

# Permanently Progressing?

## Building Secure Futures for Children in Scotland

### Annual Update Summer 2025

This summary gives a brief update since Phase 2 reported in September 2024. It is also an opportunity for the research team to say thank you to the children, young people, and adults who have been involved and have been so generous with their time.

Since 2014, the *Permanently Progressing?* study has explored the routes and timeframes to permanence, and the experiences and outcomes of 1,836 children who became looked after in Scotland in 2012-2013, when they were aged five and under.

It is the largest longitudinal cohort study in the UK into care experienced children’s pathways to permanence (or impermanence), focusing on children living with kinship carers, foster carers, or who are adopted. The aim is to build a picture of the lives of children and their families over time, and influence policy and practice.

The study tracks the children’s progress and outcomes at key life stages- early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence/early adulthood. Phase 1 (2014-2018) analysed children’s pre-care experiences, pathways and early outcomes from birth to age eight.

Phase 2 (2020-2024) revisited the cohort children in middle childhood, when they were aged between nine and sixteen. It explored:

* children’s routes to different forms of permanence (with parents, kinship carers, foster carers, or adoptive parents),
* children's experiences, wellbeing, and outcomes, and how they kept in touch with people who they don’t live with, but are important to them,
* what sources of support were needed by and available to children, their caregivers, and families.

Phase 2 published in September 2024:

[Key-findings from Phase 2: final report and summaries – Permanently Progressing? Building secure futures for children in Scotland](https://permanentlyprogressing.stir.ac.uk/key-findings-from-phase-2-final-report-and-accessible-summaries/)

For a copy of the report:



The findings of Phase 2 were reported across 33 media outlets including The Times, and The Herald and STV. There have been two questions in the Scottish Parliament. One highlighted the time it had taken to achieve legal permanence for children (almost three years), and how many children and young people who were in impermanent placements (12%). The other focused on limitations of administrative data.

Since September, the team have been disseminating findings across Scotland, the rest of the UK and internationally, and will continue to do so. Our communication strategy has been underpinned by three questions: What do we want audiences to know? What do we want them to feel? What can they do more/less of to help children, young people and their families?

On 29th May 2025, Permanently Progressing won The Herald Higher Education Award for Research Study of the Year. We are so pleased for everyone who has taken part so far, and the win recognises the impact the study is having on policy and practice.

Phase 3 will start in 2026, and complete in 2030, and our cohort will be in adolescence/early adulthood (aged 12-23).

In Phase 3, we are hoping to do some of the same things we did in previous phases, including analysing Children Looked After Statistics, and interviewing young people, caregivers, adoptive parents, and birth parents. We’re also planning to hold focus groups with professionals, and we will ask caregivers and young people if they would like to take part in surveys.

At dissemination events, we’ve asked audiences what they would like to see in Phase 3. If you have any ideas about things you think we should be doing in Phase 3, please get in touch with Helen on [helen.whincup@stir.ac.uk](mailto:helen.whincup@stir.ac.uk) We’d love to hear from you, as you may have ideas which we have not yet considered.

Thank you to all those who have been involved in the study so far from the research team: Alison, Ariane, Ben, Helen, Jade, Linda, Maggie, and Paula.

For more information about Phases 1 and 2 of the study, including accessible summaries and a video version for young people please go to our website: <https://permanentlyprogressing.stir.ac.uk/>

