At this point in the study, we are especially interested in how the babies react to new situations and new people. We are particularly interested in how they react when they meet other babies their own age. To study this, we would like to invite you to a birthday party, to celebrate your first year in the study. Two other mothers in the study and their babies will be there as well. The mothers will be able to stay with their babies at all times.

We are going to hold the birthday party in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, where we have set up a special playroom for mothers and infants. During the birthday party, we will introduce some games and activities that will allow us to find out how babies at this age react to new situations. We are particularly interested to see whether some babies find new situations more difficult to cope with than others do, and so we have introduced a few challenges into the situation. Your baby will meet new people and will be asked to play games with the researchers. Some of the toys and games may be slightly challenging for babies of this age. In general, though, we expect the birthday parties to be happy, festive occasions.

The Playroom
We have tried to make the playroom as comfortable and safe as possible. There will be comfortable sofas and a lot of space for the babies to play. There will be a number of different toys for your baby to play with. The room has been approved by the School of Psychology Safety Officer.
What Happens During the Party
We will book taxis to bring you to the School of Psychology. If you would prefer to drive your own car, we will give you parking vouchers. When you arrive, a member of our research team will take you to separate rooms to begin with, where we can tell you more about this part of the study. We will start out in that room by playing some games with your baby, to see what sort of skills babies have learnt by the first birthday. Then we will bring all three mothers and babies together in the playroom for the party. The theme of the first birthday party is Teddy Bears’ Picnic. If your baby has a favourite teddy, please bring it along to the picnic. Two members of our researcher team will set out the picnic, and invite the babies to join in games. The babies will be then be given the chance to play with each other for 20 minutes. We will finish up with a Lucky Dip. We’d like to give the babies a snack at the end of the party. To avoid problems with allergies, we’d like you to bring the type of snack that you would ordinarily give to your baby.

How We Study Your Baby’s Reactions to the Birthday Party
We will be watching a birthday party through a one-way window. One of our researchers will be in the playroom with you, giving you instructions and getting the babies to try out different toys and play some games. We are very interested in how the babies react to this new situation, on the inside as well as the outside. Some babies take things in their stride, but others might find birthday parties more challenging.

To get a better idea of how different infants react to new situations, we are going to record their heart rate, using a Velcro monitor (similar to those that runners often wear). We are also going to see whether some babies are more likely to produce the kinds of hormones that help them deal with challenging situations. To do this, all we have to do is collect samples of your baby’s saliva using a swab, which is completely safe and will not produce any allergic reactions. The saliva can then be analysed for the hormones that help people cope with new situations. It is important to measure the babies’ physical reactions, as well as their behaviour, because babies cannot tell us what they are experiencing, and some babies are particularly difficult to read. We want to try to find out how they might be feeling on the inside.

We expect that the babies will find the parties to be enjoyable occasions. However, if you feel at any point that your baby is getting upset, we can stop, and take a break, or end the party at any point. We will end the party with presents and a snack, so that every baby goes home on a happy note. We do hope that you enjoy the birthday party, and enjoy meeting some of the other mothers and babies who are taking part in the study.

If you want any more information, please do not hesitate to contact Professor Dale Hay, School of Psychology, Cardiff University on 02920 876503 or 02920 876191 (CCDSteam@cardiff.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. We hope that you will continue to help us with this important study.