

Nomination of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Team for the Dean's Award for Outstanding Communication and Contribution to the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

The HBSC team was founded in the Centre for Health Promotion Studies in 1994 following an invitation to Saoirse Nic Gabhainn from the leaders of the International HBSC Network to join them in their cross-national study of adolescent health and well-being. Since then the international collaborators have grown from 27 to 51 countries in the European Region of the World Health Organisation and North America. The network agrees a shared research protocol and conducts data collection from children aged 11 to 15 every four years. Some countries expanding the age range – for example in Ireland data are collected from children in 3rd class up to 5th year.

Funding

HBSC has been funded by the Department of Health since 1997 in four-year grants, each of which enables a round of collaboration, data collection, data analysis and dissemination. Since 2025 the funding has been competitive following an international competition to undertake the study in Ireland. The team have met all deliverables agreed with the Department of Health since 1997, and has sustained a positive and supportive working relationships with senior departmental staff for almost 30 years.

Dissemination

The HBSC team produces policy reports for Government Departments, fact-sheets, infographics, alongside peer-reviewed journal articles. They have also developed a knowledge translation helpdesk which provides data access and bespoke analyses in short reports for all public sector and community/voluntary organisations. To date they have produced 63 short reports and 121 factsheets.

Placements and internationalisation

HBSC Ireland have accepted internships and placement students from Ireland , Europe and the US, including undergraduate medical students, totalling to 50 students overall. Almost all of these have an authorship stemming from their time with the team, and have been mentored by senior team members. HBSC have attracted many international staff to the University, with current staff

from Hungary, Belgium and India, and many others from Poland, the USA, Canada, France, Portugal and so on over the years.

Youth Engagement

HBSC Ireland pioneered the participation of young people in all stages of the studies, including involving children in the choice of issues to investigate, interpretation of data and dissemination both scientific and policy oriented. HBSC Ireland team members founded the International Youth Engagement Group of the network and continue to lead the group, expanding the use of participation techniques to multiple dimensions of the study and across many countries.

Cross-sectoral Data Use

HBSC Ireland data is used by multiple government departments in their planning, policy development and evaluation of policy implementation. The National Child Well-being Indicators for Ireland draw heavily on HBSC and many were specifically developed by the HBSC team for this purpose. HBSC data are also used to inform planning in the HSE regions and among multiple Irish and International NGOs.

Scientific dissemination

Data from the HBSC Ireland research team have been included in 316 peer-reviewed journal articles, 12 book chapters and team members have made 265 scientific presentations. These scientific endeavours are the foundation upon which all other impacts rest.

Policy impact

The HBSC Ireland team have produced and contributed data to some 302 Irish reports designed to inform policy and practice. Data from HBSC Ireland are included in 217 international policy documents, while HBSC Ireland is cited in 253 OECD Reports and 140 European Observatory on Health Systems and Policy reports. Overall there are 353 inclusions of the University of Galway in the international policy documents that draw on HBSC Ireland data and methodologies. *These figures do not include citation of journal articles.*

Media

Each release of HBSC Ireland data is accompanied by press briefings and are covered in most national daily newspapers as well as an increasing number of on-line news sites. Team members

are interviewed on local and national radio, and often for television news. The team were featured in the RTE *ChangeMakers* series in 2023.

Leadership in HBSC Internationally

HBSC Ireland team members have held multiple leadership positions in the International network of 51 countries, including chair of the focus groups on Violence and Injuries, Risk Behaviours, Eating and Dieting, and Sexual Health. They have also chaired the overall study Scientific Development Group, The Policy Development Group and the Youth Engagement Advisory Group. There have been Irish members of the overall study Co-ordinating Committee for most of the last two decades.

Links with the World Health Organisation

HBSC is a WHO collaborative study, and WHO use HBSC data to support many areas of their work, including developing trans-national policy on specific health issues and behaviours. HBSC Ireland have worked closely with WHO Euro on many of these study outputs, leading on key outputs on topics such as Diet and Nutrition, Social Cohesion and Mental and Sexual Health. The HBSC teams work with WHO was a key factor in the award of Collaborating Centre Status to the Health Promotion Research Centre, and the Co-Director of the WHO-CC is from the HBSC Ireland team. The team have also helped lead on evaluating the European Child and Adolescent Health Strategy, the Development of new European strategy objectives and the impact of COVID-19 on young people across Europe. The HBSC Ireland approach to youth participation has influenced numerous WHO programmes and the team worked closely with WHO Consultants to develop practice briefs on how to embed youth engagement in the policy process. These aspects of our work are central to the forthcoming 2025 new WHO-Euro Child and Adolescent Health Strategy 'A Healthy Start for a Healthy Life'.

Conclusion

These activities demonstrate the initiative and creativity the team has shown in research dissemination, and the esteem in which they have been, and are, held by international colleagues and decision-makers. The team has made very substantial contribution to the landscape of children's health in Ireland and internationally, which reflects very well on the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences and the University as a whole.