

The National Joint Investigative Interviewing Project

Status Report

June 2024

Introduction and background

This paper aims to capture the key achievements, challenges and learning from the National Joint Investigative Interviewing (JII) Project. It is being produced now, to inform decisions about the next stage of the project.

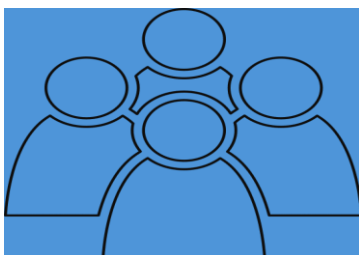
The National JII Project was established in 2017 as part of the response to the Evidence and Procedure Review. A national team of experienced social workers and police officers were recruited with the remit of developing a new approach to joint investigative interviewing, in line with national and international research and best practice evidence.

After eighteen months of research and development, the Scottish Child Interview Model for joint investigative interviewing emerged. This is a trauma-informed model of practice, has enhanced planning and questioning strategies, incorporates an evidence-based interview protocol and is underpinned by specialised training and ongoing professional development for interviewers. This began to be tested in practice in 2019.

At that stage, two additional posts were recruited to the national team to provide implementation support: a National Implementation Coordinator (local government) and a Detective Inspector.

All posts within the national team are currently funded by Scottish Government and have been since 2017 (10 FTE posts).

Social Work Scotland



COSLA



Police Scotland



Implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model

The Scottish Child Interview Model for joint investigative interviewing is implemented by integrating it into local child protection systems. Local multiagency partnerships drive forward this work by ensuring that the necessary conditions to facilitate delivery of the new approach are in place and that barriers are effectively removed, paying attention to the quality standards for the Scottish Child Interview Model. This ensures the new model of practice is delivered with fidelity, to enable children and young people to experience the intended benefits.

The local multiagency partnerships are led by social work and police. Many involve more than one local authority. Each partnership is at a different stage in their journey towards embedding the Scottish Child Interview Model, with the majority now operational and able to deliver the benefits to children. Orkney and Shetland continue to be supported to make progress towards creating optimal conditions locally that will offer them the best approach that takes account of their needs as Island Authorities.

Partnerships involving one local authority:

Dumfries and Galloway (V Division)
Glasgow (G Division)
Fife (P Division)
Edinburgh (E Division)
Highland (N Division)
Western Isles (N Division)

Partnerships involving three local authorities:

Ayrshire (U Division)
North East Scotland (A Division)
Forth Valley (C Division)
Tayside (D Division)

Partnerships involving two local authorities:

Lanarkshire (Q Division)
Argyll and Bute/West Dunbartonshire (L Division)

Partnerships involving four local authorities:

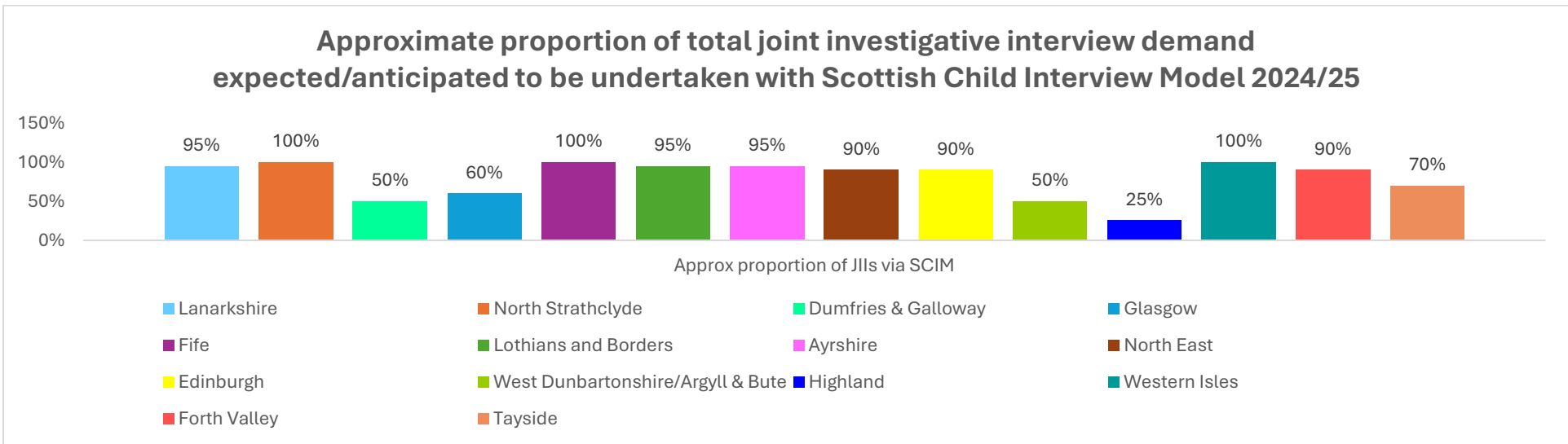
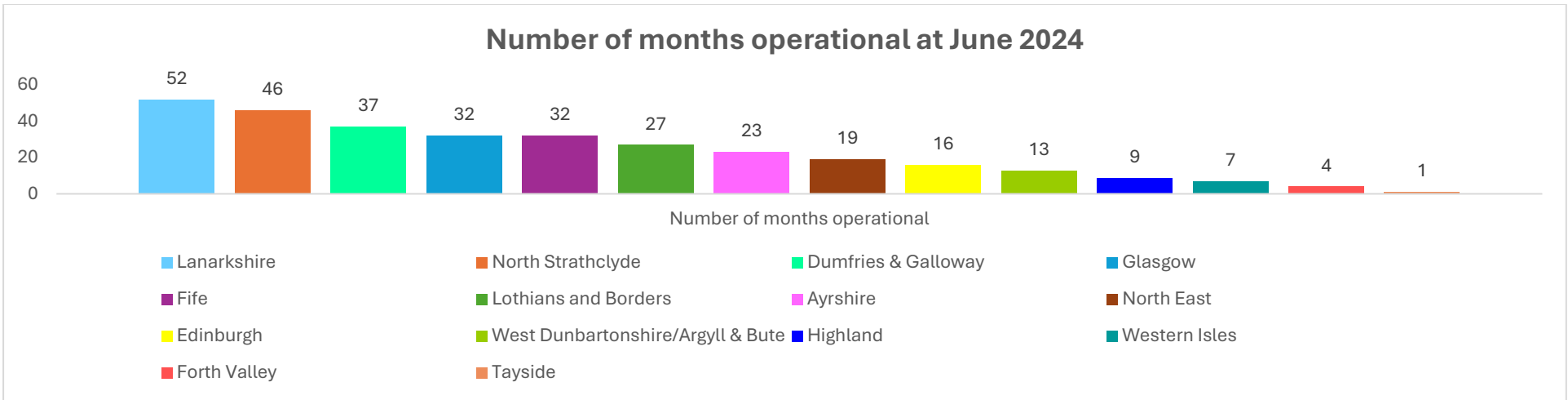
North Strathclyde (K and G Division)
Lothians and Borders (J Division)

Collaboration happens *across* partnerships as well as *within*. Some examples of collaboration build on existing evidence of what has worked locally with other areas of work and some examples are new and specific to implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model.

A few illustrations are given below, but this is just a snapshot of the available examples across the country:

- Both Ayrshire and Forth Valley partnerships have combined local authority resources to create new permanent social work posts - interviewers and a team manager - with one local authority hosting the posts on behalf of the partnership.
- Western Isles and Highland have developed an agreement for social workers from Western Isles to travel to Highland to undertake interviews as part of a strategy to support interviewers having sufficient regularity of practice opportunities.
- North Strathclyde partnership includes two police divisions and so police interviewers can work across two interview teams, supporting capacity.
- In the Argyll and Bute/West Dunbartonshire partnership, Argyll and Bute managers are supporting practice evaluations of all interviewers on an interim basis while West Dunbartonshire build their local capacity to undertake this aspect of the new approach.

A key benefit of the Scottish Child Interview Model is that this is a national model of practice. All joint investigative interviewers are trained in the same way, and local multiagency partnerships work together to ensure that all the quality standards of the model are delivered. This means that ongoing collaboration, across organisational boundaries, has a firm foundation. With consistency of practice standards, local leaders can be assured that all children will experience the same forensic interviewing service, delivered to the same quality standards regardless of which interview team undertakes the interview.



99%

of the child population (0-17 years) has access to the Scottish Child Interview Model.

80%

of all joint investigative interviews across Scotland are currently estimated to be conducted via the Scottish Child Interview Model in 2024/25.

The National JII Team supports local implementation by:

Participation in each local partnerships arrangements for overseeing this change and improvement work

Development of implementation support documentation

Facilitating links across partnerships

Identifying commonalities of experience in different partnerships and signposting to support shared learning

Developed, tested, and further refined the quality standards of the Scottish Child Interview Model – set out in the Quality Assurance and Data Framework

Design and delivery of information sessions tailored to local context/audience/priorities

Design and delivery of data and evaluation sessions aimed to introducing the key data and evaluation tools and strands of work

Ongoing direct support to help build local capacity for use of JII data

Documenting emerging learning and sharing widely

Discussion forums bringing together all implementation leads across the country to share learning and support each other (2021 to 2023)

Series of workshops to support best use of data and evidence

Remaining alert to the evolving legislative and policy context nationally and connections with Scottish Child Interview Model

National Joint Investigative Interviewer (JII) Training Programme

The National JII Training Programme takes account of international research in the field of forensic interviewing, and it effectively equips social workers and police officers with the required knowledge and skill to undertake forensic interviews with children. The initial learning and development commitment is around 50 days. This is a blend of teaching, self-study, and online assessment, spaced over several months. The training programme is both credit-rated at SCQF level 9, and formally endorsed by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) as advanced practice post qualifying training for social workers.

15 training programmes delivered between September 2019 and June 2024.

172 new interviewers trained (89 social workers and 83 police officers).

The National JII Team also provide training for police and social work managers. A 3-day direct teaching course is provided for those who have responsibility as Briefing/Debriefing Managers and a 1-day Evaluators Course is provided for managers who have responsibility for the structured evaluation of interviewer practice.

27 Managers and Evaluators Courses delivered between May 2020 and May 2024.

288 managers trained (194 social work managers and 94 police managers).

187 evaluators trained (121 from social work and 66 from police).

All training to date has been funded by the Scottish Government.

Each local authority has between 1 and 7 social workers trained in the new model of practice.

Each police division has between 2 and 7 police officers trained in the new model of practice.

Analysis of interviewer retention data highlighted 84% retention rate overall (based on 120 interviewers who had been in practice between 6 and 45 months).

- 94% retention rate at 12 months (based on 93 interviewers)
- 80% retention rate at 24 months (based on 47 interviewers)
- 65% retention rate at 36 months (based on 20 interviewers)

*It should be noted that this data analysis included the four pilots for this project. The learning from these pilot sites included learning in relation to selection, recruitment and retention.

We know that several strategies help support interviewers in practice. These strategies include effective workload management, clear and effective managerial oversight, and support and recognition of the role that interviewers have in the protection of children and young people. In addition, structured support for continuous improvement to joint investigative interviewing practice plays a key role.

Continuous Improvement of JII Practice

Following initial training, interviewers must adhere to the Interviewer Practice Evaluation Framework. This framework is a blend of self, peer, and manager evaluation structured around the key aspects of interviewer practice that need to be attended to for critical reflection to have the desired impact of supporting improvements to practice.

Interviewers who can objectively critique their interview by following a structured format, one that prompts them to consider aspects in detail, will ensure their self-evaluation is robust and likely to provide rich material to inform the individual's learning and development. Adherence to interviewing protocol, quality of questioning strategy, sufficiency of evidence gathering, knowledge of essential elements to inform prompts, overall interview structure and application of trauma informed principles are important features that must be considered in each evaluation. This rich material can have even greater impact when shared with peers and the extent of the learning is both deepened and more widely shared.

The ongoing regular contact between the National JII Team and each of the local partnerships and interviewers means that there are established routes to identify emerging practice issues and consider how to respond to these for the benefit of all interviewers across the country.

The National JII Team supports continuous improvement of joint investigative interviewing practice by:

Single point of contact for joint investigative interviewing enquiries

Advice and guidance on joint investigative interviewing

Support with complex case planning

In person supported peer evaluation session

Evaluation of interviewer practice – for new interviewers, then on a “dip sampling” basis and also by request

Development and provision of “refresher” learning and development pathways for those returning to interviewing practice after a break

Themed CPD Sessions, delivered in person locally and often led by specialists in that theme (for example Speech and Language Therapists)

Online discussion forums bringing together all interviewers across the country to share learning, support each other and receive training and practice development updates (2023 and ongoing)

Ongoing review and development of the National JII Training Programme

Compliance with relevant quality assurance requirements for learning and development

Remaining connected to the international forensic interviewing research community and relevant links with ongoing development of the Scottish Child Interview Model

Local Areas of Focus

While local partnerships work towards full implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model, other approaches to joint investigative interviewing continue to be used. There are two main aspects of implementation that feature when examining why other approaches to joint investigative interviewing continue to be utilised:

1. Continuing to build up the optimum number of interviewers required to meet demand and provide a degree of resilience.

Key considerations here are:

Selection and recruitment - development of local processes to purposefully select and recruit those with the required attributes and experience.

Identifying/resourcing posts for interviewers – increasingly stretched workforces across social work and police divisions with staff vacancies in almost all organisations.

Initial learning and development commitment required from interviewers – recognition that this is a substantial professional development undertaking and both releasing staff for this plus ensuring staff don't have personal commitments such as holidays, during teaching times can be challenging.

“Lead in” time from recruitment to training to deployment – purposeful recruitment combined with specialist initial training means that the process of “acquiring” additional interviewers is relatively lengthy and requires effective strategic planning.

Deployment arrangements for interviewers – the interviewer role continues to develop and while there are challenges in resourcing dedicated interviewer posts, equally there are challenges in managing the deployment of interviewers who carry additional responsibilities.

2. Continuing to develop the local system within which the conditions necessary to support delivery of the Scottish Child Interview Model are established.

Key considerations here are:

Aligning IRD process and practice to best support decision-making – most areas have substantive IRD improvement activity underway following local audit and evaluation activity, or inspections, or as part of their implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland.

Awareness raising across the multiagency system – information needs across the multiagency system are significant and change over time, requiring dynamic communication strategies.

Safety planning – while this is an existing key feature of local child protection assessment, planning and review activity, the enhanced planning within the Scottish Child Interview Model can mean the safety plan may be required to meet the child's needs for a longer period of time.

Office space and equipment for interviews – reaching optimal arrangements to provide the best workplace conditions to support interviewers to work jointly in an effective way requires

careful planning and consideration in the context of trusting working relationships to take account of both social work and police working practices and system requirements.

Interview venues and equipment – the profile of both the quality of recording and appropriate interview venues has increased throughout the lifetime of the National JII Project and is now given more prominence by Bairns’ Hoose considerations.

Establishing joint management – reaching optimal arrangements for management and coordination of the interviewers and their work takes time and testing.

Embedding data and evaluation – it is recommended that all implementation activity is data-driven and local partnerships are encouraged to collect, analyse, and utilise a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data. This is a significant demand on the system, not least because some of the evaluation activity is substantive – such as implementation of the Interviewer Practice Evaluation Framework.

Voice of the child – central to the range of data being collected, analysed, and utilised is feedback from children and their families. Effective feedback loops take time to bed in.

Interviewer wellbeing support – supporting the wellbeing of interviewers is a core aspect of the Scottish Child Interview Model and examples of externally commissioned support in this specific context are beginning to emerge. On a national level, we continue to learn from our collective efforts to develop trauma-informed workforce and services and this includes support for those operationalising trauma enhanced practice.

Information gathering pathways – bespoke interview plans that fully reflect the individual needs of each child depend on effective information-sharing pathways between the interviewers and relevant services. These pathways are also critical for ongoing support and follow-up activity for the child and their family.

Alignment with wider children’s services improvements – capacity for improvement and sequencing of improvement activity are critical challenges impacting on implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model.

Children and Families Experiences

Approximately **7,500** children and young people have experienced a joint investigative interview via the Scottish Child Interview Model since it was first introduced in February 2020

Local partnerships have implemented a range of ways of gathering the perspectives of children and families in relation to their experiences of joint investigative interviews. These include ad hoc methods such as:

- White boards
- Noticeboards
- Comments Cards
- Suggestions Boxes

The above are situated in fixed interview suites and those visiting these suites can access them whenever they wish to make a comment. Some children gift the interviewers' drawings they have done while in the interview suite and drawings sometimes include relevant feedback, such as the qualities of the interviewers that they valued: "*She was a kind lady*". Drawings can then be pinned to the noticeboard.

In addition to these ad hoc arrangements, many partnerships have introduced, or built upon existing, feedback arrangements to incorporate questions about the interview experience. Typically, this consists of a set of questions that form a survey which can be completed in a range of ways: either independently, with support, in person, online or over the telephone. Creative approaches are taken with the design and administration of these surveys, including use of technology such as QR codes. Those supporting children and families to give such feedback include interviewers, social workers, school staff and third sector staff (advocacy and/or recovery support staff).

The questions that form part of the survey include questions about how prepared children felt about coming for interview, their experience of the interview space, and their experience of the interview itself.

The feedback from children typically reflects that children knew why they were coming for interview, they felt nervous or scared before interview, they felt supported to give their account of what had happened, and they experienced the interviewers as kind and caring, resulting in feeling less nervous or scared as the interview progressed.

Some older young people who had previous experience of a joint investigative interview reflected that the Scottish Child Interview Model offered them an improved experience where they felt the planning and approach was individualised to their needs.

Parents and carers tend to share positive feedback too. Like children, they report that they felt they understood what was happening and why, they felt listened to, and they felt the interviewers offered a caring and compassionate approach which helped their child to give their account of what happened. Some have offered positive reflections on the skill of the

interviewers in responding to complex needs and being able to support their child to participate in interview.

Evaluation of interviews by Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration

The Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) conducted a total of 170 evaluations of joint investigative interviews that had been conducted between 1st August 2020 to 31st July 2023. While a growing proportion of joint investigative interviews are conducted using the Scottish Child Interview Model, evaluation of interviews by SCRA is not restricted to the type of approach used.

The chart below shows the following key messages:

86% of joint investigative interviews evaluated met a satisfactory standard for sound quality.

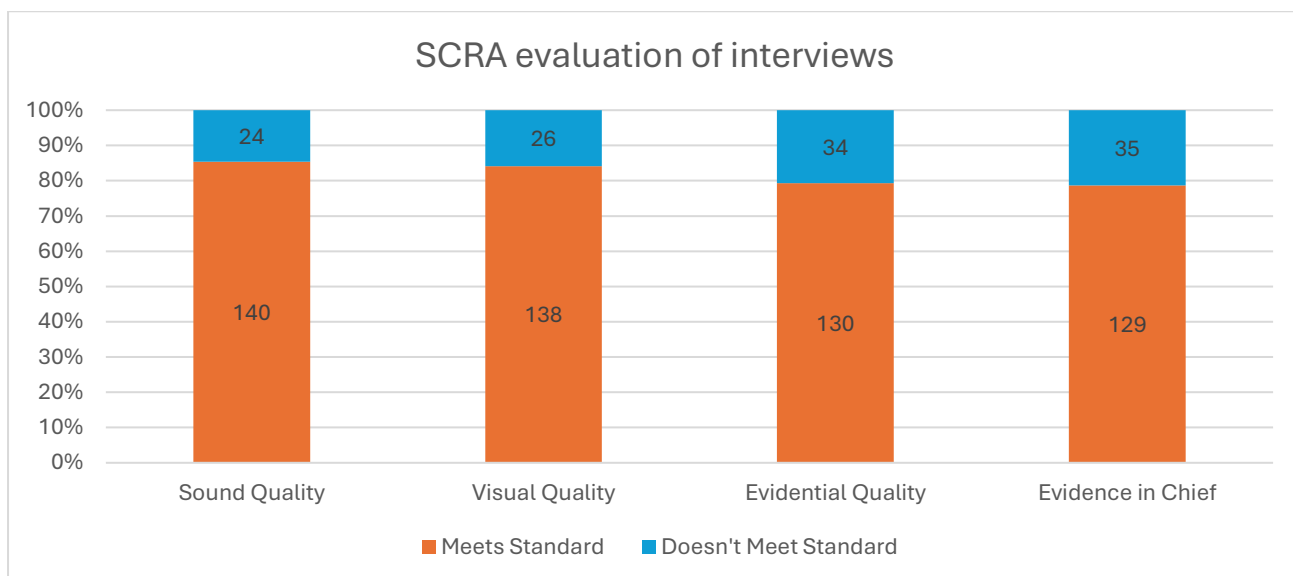
85% of joint investigative interviews evaluated met a satisfactory standard for visual quality.

80% of joint investigative interviews evaluated captured the essential evidential details.

79% of joint investigative interviews evaluated could be used as Evidence in Chief

There are a broad range of factors that inform the assessment of whether the interview can be utilised, not all of which relate to interviewer practice. Where a joint investigative interview was not able to be used as Evidence in Chief, the Reporter evaluating the interview was asked their view on whether this could be attributed to the way the interview was conducted:

4% of all the joint investigative interviews evaluated could not be used as Evidence in Chief due to the way the interview was conducted.



Within each evaluation, Reporters also provide their observations of areas of good practice and areas for development. This feedback, plus feedback from evaluations by Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, is used to inform ongoing development of the interviewer training programme, as well as for improvement activity at local level.

Evaluations by Reporters provide local teams with valuable insights into optimal positioning of microphones and cameras in individual interview suites, as well as observations on wider environmental factors that may impact on the quality of the interview.

Many evaluations by Reporters contain observations about the overall conduct of the interview:

“Child gives very clear account of what happened. Interviewer clarifies everything so no ambiguity. There is unlikely to be any objection to the interview as questions are not leading and the interviewer doesn’t put any words into the child’s mouth.”

“Child appeared to be relaxed, good rapport built with the child. He appeared to be comfortable talking to the interviewer(s). When the child became upset the interviewers responded appropriately by taking a break.”

“There was a plan to meet the child’s needs which appears to have been followed throughout the interview. The child was supported by an adult of his choice and the date and time of the interview was done in consultation with him.”

“The child appeared to be sufficiently relaxed. Her attention was well engaged from the outset, explanation offered to her of the ground rules was well gauged in terms of her age and ability to understand and so in answer to questions during the substantive part of the interview the child was confident in her response. The interview was brought to a conclusion at an appropriate stage when it was evident that the child was becoming distracted.”

Evaluation of interviews by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) agreed to evaluate joint investigative interviews which took place via the Scottish Child Interview Model where that was being piloted in North Strathclyde, Lanarkshire and Glasgow. The evaluations encompassed interviews which formed part of solemn level prosecutions, and the interview was requested by COPFS during the normal course of that prosecution. COPFS have evaluated a total of 64 of these joint investigative interviews at time of writing. These interviews were conducted between February 2020 and October 2022.

The evaluations required ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses in relation to a number of questions surrounding sound and visual quality, evidential value and prospective use of the interview at trial. In addition to these binary questions, responses were collated which allowed the evaluator to expand and provide context behind their answers.

The chart below outlines the responses collated for the binary questions:

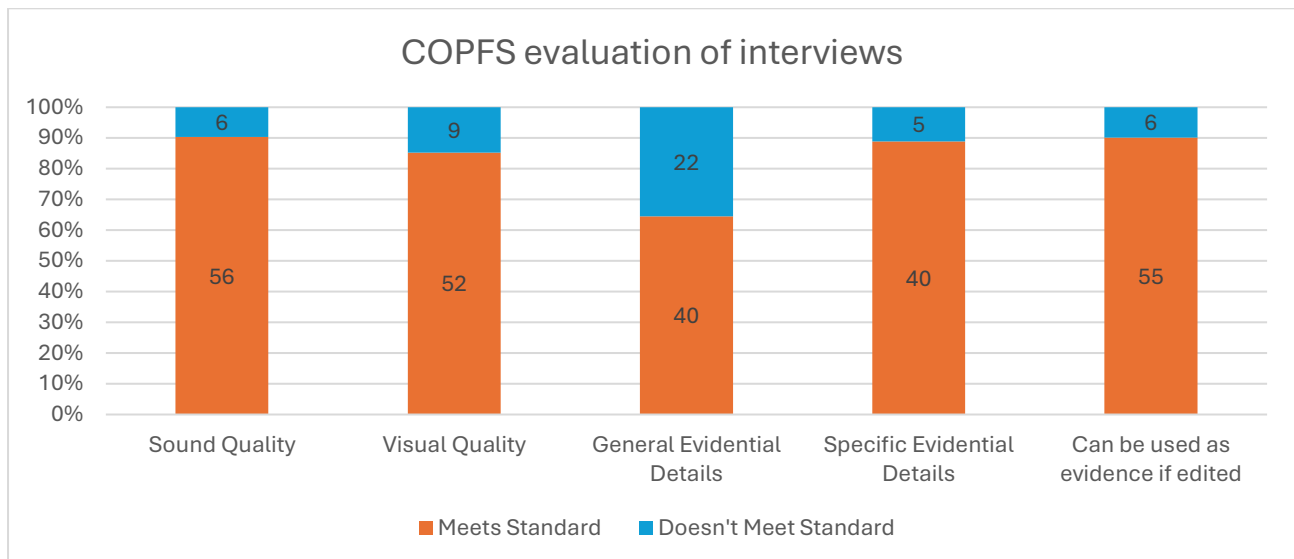
90% of joint investigative interviews evaluated met a satisfactory standard for sound quality.

85% of joint investigative interviews evaluated met a satisfactory standard for visual quality.

65% of joint investigative interviews evaluated contained the general evidential details (**note** – this aspect was identified at an early stage of COPFS evaluation activity and addressed via practice and training amendments resulting in significant improvement from 2021).

89% of joint investigative interviews evaluated contained the specific evidential details where this was applicable.

92% of joint investigative interviews evaluated were capable of being used in court (subject to redaction or editing)



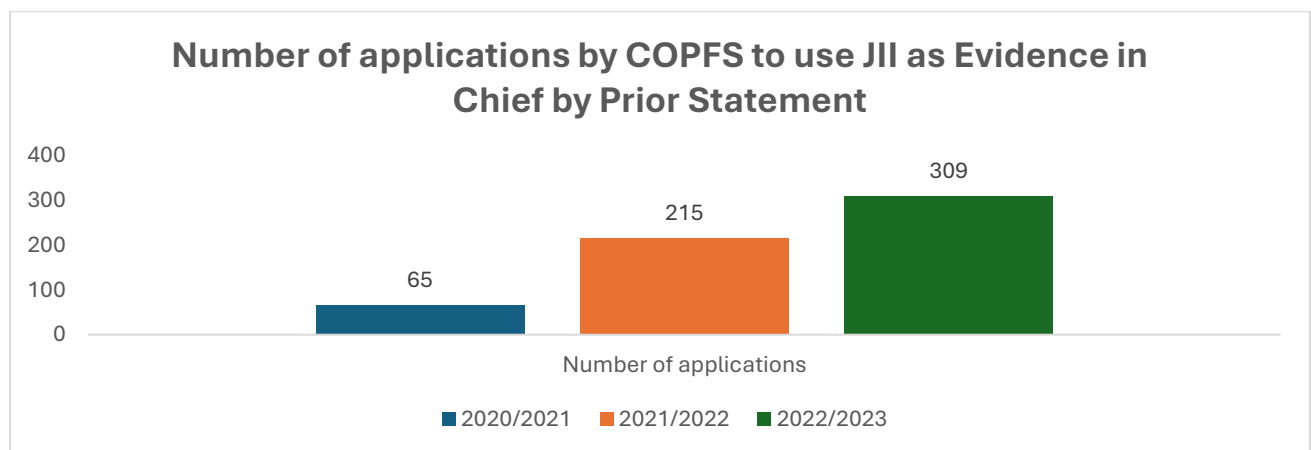
The responses collated provided useful background to the above statistical data which informs existing good practice and areas for development and continuous improvement. A non-exhaustive and non-hierarchical list of the responses received have been summarised below:

- Better consideration could be made for the acoustics of the room and positioning of microphones to ensure the witness is heard clearly.
- Prompts from the interviewers are beneficial tools to ensure witnesses are seen and heard effectively.
- Equipment used may merit consideration and review to ensure best quality. Police Scotland are in the process of procuring visually recorded interview (VRI) equipment utilising Bairns' Hoose funding secured by the local partnerships. The equipment will be installed at the identified fixed site interview suites and will help to improve the overall quality and standard of the recording of the interview.
- A witness's full range of emotions was captured well when the camera angle is fully considered by the interviewer.
- Consideration should be given to the location of the interview and the anticipated interruptions to the interview e.g., school bells. Good examples were collated on how interviewers handled interruptions which kept the child focused on their train of thought.
- Interviewers were commended for their relationship building with the witness however the time taken to do so noted as being lengthy.

- The use of the break in the middle of the interview is an effective tool not only for the child’s benefit but it ensures an opportunity to confirm that all evidential bases have been covered by the interviewer.
- The majority of interviews required to be redacted or edited to ensure fluid viewing for court purposes. Most commonly, redaction or edits were required to an interview transcript to assure typographical accuracy. Redaction can also be required where despite effective questioning and cueing techniques to support the child’s memory retrieval and recall, the child’s narrative as a response can be unpredictable or disjointed. This means the child can often offer details that were not asked for that cause difficulty evidentially. On other occasions redaction was required when interviewers incorrectly or inadvertently prompted the child in ways which resulted in elaboration on details that were irrelevant or inadmissible, or answers that were contrary to the rules of evidence.
- Training and awareness of the law in relation to the crimes alleged to have been committed are key to ensure that there is effective questioning of the witness. An example was given in one interview where further simple and direct questioning ought to have been made in respect of a statutory defence.

All of the above has been incorporated into ongoing continuous improvement activity.

The chart below shows an increase in the number of applications made by COPFS to use the interview as Evidence in Chief by Prior Statement; a form of special measures that reduces the need for a child to repeat the content of the interview in a court or equivalent setting.



Data and Evidence

All multiagency partnerships implementing the Scottish Child Interview Model collect and utilise a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data to inform their ongoing implementation strategy.

A JII Data Capture Form with accompanying guidance note is provided to all partnerships during the preparatory stage. While there are some localised adaptations to this statistical

dataset, there is a significant proportion of commonality which provides the potential for future development of a national JII dataset.

Local partnerships are encouraged to use their qualitative data, such as feedback from children, alongside their quantitative data, to provide them with a more rounded picture of how the Scottish Child Interview Model is operating and what difference it is making.

As part of the support provided by the National JII Team, a series of data workshops began in Autumn 2023, with disability data as the first focused theme. Dr Alex McTier, CELCIS, was invited to these workshops due to his involvement in disability data research. Alex shared his research with workshop participants and the consequent discussion and reflection led to an opportunity to test revised disability data questions for children participating in joint investigative interviewing. To support this work, Alex secured funding from the Economic and Social Research Council.

A revised set of disability questions for children involved in joint investigative interviews have been developed in partnership with six local JII partnerships, the National Joint Investigative Interviewing (JII) Team, the Scottish Government, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (The ALLIANCE) and CELCIS. These will be tested from August 2024.

If the project is successful and provides better quality information about children's disabilities, the questions could be adopted by other children's statistical collections.

Research and Evaluation

In January 2021, an Interim Evaluation Report, led by Justice Analytical Services in Scottish Government, was published. Due to the stage of the project at that time, the focus of this evaluation was necessarily on key learning and features from implementation rather than on impact and outcomes. That interim evaluation report can be accessed here: [JII-Interim-Evaluation-Report-Autumn-2019-to-Autumn-2020.pdf \(cosla.gov.uk\)](https://www.cosla.gov.uk/interim-evaluation-report-autumn-2019-to-autumn-2020.pdf)

As a follow up to that interim evaluation report, in 2023 Scottish Government commissioned the Children and Young Peoples Centre for Justice (CYCJ) to undertake an evaluation of the Scottish Child Interview Model that explored the experiences of children, young people, parents/carers, and professionals from differing perspectives, plus examined the use of the interview in court proceedings. This research is due to be published towards the end of 2024.

In January 2022, IRISS published an insight report on the provision of non-suggestive social support within joint investigative interviewing that can be accessed here: [Joint investigative interviewing in Scotland \(cosla.gov.uk\)](https://www.iris.gov.uk/research-and-evaluation/insight-reports/joint-investigative-interviewing-in-scotland)

In 2022, Hannah Carr, clinical psychologist, undertook a PhD at Glasgow University under the supervision of Dr Caroline Bruce and her research was in relation to the Scottish Child Interview Model. The purpose of Hannah's study was to develop an understanding of how the training on child development and the impact of trauma, supported by use of the Plan for the Child's Needs, impacted the interviewer's perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of conducting

Jl Interviews. This research is available here: [A-new-approach-to-investigative-interviews-with-children.pdf \(cosla.gov.uk\)](https://www.cosla.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/A-new-approach-to-investigative-interviews-with-children.pdf)

Project Improvement Aims

At the outset of the three-year strategy to introduce the Scottish Child Interview Model across the country, the following improvement aims were agreed:

1. Evidence is gathered through trauma informed joint investigative interviews (JII) undertaken within the Scottish Child Interview Model in 80% of cases involving children aged under 16 years by March 2024.
2. The percentage of solemn proceedings cases where a JII is part of the evidence chain, in which an application for Evidence in Chief by Prior Statement, is made, is increased.

Each improvement aim has been met.

Next Steps

The proposed next steps for the National JII Project can be viewed as falling into the following, interconnected, workstreams:

Continued focus on implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model

While it is important to acknowledge and celebrate the progress made to date with introducing the Scottish Child Interview Model, particularly given the evidence of improved experiences and outcomes for children, it is equally important to recognise that continued investment and focused leadership is required to enable full implementation. Implementation research internationally, highlights the risks of not actively attending to implementation of new interventions, leading to failure to ensure change is both sustainable and scaleable resulting in the model not being viable longer term. This would jeopardise the investment made to date in the Scottish Child Interview Model and potentially result in a return to a type of interviewing practice that does not support improved experiences and outcomes for children.

The value of a national team with responsibility for supporting local partnerships to implement the Scottish Child Interview Model has been clearly evidenced throughout the lifetime of the project. Ongoing investment in a national team – which includes investment in ensuring the child protection workforce is provided with the most up to date best practice evidence in relation to forensic interviewing – is critical to support full implementation in order that all joint investigative interviews are undertaken using the new approach.

Full implementation is achieved when all joint investigative interviews are undertaken using the Scottish Child Interview Model and the quality standards of the model are adhered to, supporting improved experiences and outcomes for children and supporting interviewer wellbeing and continuous professional development.

While we have learned a great deal about what is required to embed this new approach to joint investigative interviewing, including the common challenges experienced by local

partnerships, the next stage of this work may need a more nuanced lens where the individual needs of each local partnership should be reflected in any future oversight arrangements.

Hearing the perspectives of each partnership, combined with continuing our commitment to be led by data and evidence, a new oversight group could provide an accessible platform to support our progress into the next stage of the work.

Building on what has been effective about the approach taken

Retaining local leadership, ownership, accountability and quality assurance while introducing a national model of practice in a flexible way to fit local needs, has been possible with the approach taken to introducing the Scottish Child Interview Model.

There is merit in considering extending this approach to other areas – particularly those areas closely connected to joint investigative interviewing.

Improvement activity in relation to Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) process and practice has been underway across the country for several years. Implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland, 2021, updated 2023, included work to develop a national IRD training course. The course has been piloted and a strategy for delivery is now under development.

The work of the National Joint Investigative Interviewing Team will inform the development of an IRD learning and development plan and ensure close alignment between these linked areas. This is particularly important given that forensic interviews sit within an overarching investigative strategy and improvements in joint decision-making at IRD, support improvements in the planning and conduct of interviews.

Increased activity in key areas

With the publication of Trauma Informed Justice: A Knowledge and Skills Framework for Working with Victims and Witnesses in May 2023, plus the updated plan for implementation of the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) Scotland Act 2019, in April this year, there is arguably an increasingly conducive context for the National Team to be more active in the justice space.

With tailored inputs successfully delivered to the local SCRA offices, this approach could be extended to local COPFS offices. Our team could support upskilling of COPFS staff in trauma-informed approaches, particularly within roles involving questioning of children, and this would create dynamic feedback loops for reciprocal learning.

We have also begun discussions with the Judicial Institute regarding provision of input to Sheriffs. A similar approach could be taken here.

Building connections through reciprocal learning, UK and wider

Reciprocal learning opportunities noted above with our more immediate colleagues can be further built upon through growing our connections across the UK and further afield.

We have shared learning from our project with colleagues in central government such as the Bairns' Hoose Unit and Trauma Responsive Social Work Services, as well as with colleagues in other parts of the UK such as Emma Harewood, Transformation Lead and Delivery and Service Manager for the Lighthouse, the first Barnahus in the UK, along with her Metropolitan Police colleagues.

We have also delivered a workshop at the Social Work Scotland Conference 2023 and the European Social Services Conference 2024.