
ESRC Research Project on *Education and Youth Transitions in England, Wales and Scotland, 1984-2002*

Working Paper 5

THE YOUTH COHORT SURVEY DATA

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The datasets on which the Education and Youth Transitions (EYT) project is based come from nationally-representative cohort surveys:

- The England and Wales Youth Cohort Study (YCS), funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
- The Scottish Young Peoples Survey (SYPS, until 1993) and subsequently Scottish School Leavers Survey (SSLS), funded mainly by the Scottish Office/Scottish Executive.

The two cohort surveys have similar purpose and content. Each cohort is defined at the end of compulsory schooling,¹ approximately aged 16. The surveys are carried out using postal questionnaires, with the first sweep of each survey typically in the spring of the year following the end of compulsory schooling, with subsequent sweeps one or two years later. The cohorts used for the analysis are summarised in Table 1. For this project, each cohort will be named by the last year in which the cohort members were in Y11 or S4. The first four Scottish cohorts coincided with England and Wales cohorts 1, 3, 4 and 5, but the timing of subsequent cohorts has not coincided.

Table 1: Youth Cohort Datasets (and year of survey/sweeps)

Cohort: ended Y11 or S4 in	Scotland	England & Wales
1984	SYPS85 (1985, 1986, 1987a)	YCS1 (1985, 86, 87)
1985		YCS2 (1986, 87, 88)
1986		YCS3 (1987, 88, 89 + 94)
1987		
1988	SYPS89 (1989,1991a)	YCS4 (1989, 90, 91)
1989		
1990 HIP	SYPS91 (1991, 1993a)	YCS5 (1991, 92, 93)
1991		YCS6 (1992, 93, 94s,94a)
1992	SSLS Reconstructed Cohort (1993-5, 1999)	
1993		YCS7 (1994,,96)
1994		
1995		YCS8 (1996,,98, 2000a)
1996		
1997		YCS9 (1998,99,2000s, 2000a +02)
1998	SSLS99 (1999, 2001)	
1999		YCS10 (2000s, 2000a, 2002)

¹ Year 11 (Y11) in England and Wales, which is equivalent to Secondary 4 (S4) in Scotland.

THE ENGLAND AND WALES YOUTH COHORT STUDY (YCS)

The Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales (YCS) is a major programme of longitudinal research designed to monitor the behaviour and decisions of representative samples of young people aged sixteen upwards as they make the transition from compulsory education to further or higher education, or to the labour market. It tries to identify and explain the factors which influence post-16 transitions, for example, educational attainment, training opportunities, experiences at school. To date the YCS covers ten cohorts and over twenty surveys. The first survey was carried out in 1985 and the most recent in 2002. The questionnaires have been designed, over the years, to be broadly comparable, but external changes and shifts in policy interest, have brought about changes - some minor, some fundamental. For YCS cohorts 1 to 6 cohort members were contacted by post three times, at yearly intervals, when they were 16-17, 17-18 and 18-19. For YCS cohorts 7 and 8 the sweeps were carried out at bi-annual intervals instead of annual. Thus YCS cohort 7 Sweep 2 took place when the respondents were aged 18-19 whereas previous second sweeps have taken place at age 17-18. YCS cohort 9 surveys were carried out annually for Sweeps 1 and 2 in 1998 and 1999 respectively, and Sweeps 3 and 4 were both conducted in the same year, 2000. YCS cohort 10 Sweeps 1 and 2 were also both conducted in 2000, and Sweep 3 in 2002.

Datasets for this research were obtained from the Data Archive.

YCS Samples

Design of the YCS sample has changed over time. Multi-stage stratified random sampling was used for YCS cohorts 1 - 5, in order to include larger within-school samples, but fewer schools. (Independent schools were omitted from YCS cohort 1 but included thereafter). A stratified sample of schools was selected by the Department of Education and Science (DES, now DfES). These schools were approached for details of pupils with selected birthdates.

Since YCS cohort 6 the YCS sample has been a single-stage simple random sample. In Spring of the sampling year all schools in England and Wales (excluding special schools), both state maintained and private sector, are sent a return form for sampling. This gives a number of dates, e.g. the 5th, 15th and 25th, and all pupils on the Year 11 roll whose birthdates coincide are sampled. Usually three dates are specified giving a simple random sample just under 10%. There are some difficulties with school-level non-response at the sampling stage and to compensate for this there is a further stage of sampling before Sweep 1. Here the initial sample is sub-sampled to give a Sweep 1 final sample that is representative of a population matrix of pupil numbers by school type by sex by region.

Table 2 summarises the survey response rates and achieved sample size of the England and Wales cohort surveys at sweep 1. Response rates have been between 65% and 77%. A system of weighting is used to compensate for non-response bias.

Table 2: Response rate and un-weighted sample size at Sweep 1

Cohort	Response rate (%)	England	Wales
YCS 1: 1983-4	69	7495	569
YCS 2: 1984-5	74	na	na
YCS 3: 1985-6	77	15227	981
YCS 4: 1987-8	71	13209	907
YCS 5: 1989-90	72	13284	1227
YCS 6: 1990-1	69	21380	3542
YCS 7: 1992-3	66	17093	928
YCS 8: 1995-6	65	14946	953
YCS 9: 1996-7	65	13762	900
YCS 10: 1998-9	65	12906	792

The Scottish Young People Survey and Scottish School Leavers' Survey

The SYPS/SSLs is a general purpose survey of young people in Scotland, conducted by postal questionnaires. The design has undergone a number of changes since its beginning in 1976. Initially the target population for the surveys were school leavers (from all secondary schools except special schools) who left school variously from S4, S5 and S6 stages. The school leaver surveys were carried out every two years from 1976 to 1990, and took place in the spring approximately nine months after the young people left school.

From 1984 to 1990 the sample was extended to include young people who stayed-on at school after S4, thus creating a series of S4 year-stage cohorts comprising 10% of the year stage. These cohort samples were followed up by a second survey sweep in the autumn two and a half years after the first survey.

In 1992 the survey was redesigned as three annual surveys of school leavers, who left school from any stage in 1992, 1993 and 1994. It was intended that that the cohort of young people who were in the S4 year stage in session 1991-1992 would subsequently be “reconstructed” by selecting appropriate sub-samples from the leavers’ surveys: leavers from S4 in 1992, leavers from S5 in 1993 and leavers from S6 in 1994. A follow-up survey of the S4 and S5 sub-samples was carried out in spring 1995. (A further follow-up survey was carried out in 1999 at age 23). However, the design of the reconstructed cohort creates many problems, in particular the S5 winter leavers were not surveyed until 15 months after they had left school, which means that data for their first destinations is not available.

In 1996 there was a further redesign of the SSLs to an S4 year-stage cohort, surveyed in the spring nine months after the completion of the S4 stage, and again in spring two years after the first sweep. This design was also used for the 1998 cohort, with the additional feature that the 1998 cohort survey went to a 20% sample of the year stage population.

Scottish cohort samples

The sample is drawn as a single-stage pseudo-random (birth date) sample that includes S4 students from all secondary schools in Scotland except special schools. For cohorts 1-6 the sample is 10% of the target population, and for cohort 7 it is 20%. The names, addresses and other details of the sample were provided by the secondary schools, who filled in forms sent

to them by the Scottish Education Department (now Scottish Executive Education Department).

Response rates and achieved sample size at sweep 1 are summarised in Table 3. A weighting system is used to compensate for non-response bias. The weights are calculated using known characteristics of the target population, including gender and attainment in national qualifications at the end of S4.

Table 3: Response rate and un-weighted sample size at Sweep 1

Cohort	Response rate (%)	Sweep 1 sample
Scottish cohort 1: 1983-4	81	6501
Scottish cohort 2: 1985-6	81	6360
Scottish cohort 3: 1987-8	77	5579
Scottish cohort 4: 1989-90	69	4450
Scottish cohort 5: 1990-1	na	3433
Scottish cohort 6: 1995-6	68	4302
Scottish cohort 7: 1996-7	63	7567

Differences in school type

Both cohort surveys included young people from independent schools as well as state-funded secondary schools. (The exception is the first YCS cohort which did not include independent schools). Table 4 summarises the percentage of each cohort sample by type of school, using information extracted from the sampling frame of each survey.

Table 4: Differences in national samples by school type (% of unweighted samples)

England	1984	1986	1988	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
6th form college	6.2	0.1		0.1				
Comprehensive to 16	23.5	29.9	31.0	28.3	32.9	34.5	33.0	33.1
Comprehensive to 18	62.0	55.6	55.5	54.0	50.6	45.5	51.7	48.6
Grammar	3.3	2.9	2.6	3.0	4.0	5.0	4.5	5.5
Secondary Modern	4.5	4.6	3.2	3.2	4.3	3.9	3.3	2.8
Other state funded	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.5	0.2	0.2		0.6
Independent		6.6	6.9	10.9	8.0	11.0	7.5	9.4
Wales	1984	1986	1988	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
6th form college	6.3							
Comprehensive to 16		13.0	12.3	18.5	21.3	20.9	19.9	21.0
Comprehensive to 18	93.7	83.6	87.0	78.5	76.4	76.7	78.2	76.8
Grammar		1.1						
Secondary Modern		1.5						
Other state funded								
Independent		0.7	0.7	3.0	2.3	2.4	1.9	2.2
Scotland	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1996	1998	
6th form college								
Comprehensive to 16	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.3	
Comprehensive to 18	96.0	95.2	94.4	93.9	93.7	94.1	93.8	
Grammar								
Secondary Modern								
Other state funded	2.4	0.1		0.1	0.1			
Independent	1.4	4.6	5.2	5.8	6.1	5.6	5.8	

In Scotland, the overwhelming majority of respondents attended comprehensive schools serving pupils to age 18, and just a small minority in the Highlands and Islands had to change schools after age 16. In England and Wales the majority of respondents attended comprehensive schools up to the age of 18, but a substantial minority were attending comprehensive schools that did not have a 6th form.

In England there were different types of state-funded school, including some selective schools (Grammar and Secondary Modern). In England a substantial minority of pupils attended independent schools, as did a smaller minority in Scotland.

In England and Wales, pupils typically transfer to secondary school at age 11, or Year 7, whereas in Scotland the transfer takes place at age 12 (from Primary 7 to secondary 1 stages). Table 5 summarise the typical year of entry to secondary school for each cohort.

Table 5: Year started secondary school

E&W		Scotland	
Cohort	Started Y7 in	Cohort	Started S1 in
1984	1979	1984	1980
1986	1981	1986	1982
1988	1983	1988	1984
1990	1985	1990	1986
1993	1988	1992	1988
1995	1990		
1997	1992	1996	1992
1999	1994	1998	1994