Theirworld

Edinburgh Birth Cohort

Summer 2026

NEWSLETTER

Welcome,

to the latest edition of our newsletter. With the holidays just around the corner we pose a playpark quest challenge! How many playparks can you visit and which ones are the best?

In staff news, we said goodbye to Amy Corrigan, Research Midwife. We also welcomed Alexandra Bonthrone, Neuroscientist, to the team. In student news, Rebekah Smikle completed her PhD and shares news of her future plans.

We have updates on the 5 and 7 year visits, and share news about plans for a visit when children are age 10 years.

TEBC research findings this time are from two recently published papers, the first led by Sinead O'Carroll and second led by Rebekah Smikle. Sinead's research explored how socio-economic status (a person's social standing) affects the way parents talk to their babies. Rebekah's paper looked at understanding language, attention, and thinking skills in two-year-olds in relation to parent questionnaires and the impact of premature birth.

As always, a huge thank you to everyone who takes part in TEBC and shares their time with us, it's much appreciated.

Warm wishes, the TEBC Team.

Looking for fun ideas for the summer holidays? Why not go on a playpark quest! More on page 6.

Playpark Quest!

Staff and Student News

We said a fond farewell to **Amy Corrigan** (Research Midwife) who has taken up a new role of midwifery lecturer at Edinburgh Napier University. Many of you will have met Amy when you signed up to TEBC or at the follow up visits. Popular with families and the research team alike, Amy made many valuable contributions to TEBC. We will miss Amy very much but wish her all the very best for the future in her exciting new role!

We recently welcomed **Alexandra Bonthrone** to the team! Alexandra is a neuroscientist.

Warm congratulations to **Rebekah Smikle** who has been awarded her PhD!

More about Alexandra and Rebekah's future plans on page 3.

News

5 and 7 Year Visits

It's great to see everyone coming back at 5 year and then again at age 7. It's been a particularly busy start to 2026!

- ☆ **50+** visits Jan to May 2026
- ☆ **300+ 5 year** visits in total so far
- ☆ **100+ 7 year** visits in total so far

Lunch at 7 Year Visit

When you come for your 7-year visit, we provide lunch to help make sure everyone is happy and comfortable throughout the visit. We have a good selection to choose from so that everyone gets something they like and works for dietary requirements too. The research team will share details with you when they're in touch to arrange the visit. Knowing your choices in advance ensures we can get the lunch you'll really enjoy!

Please remember to send your lunch choices to the research team before your visit. Thank you!

10 Year Visit

We wanted to provide a wee update on plans for the next study visit which will be at 10 years of age. Preparations for this are under way and we have met with the TEBC Parent & Child Advisory Group to help us shape the visit and make sure it reflects the things that are most important to families.

It will be a single visit and take place at the research facility in the Children's Hospital. It will feel very similar to visits at 5 and 7 but there will be some new games and a few different questionnaires. There won't be a brain scan this time round.

We still have lots of work to do to get everything ready. We're already looking forward to seeing the first 10 year olds later in the year!

Facebook Group Back in Action!

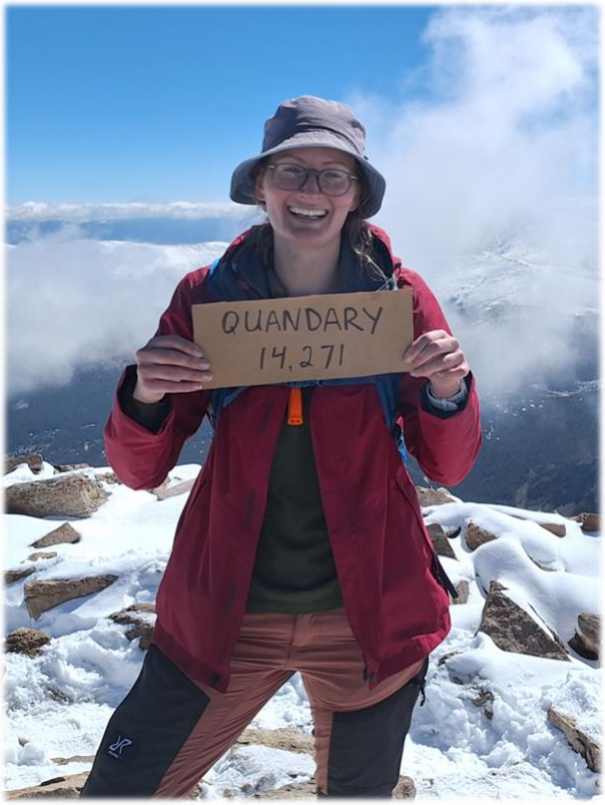
The Facebook group has been a bit quiet but do look out for regular posts now. We'll be sharing a mix of what's going on in the study, updates on research findings plus related news that we think might be of interest.

Keeping in Touch

If your email or phone number have changed since we last saw you, please do get in touch so that we can make sure our records are up to date. You can send us a message on 07584 642277 or email TEBC@ed.ac.uk

Welcome Alex

Hi, I'm Alexandra and I am a neuroscientist! I joined the TEBC team in April.



Since 2018, I have been working to understand how the brain and thinking skills develop in babies born preterm and babies with heart problems. I'm really excited to join TEBC and understand how the brain develops from a newborn baby to a child at school.

I grew up in lots of different countries and am now moving to Edinburgh from London. In my spare time, I enjoy running and hiking with my spaniel, and volunteering in a Search and Rescue team. I look forward to meeting some of you at TEBC events!

Congratulations to Rebekah

Congratulations to Rebekah Smikle, who recently completed her PhD! Lots of you will have met Rebekah at 5-year visits. Rebekah's research mainly focused on using biological markers called EpiScores to study the impact of preterm birth and inflammation on brain and cognitive development. These EpiScores were developed from saliva samples collected from TEBC babies around their due date. Rebekah found that many EpiScores may be linked to children's brain development and cognitive abilities at ages 2 and 5 years.

Rebekah plans to pursue a career in research and has rejoined TEBC as a postdoctoral researcher. She will help the research team to combine EpiScores and brain MRI scans in a new way to study how differences in the immune system of preterm babies affect the developing brain and what factors contribute to these differences.

Research Findings

How Socio-Economic Status Affects the Way Parents Talk to Their Babies: A Study of Preterm and Term-Born Infants

Background Information

Preterm birth, which is when a baby is born before 37 weeks of pregnancy, has been linked to a higher risk of language difficulties and delays in children. Additionally, socio-economic status, which refers to a person's social and economic position in society, has also been shown to impact language development in children. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to have less exposure to rich and complex language, which can affect their language skills. This study aimed to investigate how prematurity and socio-economic status affect the language exposure of infants.

Research Questions

The researchers asked two main questions: (1) Do parents of preterm infants communicate differently with their babies compared to parents of term-born infants? and (2) How do factors related to socio-economic status, such as neighbourhood deprivation and maternal education, influence parental communication with their infants? To answer these questions, the study involved 100 participants, including 47 preterm infants and 53 term-born infants, whose parents engaged in a 10-minute free play session with their babies at 9 months of age. The sessions were video-recorded and coded for parental language and gesture use. The researchers also collected data on the parents' socio-economic status, including neighbourhood deprivation, maternal education, and quality of life.

Findings

The study found that parents of preterm and term-born infants communicated similarly with their babies in terms of the amount and type of language used. However, socio-economic status played a significant role in shaping parental communication. Parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds used more words, had a greater variety of words, and used longer sentences when speaking to their infants. The researchers also found that neighbourhood deprivation was a stronger predictor of parental language use than maternal education or quality of life.

Conclusions

The study's findings suggest that socio-economic status, rather than prematurity, is a key factor in determining the language environment of infants. This has important implications for policymakers and healthcare professionals, as it highlights the need to support families from disadvantaged backgrounds to provide a rich and stimulating language environment for their children. By doing so, we can help reduce the risk of language delays and difficulties in preterm and term-born infants alike, and promote better language and communication skills in all children.

Scan the QR code to access the full text paper by Sinead O'Carroll and co-authors.

Understanding Language, Attention, and Thinking Skills in Two-Year-Olds: Parent Reports and the Impact of Premature Birth

Background Information

Children born preterm often experience difficulties in a range of cognitive skills, typically assessed by an examiner. These include general cognitive abilities and particular areas such as language, attention and executive functions. There is a need for efficient, scalable assessments that are relevant to everyday behaviours. For example, parental questionnaires are increasingly used, but it is unclear how well they can detect early cognitive difficulties in preterm children. Cognitive skills are also often correlated, such that people who perform well in one area usually perform well in another area. However, it is unknown if parental ratings of different skills correlate similarly.

Research Question

We used parental questionnaires to assess the language, attention and executive functions of 2-year-olds (96 preterm children and 87 term-born children). We explored associations between these skills and gestational age at birth, and also studied whether an underlying factor of shared 'general ability' links them.

Findings

Parents of preterm toddlers report reduced language abilities but similar attention and executive functions compared to term-born children. We found that these three skills are correlated with an underlying general ability that links them based on parents' ratings.

Conclusion

Our findings show how parental ratings might be used to identify differences in preterm children's abilities in many different areas, highlighting that they are particularly sensitive to differences in language. Future studies should compare parental reports with examiner-administered assessments to understand how both types of assessments relate to one another in early life.

We have published over 50 research papers using data from the study cohort. Summaries of all our published research findings are available on our study website. Use the QR code to find more on the website.

Contact Details

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https://www.ed.ac.uk/centre-reproductive-health/tebc

Playpark Quest!

How many playparks can you visit over the summer holidays? Which ones are the best?

Over 200 playparks in Edinburgh and East Lothian alone! Find one near you:

Edinburgh West Lothian East Lothian Fife

If you live outside these areas, check your local Council website for details of maintained playparks in your area.

- ☆ Visit new parks
- ☆ Have fun outdoors
- ☆ Pick your favourites
- ☆ See how many you can find!
- ☆ Which park has the best slide, swings, or climbing frame?

Playpark quest to West Princes Street Gardens playpark, Edinburgh

Castle themed playpark with something for all ages. Features large wooden multi-play castle with slides, climbing nets and walls, balancing bridges, monkey bars, swings, spring rockers and more besides!

Inclusive equipment, including accessible roundabouts and musical play features.

Tables and benches available, **toilets** close by.

Pack a **tasty picnic** of pizza pinwheels that kids will love to make. ham and cheese pizza pinwheels

Ice cream and coffee from the Fountain Café Kiosk.

Add a **nearby walk** to follow a Statue Trail through the gardens. Statue Trail

End your walk by the Scott Monument and it's time to get arty! Check out the **Family Art Hub** in the National Gallery. It's accessible and the gallery has good facilities. Family Art Hub

Good **public transport** links by bus, tram and rail for getting there and back.