

Scottish Graduate School of Social Science

Report on the SGSSS and Scottish Government Autumn Policy Event Series 2025

1. Executive Summary

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) worked with the Scottish Government to lead a policy event series in Autumn 2025 designed to further increase links and collaboration between social science PhD researchers, supervisors and policy makers.

The series comprised three events that considered: 1. research drawing on the UK Household Longitudinal Study, also known as Understanding Society (the UK's gold standard longitudinal household dataset); 2. Research on the theme of Population Ageing and Social Care; and 3. Research on the theme of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

This work is guided by our External Partners Group and reflects a pledge in the SGSSS recommissioning bid to increase the wider impact and dissemination of Social Science PhD research. The series also reflects our ambitions around [Research in Practice](#) and [Challenge-led pathways](#) that support students to attain the skills and experience to work and communicate research across disciplines and sectors. The policy series follows a [successful pilot event in 2023](#) that considered evidence and policy on violence against women and girls.

The events offered government colleagues an insight into emerging work from social science PhD students from across Scotland. Enduring connections were successfully formed between policy makers, PhD students, Academics and other organisations with an interest in the topic area.

There was strong interest in the event across the SGSSS PhD network with over 100 applications received. 31 students were selected by the Scottish Government and SGSSS to present their work. Over 100 people attended across the three events.

The series was very positively received by attendees and reported outcomes included a student presenting their research to over 100 people at the Scottish Government social care policy directorate weekly policy meeting, a student presenting their work to the UK Household Longitudinal Survey User Group, and two students presenting their research to the Allied Health Professional Care Home Oversight Group. These follow-up actions, collaborations, and increased awareness of SGSSS student's research, highlighting the value of such events in bringing together policy and social science research from across Scotland.

2. Event details

There were three events in the series each focused on a different policy relevant topic raised by Scottish Government colleagues:

- 1. Understanding Society Data** (for those using the 'Understanding Society' data set in their research)
Thursday 25th September 2025 10am- 2pm
- 2. Population Ageing and Social Care**
Wednesday 1st October 2025 10am- 2pm

3. Exploring Mental Health and Wellbeing

Thursday 13th November 2025 10am – 2pm

Each event followed broadly the same format. PhD students shared the implications of their emerging work in either a 10–15-minute presentation or a 5-minute lightning talk with an audience of academics and policy-makers. As well as being an excellent forum to facilitate knowledge exchange, the events also included round table discussion, with notes taken, to highlight and record areas of interest where further evidence and action may be helpful. The events each finished with a networking lunch to allow participants to continue the discussions and cement connections.

Please see Appendix One (page 9) for details of the full programme for each of the three events.

2.1. Student participation and attendance

SGSSS received over 100 applications from students to present their emerging work over the three events. These abstracts were reviewed by SGSSS and Scottish Government colleagues and 31 students were chosen for their policy-relevant work that aligned with Scottish Government priorities on one of the three topics. The three events took place in person and/or hybrid, with over 100 people attending across the three events. Attendees were a mix of policy makers, academics and PhD students as well as representatives of organisations with an interest in the themes considered.

3. Discussion outcomes

Each event included time for discussion in a round table format with a mix of academics, students and public sector partners to enrich the discussion. Participants were given broad discussion topics at each event to encourage a discussion on the work they had heard about and an opportunity to discuss further policy relevant gaps or research questions.

Notes were taken at each and topics discussed are reported by event as follows:

3.1. Understanding Society Event

The Understanding Society Data set discussion identified potential future research questions that could be addressed using the data set. Attendees discussed using the data to further research child poverty including using the data to further research the six Scottish Government priority family types or to characterise the experiences of different groups to help target policy development, and examining longer-term outcomes such as education, health, and work.

Attendees discussed using the data set to research a place-based focus on neighbourhood or local authority level including investigating how policy implementation varies in different areas and the impact of timing on these policies. There was also discussion around using the data to investigate the experiences of minority groups, using linked education data to provide further insights into the educational outcomes of different populations and using the data to examine pre- and post-policy intervention differences, providing valuable information on the effectiveness of policy interventions.

Some potential research questions that were suggested during the discussion, could be answered using the Understanding Society Data set include:

- What are the long-term outcomes for children growing up in poverty, and how do these outcomes vary by family type and household size?

- How do policies aimed at reducing child poverty impact different population groups, and what are the differences in policy implementation between Scotland and the rest of the UK?
- What are the experiences of minority groups in terms of education, health, and work outcomes, and how can policy be targeted to support these groups?

Data gaps and limitations were discussed, including attrition, which is a significant issue in the Understanding Society Data set. To address these gaps, researchers could look to other linked data sets, such as the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study, or explore the potential of linking administrative data sets or social media sources.

Finally, participants discussed opportunities for future research where the Understanding Society data set could be used to provide a Scottish-specific focus on UK-level research. Suggestions included examining child poverty differences between household sizes, and investigating differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK in relation to attitudes and wellbeing. The data set might also be used to explore migration patterns, including which industries are reliant on migrants and how these patterns differ between Scotland and the rest of the UK. The boost samples of immigrant and ethnic minorities are useful for this ambition.

3.2. Population Ageing and Social Care

Key themes that emerged were:

The importance of understanding ageing as a journey and the potential for gaps in support at different transition points. Discussions considered the issue that many older adults prefer to remain at home, but this sits alongside the need to ensure high quality care home environments. A recurring issue was that decisions are often made during crises, with limited anticipatory planning or family involvement.

The impact of changing demographics (including smaller families) was noted in reshaping who provides care and how responsibilities are shared. Intergenerational relationships were seen as increasingly important, both for social connection and community resilience.

The research and discussion argued that the built environment and local infrastructure play a significant role in ageing well. Examples of aspects neighbourhoods conducive to health ageing included good transport links, accessible public spaces, and the development of 20 minute neighbourhoods. Concerns were raised that rapid neighbourhood change including from regeneration or gentrification can unintentionally leave older adults feeling excluded.

Inequalities, including class, income, geography, and ethnicity, affect experiences of ageing, access to services, and perceptions of fairness in care funding. There are also challenges in valuing the social care workforce, despite the skills involved.

Data gaps persist, especially between health and social care systems, and there is demand for better access to shared datasets and improved clarity on ethics processes. Participants also emphasised improving knowledge exchange between researchers and policymakers, including clearer routes for communication, earlier engagement, and training on producing policy relevant outputs.

Finally, discussions highlighted the need to reduce the stigma around ageing and to encourage earlier conversations and planning within families and communities.

3.3. Exploring Mental Health and Wellbeing

Discussions at the round tables included:

Support Networks and Partnerships there was discussion around the need for collaborative approaches to mental health care. Particularly the importance of support networks for children and young people's mental health, including the role of significant adults, peers, and parent-professional partnerships.

There was discussion about the mental health challenges faced by vulnerable groups, such as refugee and asylum-seeking women, older male prisoners, and individuals experiencing homelessness and substance use. Attendees discussed the need for tailored support services and interventions that address the unique needs of these populations.

Groups also discussed the importance of co-production and participation in mental health research and service development, including the involvement of individuals with lived experience and the need for culturally sensitive and accessible mental health services, including services that address the unique needs of marginalized communities, such as Muslim patients and refugee populations. Discussion of the student's research highlighted the value of collaborative approaches to developing effective interventions.

There was discussion around the mental health workforce and service development including the importance of compassion-based interventions, person-centred care, and the challenges faced by mental health professionals including stigma.

Finally, some attendees discussed the transitions and life course changes that impact mental health, including the transition from childhood to adulthood, discussing how some of the research they had heard about highlighted the need for services that support individuals across the life course.

4. Outcomes and impacts

On the day and in the event evaluation attendees across students, academics and policy makers reported several plans for follow-up actions.

Attendees have expressed interest in cooperating with each other, sharing knowledge, and exploring opportunities for joint research or projects. Many attendees made connections and planned follow-up meetings or discussions with contacts made during the event, including policy makers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Student attendees shared plans to explore specific policy links that could offer a realistic impact pathway for their research, potentially leading to collaborations and influence on policy decisions.

Policy colleagues aimed to increase awareness of SGSSS and social science student's research to policy contacts within the Scottish Government, potentially leading to more collaborations and impact. Some Scottish Government colleagues reported inviting speakers to present to specific groups, such as the Allied Health Professionals care home oversight group or the long covid oversight group.

Attendees were provided with email lists for all of those who attended their specific event and some planned to use these email lists or other communication channels to stay in touch with new contacts and facilitate future collaborations.

4.1. Student follow up

The SGSSS Policy Event Series 2025 had a significant impact on the students who presented their research. SGSSS followed up with the students six months after the event to find out about outcomes from the event:

Edward Pomeroy: Following the event, Edward has been working towards publishing his research and has also completed an SGSSS internship with the Data and Analysis Unit of the Mental Health directorate in the Scottish Government. Edward was also invited to deliver a presentation at a Scottish Government social care analytical team meeting.

Taira Jabeen: The event motivated Taira to complete analysis and start writing up the findings. Taira hopes to soon share findings on improving NHS person-centred mental healthcare for Muslim patients with relevant stakeholders.

Kirsten Clarke: Presenting at the event helped Kirsten to think about how to communicate research beyond an academic audience. Kirsten found the discussions and feedback particularly helpful in refining framing the policy relevance of PhD work.

Hayley Sneed: The event contributed to Hayley's experience in presenting research within policy-facing spaces. Hayley has since presented the research in various settings and has continued to develop further expertise in translating participatory research findings into accessible, policy-relevant narratives.

Diane Delaney: The event provided Diane with a valuable opportunity to engage directly with colleagues from the Scottish Government and SGSSS, presenting at the event. Diane has since completed the PhD and is exploring pathways to translate the findings into policy and practice.

Robyn Lock: The event helped Robyn to refine how to communicate research beyond academic audiences. Robyn's research has continued to develop both academically and in practice, and Robyn has been able to contribute to wider discussions linked to the Social Policy Association and emerging sustainable welfare work.

Louise Rowlings: The event helped Louise to make useful connections and develop the research presented. Louise has since presented to the UK Household Longitudinal Survey User Group and will continue to showcase this work to a mixed audience from academia, third-party organizations, and the Scottish Government policy team.

4.2. Scottish Government follow up

The Scottish Government colleagues who attended the event found it to be a valuable opportunity to learn about and engage with emerging research on various policy areas. They appreciated the high quality of the presentations and the discussions that followed.

Dr Alix Rosenberg reported that the event helped to broaden academic networks and raise awareness of ongoing research, leading to some useful follow-ups with students. Alix reported that following the event Lucy Halamova presented at the social care policy directorate weekly policy meeting (this meeting includes all the social care policy teams and over 100 people attend), providing an overview of her research and making contact with policy teams where there were specific links to the work.

Edward Pomeroy presented to the Social Care Analytical Unit, sharing the findings from his research as well his expertise on the use of Understanding Society as a data source. Additionally, Lucy

Halamova and Clare Halpenny were invited to present to a future meeting of the Allied Health Professional Care Home Oversight Group.

5. Feedback from attendees

SGSSS received the following feedback from Scottish Government

5.1. Understanding society

Attendees from the Scottish Government really enjoyed the event and were impressed by the range of work presented and the expertise of the researchers who contributed. Some Scottish Government officials had been less aware of the breadth of data available in Understanding Society, and so the event helped inspire them to consider how research in their immediate policy area could link with data and findings more broadly. Attendees are also actively considering whether future internship opportunities within Scottish Government could draw on the existing skills of PhD students in using this data resource.

5.2. Population Ageing and social care

Scottish Government shared that they found the event a valuable opportunity to highlight the importance of social care research within the context of population ageing, and the importance of academic and policy knowledge exchange. The breadth of presentation topics was strength, illustrating the range of research taking place in this area. The event helped to broaden our academic networks and to raise of awareness of ongoing research and this has already led to some useful follow ups with students.

Scottish Government colleagues reported that they found it was useful to hear from students at different stages of their research using varied methodologies. In addition to presenting findings, students' willingness to pose questions for a policy audience and to offer clear takeaway points was useful and welcomed. The discussions at the end provided an opportunity to reflect not only on the implications of the presentations, but also practical reflections on how to support knowledge exchange which have informed my ongoing work on academic engagement.

5.3. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Scottish Government colleagues reported the event was an excellent opportunity to learn about and engage with emerging research on mental health in Scotland. Particularly as the mental health research landscape is incredibly broad. Colleagues shared that it is a real challenge to stay on top of new work, not least because of the number and variety of mental health policy areas within Scottish Government and the event helped them access new research more easily.

A Scottish Government colleague said "It was also a great chance for myself and other colleagues to hear about areas of mental health research some people were less familiar with. The presentations on access to community-based services for refugee and asylum-seeking women, mental health needs of older people in prison, urban regeneration and wellbeing, and the links between climate change and mental health were particularly insightful. The feedback I heard was that the overall quality of all of the presentations was very high."

Scottish Government also reported that the discussion time was especially valuable for students. It gave them a chance to talk about how we approach research and analysis in government, including the differences between government and academia; for example, how the aims, outputs, timescales

are more policy-focused. It was also useful to discuss career pathways, including routes into government that aren't traditional research roles, such as graduate schemes or policy posts.

5.4. Attendee feedback across the three events

Attendees were asked to complete an evaluation survey after the event and feedback from across the three events is summarized below.

Attendees were positive about the variety of topics and breadth of presentations covered at the events. They also found the 5-minute lightning presentations were effective in keeping the audience engaged, and that overall the presentations had a good balance of information and audience engagement. The projects and research presented were of a high standard, and provided a good opportunity for presenters to build confidence. The topics were each considered useful and the time for discussion afterwards was valuable.

The events were considered to be of great value to both students and policy makers, providing opportunities for feedback, fresh perspectives, and encouragement that research is addressing relevant policy areas. Attendees reported the value of sharing information and filling gaps in research between different projects and teams, both within academia and government.

Policy colleagues highlighted the importance of sharing research findings as soon as possible, even if the research is not yet complete, to align with the fast-paced policy landscape. This highlighted the value of engaging PhD students in knowledge exchange events early on in their research, rather than just at the end of their studies, to build connections and share research findings. They also valued an opportunity to see the research being conducted in universities and how it is relevant to the policy aims of the government, highlighting the potential for collaboration and impact.

Suggestions for improvements for future events included adding more talks from policy makers about their work and studies in development to reciprocate the knowledge exchange with academic colleagues

Attendees appreciated the friendly and welcoming atmosphere including the lunch and networking opportunities and some suggested more of this could be encouraged making the venue available for an hour prior to the event for informal conversations and networking.

The discussions and time for feedback were appreciated by student participants and attendees and some suggested allowing more time for breakout presentation sessions to facilitate discussion and questions or providing a brief summary of presentations in advance and allowing attendees to submit questions before the event to get even more out of these discussion times.

Overall, the feedback emphasizes the importance of these events in facilitating knowledge exchange, collaboration, and mutual learning between academia and policy makers, by bringing together PhD students and policy professionals. Many attendees expressed interest in attending future events and appreciated the opportunity to connect with policy makers and other PhD students.

Some suggestions for topics or focus of future events included an event focused on methods, including emerging research methods and their application in policy making. Suggestions included participatory methods, quantitative methods, creative methods and research with children and young people, including ethics.

Attendees also put forward specific topic focuses to consider including mission-oriented procurement in social care, including benefits and challenges; technology in social care; food and nutrition; marginalised communities.

Further contacts

The Scottish Government have published '[Social Care Analytical Unit: Areas Of Research Interest 2026-2029](#)'. This publication outlines priority adult social care research themes and questions. The research themes and questions focus on areas where further research would add the most value to the long-term understanding of social care to inform policy development.

The publication aims to guide research funding and prioritisation, strengthen collaboration with the academic and external research community, and provide insights that can guide the policy making agenda. If you are researching a related theme relevant to the topics mentioned in this publication and would like to discuss this with someone in Scottish Government, please contact Social Care Analytical Unit, Scottish Government: ariasc@gov.scot

If you are interested in connecting with PhD researchers on any of these, or another topic or collaborating to organise an event, please contact team@sgsss.ac.uk to discuss this further.

Accessibility

To request a copy of this report in a different format, please email team@sgsss.ac.uk

Appendix One - Event Programmes

SGSSS and Scottish Government Knowledge Exchange and Policy Event Series

Understanding Society

Thursday 25th September 2025

Violet Laidlaw Room, Chrystal Macmillan Building, University of Edinburgh

and online via Zoom

Programme

Time	Activity
9.45am – 10.00 am	Arrival and refreshments
10.00 am – 10.15 am	Introduction Dr Katy Keenan, SGSSS and Dr Breda Cullen, the Scottish Government
10.15 am – 11.00am	Student presentations one Theme: Children, Young People and Mental Health. Samira Hasanzade, University of Glasgow - Exploring Artistic Methods for Peace Education Among Conflict-Affected Children. Mhairi Webster, Glasgow Caledonian University - Investigating the Relationship Between Social Policy, Financial Difficulty and Mental Health of Young Adults in the UK During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Martina Lippi, University of Glasgow - Negotiating inclusive early careers and the virtual workplace: Diminishing or increasing the disability divide?
11.00 am – 11.15 am	Coffee break
11.15 am – 12.00 noon	Student presentations two Theme: Work and Society Kirsten Clark, The James Hutton Institute - The impact of remote work on mobilities and rural communities. Louise Rowlings, University of Edinburgh - Gender disparities in mid-life economic participation and financial well-being. Kate O'Hara, University of Stirling - Applications of multilevel modelling - evaluating the assumption of no correlation of explanatory variables with random effects
12.00 noon – 12.45pm	Round table discussion (Online session close)
12.45pm – 2.00pm	Lunch and networking

SGSSS and Scottish Government Knowledge Exchange and Policy Event Series

Population Ageing and Social Care

Wednesday 1st October 2025

Upper Hall, The Pleasance, University of Edinburgh

Programme

Time	Activity
9.45am – 10.00 am	Arrival and refreshments
10.00 am – 10.15 am	Introduction Prof Alan Marshall, SGSSS and Dr Alix Rosenberg, The Scottish Government
10.15 am – 11.15am	<u>Student presentations:</u> Lucy Halamova, University of Aberdeen - Developing a conversation guide to support decision-making about care homes in older people. Clare Halpenny, University of Edinburgh - “What matters to me?” A narrative exploration of care home residents’ experiences regarding decision-making and transition to a care home. Laura Calder, University of the West of Scotland - Transforming the Transition to Retirement. Lauryn Macniven, Heriot-Watt University - 'Living well locally' in later life: Exploring the potential for 20-minute neighbourhoods to support active ageing-in-place, in areas of deprivation.
11.15 am – 11.30 am	Coffee break
11.30 am – 12.15 pm	<u>Student presentations:</u> Oluwatomisin Patience Dada, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh - Brexit and Social Care in Scotland: An Exploration of the Perceived Impact on Workforce Sustainability. Edward Pomeroy, University of St Andrews - Care in Times of Crises: An Intersectional Approach to Socio-Economic Inequalities

	<p>in Giving and Receiving Informal Care During the COVID-19 and Cost-of-Living Crises.</p> <p>Eilidh Anderson, University of Glasgow -The Long Haul: A Body Mapping Study Exploring the Liminal Spaces of Health and Social Carers Living and Working with Long Covid.</p>
12.15 pm – 1.00pm	Discussion, plenary and closing remarks
1.00pm – 2.00pm	Lunch and networking

SGSSS and Scottish Government Knowledge Exchange and Policy Event Series

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Thursday 13th November 2025

Upper Hall, The Pleasance, University of Edinburgh

Programme

Time	Activity
9.45 – 10.00 am	Arrival and refreshments
10.00 – 10.15 am	Introduction Prof Alan Marshall, SGSSS Dr Ian Macneill, the Scottish Government
10.15 – 11.15am	Student presentations (parallel sessions)
	Topic 1: Research about the mental health of children and young people
	Dalia Avello-Vega, University of Edinburgh - Significant adults and peers - mapping and understanding transitions in children's support networks over the life course.
	Haley Sneed, University of Glasgow - Investigating Young People's Perspectives on Wellbeing, Care, and Constraint in a Post-COVID-19 Youth Work Setting.
	Diane Delaney, University of Strathclyde - Valued Voices and Villages of Support: Parent and Professional Partnerships.
	Topic 2: Research about mental health equalities and the mental health of vulnerable groups
	Ainuska Sheripkanova, Queen Margaret University – Access of refugee and asylum-seeking women to community-based mental health and wellbeing services in Edinburgh and Glasgow.
	Bernadett Szilagyi, University of Abertay - The ageing prisoner crisis in Scotland: understanding the experiences and mental health needs of older male prisoners in the Scottish Prison Service and the currently available support services.
	Josh Dumbrell, University of Stirling - Co-producing a nature-based intervention for men experiencing homelessness and problem substance use.
	Topic 3: Research about the mental health workforce and mental health services
	Riya Bisht, University of Glasgow - Complex Mental Health at Work: A Critical Phenomenology of Disclosure.
	Gavin Cullen, Edinburgh Napier University - Future in mind: Systematic review of compassion-based interventions in higher education and feasibility study of Compassionate Mind Training with pre-registration Mental Health Student Nurses.

	<p>Taira Jabeen, Edinburgh Napier University - Patient, Nurse and Manager Perspectives on Person-Centred Mental healthcare for Muslim Patients: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.</p>
11.15– 11.30am	Coffee break
11.30 – 12.15pm	<p>Student lightning talks</p> <p>Yuze Shi, The University of Edinburgh – Breaking the Cycling, Building the Future: Intergenerational Pathways to Youth Mental Health and Substance Use: Evidence from Growing Up in Scotland.</p> <p>Madison Sacramone, University of Dundee - An Urban Acupuncture Approach to Catalysing Thriving and Inclusive Places for Lasting Urban Regeneration: Another Eden in the City of Dundee.</p> <p>Dalinshanjie, University of Strathclyde - Digital Mental Health Equity for Young People in Scotland - Innovative Pathways for Policy and Practice.</p> <p>Rhiannon Hawkins, University of Glasgow - 'Rain rain go away ... come back another day': Understanding Scotland's changing relationships between climate change and mental health.</p> <p>Robyn Lock, Glasgow Caledonian University - Developing Stigma-Informed Programme Eligibility.</p> <p>Monica Ghoyal, University of Glasgow -Service utilisation and pathways to care for young people with symptoms of borderline personality disorder within the BRIDGE (a feasibility randomised controlled trial of brief, intensive assessment and integrated formulation for young people early in the course of BPD) project.</p> <p>Oluchi Mellor, University of Edinburgh - Examining the experiences of Black African nurse in the UK's Healthcare system – an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.</p> <p>Steffy Cairns, University of the West of Scotland - Can the benefits of Blue Space engagement promote the Mental Health and Wellbeing of young people? A One Health Study exploring Nature Connectedness in and around Irvine Harbour.</p>
12.15 – 1.00pm	Discussion
1.00pm – 2.00pm	Lunch and networking