

Education Department Research Programme

Findings from the Scottish School Leavers Survey: 24 in 2004

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Introduction

The Scottish School Leavers Survey (SSLS) series aims to describe the experiences of young people at school, the decisions they make about staying on or leaving, and their transitions and experiences after leaving school. The Scottish Centre for Social Research (formerly NatCen Scotland) has run the SSLS since the early 1990s when the series succeeded the Scottish Young Persons Survey (SYPS). This summary provides findings from the final survey sweep of the cohort recruited in 1997 (Cohort 2), based on young people aged 24 in 2004.

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Main Findings

- The majority of respondents (70%) were working full-time, while 11% of respondents were in full-time education. One in twenty (5%) classified their main activity as being 'out of work', 4 percentage points less than when the cohort was last surveyed in 1999.
- The vast majority (92%) of those in a job (full-time or part-time) or on a GTP in May 2004 were receiving some kind of on-the-job or off-the-job training.
- On average, young people whose main activity was work, worked a 38.53 hour week. Females were more likely than males to work 38 hours or less (63% compared with 41%).
- Considering monthly income, the average take home pay for those in employment was £933. Men earned a higher wage than women - the mean income figures for men was £1017, and for women, £912.
- It is predicted that around two out of five (38%) of the cohort will eventually obtain some form of university degree, with females (41%) more likely than males (36%).
- The likelihood of being in full-time education at the age of 23-24 was linked to parental social class, with respondents not from Professional/Intermediate socio-economic groups less likely to have continued to further or higher education.
- Around half of respondents (47%) said they had a student loan and/or other debts from studying at college or university. The average total amount of combined student debt was £7501.
- By the age of 23/24 three-quarters of young people had obtained a qualification equivalent to SVQ Level 3 or above. Those that left school at the end of S4 or Christmas leavers were least likely to obtain qualifications equivalent to SVQ Level 3 or above.
- There is also an association with area deprivation and educational attainment at this level, since over two in five young people (42%) that lived in the 15% most deprived areas while in S4 at school, have not obtained qualifications equivalent to SVQ Level 3 or above.
- At the time of the survey 52% of respondents said they were living with their parent(s). Young men and those in full-time or part-time work were more likely to live with their parents, while women were more likely than men to live with a partner.

The Scottish School Leavers Survey Series

The current format of the SSLS consists of recruiting a sample of young people in a year-group cohort at S4, on a three yearly cycle, to be surveyed four times - at ages 16-17, 18-19 21-22, and 23-24.

This cohort was recruited in the spring of 1997 as sample of young people who had completed S4 the previous year, and has also been surveyed 1999. Only those that respond are surveyed in subsequent sweeps. Due to revision in the design of the study, this cohort was not surveyed in 2001. The 2004 survey is the final survey sweep for this cohort.¹

Methods

The method of administration for the study is self-completion questionnaire, with follow up by telephone for non-respondents.

Addresses were checked, before fieldwork started, for correct postcode and, where telephone numbers could be matched, telephoned to make sure the respondent still lived at that address. If the respondent had moved, correct contact details were collected, where possible.

The questionnaire was mailed to 2,352 young people on the 12th May 2004. Those who had not responded within three weeks were sent a reminder postcard. A further two weeks later, non responders were sent a second copy of the questionnaire along with a reminder letter. Finally, attempts were made to contact non-respondents by telephone in order to encourage them to either return their questionnaire or to answer questions over the phone. Telephone follow up continued until August 2004.

This resulted in 1,007 complete and returned questionnaires: 836 received in the post and a further 171 completed over the telephone. Taking account of those for whom no valid contact information was available, this represents a 52% response rate. To correct for any bias caused by non-repose to the survey, the data were weighted; this is described in detail in the technical report.

Acknowledgements

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¹ The technical report and data is available from the ESRC data archive (<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>).

to help with the development of the questionnaires or to participate in the main survey itself.

Findings

Main Activity

The majority of respondents (70%) were 'working full-time with no Government Training Programme (GTP)'. Comparison of main activity status across the three age sweeps highlights, not surprisingly, an increase in full-time employment (4% in 1997, 27% in 1999 and 70% in 2004) and decrease in full-time education (82% in 1997, 45% in 1999 and 11% in 2004).

Table 1: Main activity across sweeps

All respondents	Cohort aged 17	Cohort aged 19	Cohort 24 in May 2004
Main Activity:	%	%	%
Full-time job	4	27	70
Job with GTP	4	10	1
No job but GTP	1	-	1
Part-time job	-	5	6
Out of work	2	9	5
Full-time higher education	4	38	10
Other full-time education	78*	7	1
Looking after family/home	-	3	5
Unknown	6	-	-
Other	2	2	3
<i>Bases (weighted)</i>	6334	2479	1003
<i>Bases (unweighted)</i>	4296	2484	1006

*This includes respondents who were still at school.

Employment

The industries respondents were most likely to be working in were: education/health/social services (18%); wholesale, retail or repair sector (17%) and; banking/financial/renting/business activities (16%). The most common industry for men working full-time was wholesale/retail/repair (17%), whereas Education/health/social services (30%) were the most common industries for women.

The vast majority (92%) of those in a job (full-time or part-time) or on a GTP in May 2004 were receiving some kind of on-the-job or off-the-job training.

Whilst 6% of respondents said their main activity was part-time work, a further 12% had a part-time job *in addition* to

their main activity, making a total of 18% of respondents with a part-time job. One fifth (21%) of females were working part-time in comparison with 15% of males - this was due to the larger proportion of women who had a part-time job in addition to another main activity (14% of women compared with 11% of men).

Women were also more likely than men to have a temporary contract (56% compared with 44%).

The mean average for young people whose main activity was work (full-time and part-time) or GTPs was a 38.53 hour week. Females were more likely than men to work 38 hours or less (63% compared with 41%).

Considering monthly income, the mean average take home pay for those in employment was £933. Men earned a higher wage than women - the mean income figures for men was £1017, and for women, £912. It should, however, be remembered that males were significantly more likely than females to work an average of over 40 hours per week (29% in comparison to 11%) and this may contribute to the disparity in income.

In order to assess how respondents felt about their job, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about their attitudes towards their job or training.

Despite the overall positive attitude towards their current job or programme, six out of ten (59%) reported that they were mainly doing their job for the money. Approximately two thirds (68%) reported that they would leave their current job or programme if they could get a better job.

Table 2 : Attitudes towards job by gender

Respondents in Employment as main activity	Total
	%
I would leave this job (or programme) if I could get a better job	68
I will probably leave this job (or programme) when I have got my qualification	14
This is the kind of work I want to do in the future	58
This is good experience and should help me to move on to something better	80
This is the <u>only</u> job I have had since leaving school	23
This job is teaching me useful skills	84
The <u>main</u> reason I do this is for the money	59
<i>Bases (weighted)</i>	765
<i>Bases (unweighted)</i>	783

Full-time education

In spring of 2004, 21% of respondents were in full-time or part-time education. Around three fifths (59%) were studying at a university, and two fifths (41%) at further education colleges. One quarter (25%) were studying for a higher degree (e.g. Post-Grad, Phd) - 36% were men and 18% were women.

The likelihood of being in full-time education at the age of 23-24 was linked to parental social class, with respondents not from Professional/Intermediate socio-economic groups less likely to have continued to further or higher education.

Around half of respondents (47%) said they had a student loan and/or other debts from studying at college or university. The mean average total amount of combined student debt from a student loan or other studying debt was £7501. The mean size of student loans was £6564, whilst 26% of had total debt amounting to over £10,000. These figures are higher than those reported for Cohort 3 Sweep 3, presumably because this Cohort consists of older participants aged approximately 2 years older than Cohort 3.

Table 3: Student debt

Respondents who had studying debt	Student loan	Other studying debt	Total student debt
Amount of debt:	%	%	%
£500 or less	2	12	2
Between £501 and £1000	5	18	5
Between £1001 and £2500	16	34	15
Between £2501 and £5000	24	21	22
Between £5001 and £7000	17	3	14
Between £7001 and £10,000	19	5	17
Between £10,001 and £15,000	15	3	16
More than £15,000	3	4	10
Mean	6564	3027	7501
<i>Base (weighted)</i>	417	183	440
<i>Base (unweighted)</i>	510	226	539

Qualifications of 23-24 year olds

By the age of 23/24 three-quarters of young people have obtained a qualification equivalent to SVQ Level 3 or above, having exceeded the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework equivalent of Level 6. Reflecting their higher levels of attainment in general, females were more likely to have had obtained at least a qualification equivalent to SVQ Level 3, 78% having done so compared to 72% of the males.

The vast majority of respondents (81%) had obtained some form of qualification beyond Standard Grade, although

around one in five (19%) had obtained no qualifications aside from those attained at Standard Grade.

Table 4: Highest qualification achieved at age 23/24 by gender

All Respondents	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
None	2	1	2
Standard Grades	18	16	17
SVQ Level 1-2	9	9	9
Highers	15	14	14
SVQ Level 3	10	4	7
SVQ Level 4-5, HNC, HND	15	19	17
Ordinary Degree	10	9	10
Honours/Higher Degree	22	29	26
<i>Bases (weighted)</i>	468	536	1004
<i>Bases (unweighted)</i>	393	613	1006

There were significant differences in the highest qualifications obtained according to the young person's parental social class.² In particular, compared to those from the Professional or Intermediate social class those from the Skilled and Semi and Unskilled social classes were over represented among the lower levels of qualification. For example, among the Professional or Intermediate social class only 10% held no higher qualification than SVQ Level 2, compared to 31% and 40% within the Skilled and Semi and Unskilled social classes respectively.

Analysis of this cohort suggests an association between initial attainment at Standard Grade and the age at which a young person leaves school and whether or not young people achieve an SVQ Level 3 qualification or equivalent by age 23/24. Area deprivation also appears to be associated with educational attainment at this level, with those that lived in the 15% most deprived areas while in S4 at school, least likely to have obtained qualifications equivalent to SVQ Level 3 or above.

Overall around one in ten young people had achieved qualifications through part-time study (9%), whilst 4% had obtained a qualification through Distance Learning. Part-time study was most common among those who had obtained work-based qualifications associated with Traineeships (25%) and Modern Apprenticeships (18%), although a quarter of those who had studied part-time had a higher level vocational qualification equivalent to SVQ Level 4-5.

In order to estimate the likely proportions who will eventually achieve a qualification at a higher education level, it is assumed that the proportion of young people who continue to study at this level will achieve their qualification. On this basis around two out of five (38%) of the cohort will eventually obtain some form of university degree. Again

there were significant differences between males and females, 36% and 41% respectively being likely to obtain a university degree qualification.

If we adopt a broader definition of higher education, to include those who have achieved or are expected to achieve a SVQ Level 4 qualification or above (including an HNC/HND) as well as those who are expected to achieve a university degree, we find that over half (54%) of the cohort are expected to achieve a qualification at this level. Although overall males are more likely to study and obtain vocational qualifications compared to females, females are more likely to obtain vocational qualifications equivalent to SVQ Level 4. This is reflected in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Higher education qualification expected equivalent to SVQ Level 4 or above, by gender

All Respondents	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
Qualification below HE	52	41	46
University Degree	36	41	38
Other HE qualification at SVQ Level 4 or above	13	18	16
<i>Bases (weighted)</i>	470	536	1006
<i>Bases (unweighted)</i>	394	613	1007

Considering table 6, the proportions from different class backgrounds that are likely to achieve a university degree, a clear majority (63%) of young people from the Professional and Intermediate social class are likely to obtain a university degree, while less than a third (30%) of the Skilled social class and only one in five among the Semi and Unskilled social class are likely to obtain a qualification at this level.

However, if the broader definition of higher education is used, the proportion of those from Skilled and Semi and Unskilled social classes attending higher education increases (by 18% points), relative to those from those from the Professional and Intermediate social class (12% points).

Table 6: Percentage with or expected to a achieve a higher education qualification equivalent to SVQ Level 4 or above, by social class

All Respondents	Professional & Intermediate	Skilled	Semi & Unskilled
	%	%	%
Qualification below HE	25	52	60
University Degree	63	30	20
Other HE qualification at SVQ Level 4 or above	12	18	20
<i>Bases (weighted)</i>	347	367	178
<i>Bases (unweighted)</i>	455	363	129

² Based on the highest ranked occupation of either the mother or father.

Much of the social class and gender differences between the levels of qualifications expected to be achieved by around age 23/24 is likely to be a reflection of earlier qualification success at school. A logistic regression was therefore conducted for each of the definitions of higher education qualification. Even after controlling for qualifications obtained at age 18/19, those from the Professional and Intermediate social class were significantly more likely to obtain a university degree than those from the other social class groupings. However, when we control for qualifications obtained at age 18/19 differences between males and females were not apparent, suggesting that gender differences in those expecting to obtain a university degree can be explained through earlier differences in qualification success.

Running the same model using the broader definition of “higher education qualification” – one equivalent to SVQ Level 4/HNC or above – reconfirmed the position of the Professional and Intermediate social class. However, in contrast to the findings for university degrees, after controlling for social class and prior levels of attainment females were significantly more likely than males to obtain a higher education qualification equivalent to SVQ Level 4/HNC or above.

The Disadvantaged

Patterns of labour market disadvantage can be identified through the SSLS in a number of ways. The best information relates to current unemployment, which is relatively low (5% of males and 1% of females), and to whether young people had been unemployed on at least one occasion since May 1999: almost three in ten males (29%) and just over one in five females (22%) had been. Females were more likely to be out of the labour market with 11% of females compared to 4% of males being neither in education, jobs or unemployed: many of these were looking after children or relatives.

Of those who were working, more than four in ten were in low skill jobs (40% of males and 45% of females).³ Since 1999, 13% of males and 7% of females had experienced a Government training programme. Nearly one in five respondents (19% of males and 18% of females) held a temporary contract in their current or last job which suggests their positions may be regarded as somewhat insecure.

Experience of unemployment on at least one occasion since 1999 tended to be more prevalent among those with various ‘disadvantages’. Unemployment was particularly prevalent among males with: lower attainment (no qualification beyond SQF level 2); experience of a Government training programme since 1999; or whose last or current job was

temporary or in a low skill occupation. For females unemployment was most prevalent among those who had come from the 15% most deprived areas, were single parents, had been on a training programme since 1999 and those whose current or last job was temporary or in a low skill occupation.

Domestic Circumstances

At the time of the survey 52% of respondents said they were living with their parent(s). Young men were more likely to live with their parents (60% of men in comparison with 44% of women), and less likely to live with a partner (13% of men in comparison with 22% of women). Respondents whose main activity was full-time or part-time work were most likely to be living with their parents (53% and 58% respectively).

Overall, 11% of the cohort (15% of females and 6% of males) reported that they had one or more children by the age of 23-24. The proportion who had a child had, perhaps unsurprisingly, increased since this cohort was last surveyed in 1999 when 5% had at least one child. Among those respondents with children 92% said their child/children lived with them.

As found in a previous cohort of 22-23 years olds (surveyed in 1999), respondents who stayed on until 6th year at school were the least likely to have a child (97% had no children), where as respondents who left school at the end of fourth year were the most likely to have had a child (25%).

Around one fifth (19%) of young people owned their accommodation and one third (34%) lived in rented accommodation, with 45% living in accommodation owned by their parents (or other people in the household).

The Future

Respondents were presented with several statements about the future and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of them. Young people were largely positive about their plans for the future. For example, around nine in ten (91%) said that having a career or profession was important to them. Eighty-three percent said they would like to have a full-time job for most of their adult life and a similar proportion (79%) felt that raising a family was important to them. Only a quarter of respondents said they would just wait and see where they would end up.

Respondents were also presented statements relating to feelings of control over life. Responses to these questions were broadly positive, more than nine in ten respondents agreed that what happened to them in the future mostly depended on themselves (94%), nearly three quarters (70%) disagreed with the statement ‘I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life’ and a similar proportion disagreed with the notion that they were sometimes pushed around in

³ Low skill jobs refer Personal and Protective Services, Sales, Plant and Machine Operatives and Other occupations.

life (72%). Despite views being largely positive, there was a minority, around one in ten, that felt they had little control over things that happen to them (11%). A similar proportion (12%) felt there was no way they could solve the problems they had.

Those in employment and education felt they had more control over their lives than those out of work or doing something else ('other' category). For example, one in ten of

those in employment said there was no way they could solve some of the problems they had, compared with nearly three in ten (29%) of those out of work. Similarly, while only 14% of those in employment or on a GTP said they often felt helpless in dealing with the problems of life, for those out of work or doing something else the proportions were significantly higher (48% and 32% respectively).

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