

GUS - LAUNCH OF YEAR 5 RESULTS

ROYAL CONCERT HALL, GLASGOW, 19 MAY 2011

Introduction

Good morning. Delighted to see so many people here today. Many new faces in the audience so let me begin by introducing myself. I am Shirley Laing, the Deputy Director within Scottish Government with policy responsibility for the Early Years and the Social Services Workforce. It goes without saying therefore that the GUS work is of particular interest to me!

Opening

- We've come a long way from not knowing much at all about the impact of early year's experiences on later life outcomes to the realisation that the early years are key in child development. The Growing Up in Scotland study has contributed to this process.

Start of GUS

- The Scottish Government would like every child in Scotland to have the best start in life and to reach their full potential. In order to achieve this, they need to know more about children's circumstances; the opportunities, difficulties and challenges that they face and what happens in their lives as they are growing up.
- Back in 2000, we carried out a scoping study which showed that there was very limited evidence on the early year's experiences and circumstances of Scottish children. The study also showed that we didn't know much

about how these experiences impact on later life outcomes.

- As a result, GUS started in 2005 with the aim to provide evidence on Scottish children to inform policy and service delivery. GUS was - and is - unique in that it is a longitudinal study, which allows us to track children from the early months. Year on year we have more and more evidence on the link between early experiences and later outcomes.

Current climate

- Looking back, how things have changed since 2000! A wealth of evidence on the importance of early year's experiences is now available. We now know more about the link between early experiences and later outcomes - through GUS and other studies. We know through research into neurological development the ages at which children are most open to learning important skills such as language and we recognise more than ever the importance of quality pre-school.

Finance committee

- You may have followed the discussions in the Scottish Government Finance committee on preventative spending. A lot of the focus was on early intervention and prevention, and this evidence was brought forward and accepted. Everyone seemed to agree that indeed prevention and intervention in the early years is key.

Cross Party Commitment

- This was further reflected in a parliamentary debate that established cross party agreement on the importance of the early years.
- Indeed it was also reflected in all the parties' manifestos for the recent elections. The SNP in particular devoted a full page of their manifesto to the early years.
- As such I think we can have every confidence that the new Government will continue to be committed to the early years and will wish to build on the legacy of the last 4 years. Indeed, back in March, the outgoing administration launched a £6.8 million Early Years, Early Action fund the first projects of which will come on stream over the summer.

Contribution/ Impact of GUS

- So, we have gone from having little evidence to a clear acceptance that the early years are crucial in forming later life outcomes. There is no doubt that GUS has contributed to this understanding and in raising awareness of the issues facing young children and their families in Scotland.
- How then, has the Growing Up in Scotland study contributed to this understanding?
- It is always difficult to demonstrate the singular contribution of any study to policy, because the research is only one of the many aspects that influence policy making. Nevertheless, I wish to give some examples here to show how the GUS work is used.

- ***Firstly, through stakeholder engagement***

- The number of people here today, practitioners, policy makers, teachers, midwives etc., from all over Scotland, and even further afield, shows the tremendous amount of interest in the study. And you are only a small section of the number of people engaging with GUS. There are over 800 names on the GUS email list and I understand the study now has over 100 followers on Twitter. On top of this the GUS team engage with and inform stakeholders by going to conferences to tell people about the study, giving presentations and sending topic briefings.
- Similarly, colleagues across the Government are aware of the study and we encourage their use of the significant amount of data that we now have.
- Findings of GUS were also considered by Professor Susan Deacon in the evidence gathering for her *Joining the Dots* report on a better start for Scotland's children.

- ***Secondly, there is the Early Years Framework***

- Early findings from GUS were used as evidence for the development of the Early Years Framework. The Early Years Framework recognises that the most important influences on the lives of children are their parents. It emphasises the importance of building parents' confidence and capacity to be the most positive influence they can be for their children, with the help and support of good quality public services. All themes that you will hear more about today.

- ***A third use of GUS is our Play talk read campaign***

- Together with other research, GUS has pointed to the importance of home learning activities like reading, singing and painting, which is something that the Play Talk Read campaign has been trying to influence since 2009. It gives parents practical tips on easy ways of communicating with their children.
- The evaluation of the campaign shows that 70% of targeted parents are aware of it and 84% of those realised the benefits for their child's learning and development, indicating an excellent level of behaviour change within the target audience.

- ***Fourthly, Building capacity***

- It is not only parents that shape children's early experiences. Thousands of people across Scotland work in services that have an impact on the lives of our children and young people. To support our children and young people, we need a workforce that's well trained and supported, and has the skills, knowledge and values to do the best job they can and to make sure children, young people and families get the help they need when they need it.
- To help ensure this A Consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland was launched on 15 March by the then Minister for Children and Early Years.

- The consultation is available on the Government's website. It closes on 15 June and I would very much encourage people here to contribute to it.

- As well as this consultation the Scottish Government is already funding Strathclyde, Stirling and Aberdeen Universities to provide courses which will offer more specialised early years teaching skills. I know the GUS team successfully ran some workshops with 3rd year students studying for a Bachelor in Education at the University of Edinburgh.
 - ***A fifth example of how GUS is used is the work done at a local level***

- The GUS findings on attendance at ante-natal classes have made people, for example in West Lothian, rethink the way the classes are run and who to target in trying to have more expectant parents attend. This shows how GUS findings can be used in designing services in such a way that they will get used by those most in need.
 - ***Your use***

- These were just some examples of how GUS findings are used. We are very keen to learn about how people here today have themselves used GUS. You all have a sheet in your pack through which you can let the research team know how you have used previous findings of GUS. It would be great if you could take the time to complete this and in doing so help the research team demonstrate the impact, and thus the value, of this study.

- ***Last, but by no means least, there is the use of the Year 4 findings***

- The findings presented last year have already found their way into a report on children's mental well being, a book on mental health issues, a syllabus on parent education and a review of poverty in Scotland in 2011.
- No doubt the findings from this year will find their way into the thinking of policy and service developers, both in central government and at a local level as we move forward.

Future – continued need for evidence

- On the subject of moving forward, although there is now a wide range of evidence on the early years this doesn't make the evidence less important. In the current financial climate there is a strong need for sound evidence to ensure that money is invested in intervention and practice that works - and that works for the people who are most in need. In short we need to ensure we have the evidence to best target our efforts and resources to ensure the best outcomes for the people of Scotland. GUS helps by identifying groups of parents that can be targeted for interventions.

- *monitoring impact of EYF*

- Also, with the new birth cohort, which started in January, we will be able to start comparing experiences of children born before and after the implementation of the Early Years Framework. The study will be able to pick up on whether changes made in policy and service provision have impacted on children's lives. This in turn will further inform policy development.

Close

- So looking back over the last 5 years it is clear to see that progress has been made. Whilst we have come a long way, we remain on the journey and more can be done. You are committed to helping children to get the start in life that they need and deserve. The Scottish Government is equally committed and will continue to work with local partners and the workforce to achieve this.
- Like you, I am eager to hear about the new findings and what they tell us about what we have done and what we might wish to consider doing in the future.
- In closing however, and before we get to the main business of the day, I wish to thank the GUS team for their excellent work to date, especially Lesley Kelly for the organisation of the conference today.
- Enjoy today's event. I hope you find it informative.