainstream national schools, private schools and special schools.

In the course of our fieldwork over 2,300 individual teachers cooperated with us in the schools as well as Principals and support staff.

To ensure that a complete picture of each child was created, participation involved both a school and home component.

- Each participant child was asked to sit a Drumcondra assessment test in English and Maths. These were administered by a specially trained member of the fieldstaff who visited each school.
- The child's teacher was asked to complete two short questionnaires. The first was about the school and the teacher him/herself and the second about the child's performance in school.
- The child's Principal was also asked to complete a short questionnaire about the school.
- The fieldworker then arranged to visit the child's home at a time which is convenient for the child and family. The child's parent(s)/guardian(s) and the child were each asked to fill out separate questionnaires.
- The parent's questionnaire covered the following broad areas:
 - ✓ Household composition
 - ✓ Child's health
 - ✓ Child's use of health services
 - ✓ Child's diet and exercise

THE INFANT COHORT



The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs launched the rollout of the Nine-Month Cohort at a recent event in Dublin. Fieldwork is now underway on this phase which will involve 10,000 nine-month-old infants and their families. In preparation for the rollout three phases of pilot work was carried out to test and refine the questionnaires and methodologies used in the main fieldwork.

The infants will be selected randomly from the Child Benefit Register which is maintained by the Department of Social & Family Affairs. Similar to the Nine-Year Cohort, a fieldworker will visit the home of the infant where the infant's parent(s) /guardian(s) will be asked to fill out separate questionnaires.

Where relevant, permission will be sought from the infant's primary carer to contact a non-resident parent who will then be sent a questionnaire to fill out and return through the post. If the infant is cared for by a childminder, in a crèche etc. for more than eight hours per week, we will request permission from the infant's parents to collect information from the childminder.

We will return to these children when they are three years old to find out how they have grown and developed in the intervening years.

- ✓ Parent's health
- ✓ Child's activities
- Questions on the child's questionnaire covered the following broad areas:
 - ✓ Family
 - ✓ School
 - ✓ Food
- Where relevant, permission was requested from the child's primary carer to contact a non-resident parent who was then sent a questionnaire to fill out and return through the post.
- In cases where the child was cared for by a childminder, relative or other carer for more than eight hours per week, permission was sought from the child's primary carer to contact that person who was sent a questionnaire to fill out and return through the post.

This is a longitudinal study which means these children and their families will be revisited in four years time when the children are 13 years old to see how they have grown and how their lives have changed. In the intervening years the Study Team will keep in regular contact with all participant families to update them on how the project is progressing. Speaking about the end of this first wave of data collection, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews T.D., acknowledged and thanked all the families who had participated: "This is a hugely significant milestone in the life of the **Growing Up in Ireland** study. A great tribute is owed to all the children, families and schools who have given up their valuable time to take part in the study. They should take great pride in knowing they are the central element of this historic and unique project which will benefit children and families in Ireland for generations to come. It is thanks to their participation that we can now start to examine some very important questions about the lives of children in Ireland."

Adding to this, Professor James Williams (Principal Investigator and Co-Director of **Growing up in Ireland**), said: "The completion of the first wave of data collection is the first step in a very exciting journey for the study. The information we collect through the study will add significantly to the growing bank of data on children in this country and will become a major element of the evidence base for policy and practice regarding children and their families, ensuring that every child can have the best possible start in life. None of this would have been possible without the help and assistance of all of the children, families, teachers and schools involved in the study. We are extremely grateful to them for their assistance."

Work is now ongoing on the analysis of the data collected from the nine-year-old cohort and the first in a series of inter-related policy oriented reports is due to be published early next year. The first report will focus on telling the story of the nine-year-old child in Ireland today and will present finding on areas such as family context, parenting, health and educational development.

If you would like to find out more about **Growing Up in Ireland**:

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