

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE ON
LONGITUDINAL STUDIES**

Monday 23rd April, 2007

Medical Research Council, 20 Park Crescent, London, 2.15 – 4.15pm

Present: Professor A. Dale, University of Manchester
Professor J. Banks, University College, London
Professor P. Elias (chair), University of Warwick and ESRC Strategic Advisor (Data Resources)
Dr B. Neale, University of Leeds
Dr J. Elliott, Institute of Education
Professor J. Curtice, University of Strathclyde
Professor L. Paterson, University of Edinburgh and ESRC Research Resources Board
Professor J. Holland, South Bank University
Professor J. Golding, University of Bristol
Professor H. Joshi, Institute of Education
Professor N. Buck, University of Essex
Dr C. Stone, Medical Research Council
Professor H.P. Blossfeld, University of Bamberg
Professor C. Skinner, University of Southampton
Mr N. McIvor, Department for Work and Pensions
Dr J. Scott, University of Cambridge
Mr M. Bright, Economic and Social Research Council
Ms J. Dobbs, Office for National Statistics
Ms E. Rayner, Department for Work and Pensions
Professor Diana Kuh, Medical Research Council
Professor John Bynner, University of London
Ms L. Conaghan, University of Warwick and Committee Secretary

Apologies: Professor M. Wadsworth, University College London
Dr B. Maughan, King's College London
Professor K. Kiernan, University of York
Professor R. Blundell, Institute for Fiscal Studies and University College London
Mr I. Bell, Department for Work and Pensions
Professor J. Gershuny, University of Essex
Mr J. Neathey, Economic and Social Research Council
Professor S. Dex, Institute of Education
Professor P. Boyle, University of St Andrews
Ms J. Barelli, Office for National Statistics

Prior to the meeting, Professor Hans Peter Blossfeld (Chair of Sociology, Otto Friedrich University Bamberg) made a presentation relevant to the strategic development of longitudinal studies, detailing recent methodological developments and research findings based on comparative longitudinal surveys. He also outlined plans for the structure of a major new longitudinal research resource in Germany, the *German Educational Panel*.

Following his presentation Professor Elias thanked Professor Blossfeld on behalf of all other committee members and opened the formal business of the committee.

1. **Minutes of the last meeting (Item NLSC/01/2007, previously circulated)**

01/07 With the exception of minute 60/06 (see minute 05/07), these were accepted as an accurate record of the business of the meeting.

2. **Matters arising from the minutes**

02/07 *Minute 53/06 Launch of the National Data Strategy*

Peter Elias described plans for the launch of the National Data Strategy, scheduled for 25th June and to be incorporated into the ONS GSS conference. Sue Duncan (HM Treasury and new chair of the UK Data Forum) and David Rhind (former chair) will participate.

03/07 *Minute 58/06 ALSPAC Update*

Professor Jean Golding reported that the ALSPAC website is being re-developed and, at present, is unable to add links to other longitudinal studies

04/07 *Minute 60/06 UKHLS and qualitative research*

Dr Brenda Neale provided an update on *Timescapes* (the qualitative longitudinal study).

The chair informed members that the ESRC Research Resources Board had stipulated that the PI team for this study should seek to find ways in which the qualitative investigations could be linked with the developing UKHLS. Brenda Neale agreed to report further progress on this issue at the next meeting of the NLSC.

(Action: BN)

Angela Dale suggested that it might be useful to include a session on *Timescapes* within the forthcoming 2008 Methods Festival. She agreed to pursue this with the Festival organiser.

(Action: AD)

05/07 *Minute 60/06 – Child of Our Time*

Members were notified of an amendment to minutes of the previous meeting: the child psychologist is John Oates (not Oakes as minuted).

Heather Joshi gave an update on *Child of Our Time* (the BBC series which had offered significant material for scientific study). John Oates has produced a report on what can be done with this material and had recommended that the films be established for research access in an archive outside the BBC. However, the BBC has subsequently confirmed that they must keep this material under their control. The ESRC had agreed to convene a meeting with BBC and the CLS to determine what kind of access arrangements would be acceptable. Further information would be given at the next meeting of the NLSC.

(Action: HJ/JE)

06/07 *Minute 62/06 – ALSPAC*

The chair gave members a brief account of further developments in this area. A proposal from the ALSPAC team, to prepare a series of data files from the ALSPAC database, had been received by the ESRC RRB and reviewed at its meeting in March. The Board had agreed to go ahead with this proposal in a staged and contingent manner – determining first what work needed to be done to create the various data files, to examine the extent of the domains covered by each files before moving to the stage where the relevant files would be created and submitted to the Data Archive. Further information would be provided at the next meeting of the NLSC.

(Action: PE/JG)

07/07 *Minute 6. Update on development in government longitudinal surveys*

Amendment to minutes, as below:

- No. 3 Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study - *new study recently launched*;
- No 19 Longitudinal Survey of Refugees – *planned study by Home Office under review*

3. Commissioning the UK Household Longitudinal Study

08/07 Michael Bright gave members an update on progress with commissioning the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). Following the successful bid to the Large Facilities Capital Fund (LFCF), the ESRC had allocated an additional £3m to the £12.5 available via the LFCF. This allocation was a transfer of funding previously agreed by the RRB as partial funding for a longitudinal study of ethnic minorities, with the requirement that the UKHLS should provide sufficient information for research on ethnic minority groups and on issues relevant to ethnic minority communities. In November 2006 tenders were invited for the PI team to direct the study. Proposals were received in January, a PI team was selected and a funding recommendation from the RRB was made to the Council of the ESRC in March.

09/07 The PI team for the study had been appointed and work was now focussed on the invitation to tender for the survey organisation which would assist with the collection of information from study respondents. The current timetable would see the successful survey organisation appointed by late summer 2007. A significant effort was currently underway to engage in topic consultation, setting up meetings and publishing online the results of topic consultations.

10/07 Members agreed that it was important to engage the social science community with this new study at the soonest possible moment. Interested parties were invited to suggest events, activities, networks, etc. that could be used for this purpose.
(Action: all members)

11/07 Joy Dobbs outlined discussions that were being held between the Office for National Statistics, the Treasury and other key government departments. These had addressed the issue of whether or not there would be any support for ‘top-slicing’ of government department research budgets for funding the development of longitudinal studies. The outcome of the discussions would be known over the next few months and would be reported at the next meeting.
(Action: JD)

12/07 In addition to these efforts to coordinate the long term funding of longitudinal studies, efforts were continuing to assess the extent to which government departments would be in a position to make a contribution to funding the UKHLS between 2008 and 2010. The chair reported that, during May, it was hoped that the co-funding arrangements from a range of government departments would become clearer. This would help clarify the design of the study, particularly the sample structure, modes of data collection at each wave and the overall length of the interview.

4. Birth Cohort Studies – assessing the scientific need for a 2011/2012 cohort study (NLSC/02/2007 – *previously circulated*)

13/07 The chair reported that work to establish the scientific need for a new cohort study had been divided into two linked parts. The first part would investigate the scientific case for a new cohort study – determining the research evidence that had been obtained from earlier cohorts and providing the potential evidence base for a bid for a new study. Contingent upon establishing the need for a new study, the second part would consider the relationship between the new cohort and the UKHLS. Bids had been invited for work

on the first study. The Expert Group for Panel and Cohort Studies had met and had invited Professor John Bynner to conduct the first of these studies.

14/07 Professor Bynner gave an update on the early stages of the work that had been conducted for this study. The team which had contributed to the bid included Mike Wadsworth, Harvey Goldstein, Sue Purdon, Barbara Maughan and Bob Michael. A Consultative Panel of experts, with 25 members, had been set up and had held its first meeting.

15/07 The chair invited all members of the National Longitudinal Strategy Committee to assist Professor Bynner by providing their views on the potential benefits arising from a new cohort study.

(Action: all members)

5. Governance arrangements for longitudinal studies (NLSC/03/2007)

16/07 Caro Stone gave an update on work carried out by the MRC, Wellcome Trust and the ESRC to develop a common framework for governance arrangements for longitudinal studies. This work had been driven by the need to set in place lasting arrangements for good and efficient governance and access arrangements for the complex collections of electronic data, biological samples, genetic markers and health data that now constituted the research databases provided by some of the major longitudinal studies.

17/07 Members discussed the progress that was being made in this area and offered the following observations:

- There should be no distinction in these frame work arrangement between cohort studies and other longitudinal studies
- The concept of ‘stewardship’ was central to these arrangements. How would stewards be identified and what were the incentives for individuals and/or institutions to provide stewardship?
- The arrangements were silent about the rewards associated with the management of large scale longitudinal data resources. The ESRC needed to consider this in relationship with the governance of these resources.
- That the funding agencies should build on existing governance arrangements wherever possible.

6. Access arrangements: the proposed Secure Data Service and Administrative Data Services (NLSC/04/2007)

18/07 The chair presented this document, describing the proposals to develop two new data services: the *Secure Data Service* and an *Administrative Data Service*.

19/07 The *Secure Data Service* would be designed to provide ‘virtual access’ to data sources which were currently only available in ‘safe-settings’. Examples of these include versions of the birth cohort studies which contained detailed geographical information, or data sets which had become disclosive of individual identities through data linkage. The service would provide secure access to authenticated users, with access from approved locations. It would operate in a manner similar to the Virtual Microdata Laboratory run by the Office for National Statistics.

20/07 The second proposal seeks to establish an *Administrative Data Service*. This facility would act as an information and guidance service, assisting researchers who wished to find out about and gain access to large scale administrative data resources for research purposes. It would also provide a screening mechanism for compliance with the procedures for research access established by the holders of such resources. It would operate in a similar

fashion to CELSIUS – the service which provides advice to academic researchers who wished to use the England and Wales Census Longitudinal Study and assistance with the access arrangements operated by the ONS.

- 21/07 Members discussed the two proposals and raised a number of questions:
- Funding horizon – would the services be funded for long enough for them to be recognised and used sufficiently by the research community?
 - International use of the facilities – how would researchers outside the UK gain access to and make use of these facilities?
 - Selection of ‘secure’ data sets – what steps would be taken to prevent overuse of the Secure Data Service as a shorthand way of providing some form of access whilst avoiding the risks associated with other forms of data release?
 - Relationship between the two services – how would this be promoted/managed?

22/07 The chair replied to these questions, stating that they would be considered carefully in the redrafting of the Invitations to Tender (ITTs) for the services. The ITTs would be issued simultaneously via a two stage commissioning process. Consultations were continuing with a number of government departments, the Office for National Statistics and the Information Commissioner to ensure that, once the services were established, good cooperative working relationships with these bodies could be achieved.

7. Update on development in government longitudinal surveys (NLSC/05/2007)

23/07 Joy Dobbs gave an update on developments in government longitudinal surveys. It had been suggested at earlier meetings that the information contained in these regular updates should be placed on the ONS website in advance of the meeting. It was reported that this was under investigation, but may be affected by the redesign of the ONS website. Further information about this possibility would be reported at the next meeting of the NLSC.

(Action: JD)

24/07 Attention was drawn to the two new studies under development:

Disability Longitudinal Survey – an ITT has been issued for the development work.

25/07 *Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study* – recently launched. This now raised the possibility of developing closer links between the England and Wales LS, the Scottish LS and the Northern Ireland LS.

26/07 It was reported that several studies had been cancelled or were under review. These were prospective studies under consideration by the Home Office. A review of research plans and data requirements lay behind these decisions.

8. Any Other Business

27/07 No other business was laid before the committee.

9. Date of next meeting

28/07 It was agreed that it would be useful to consider the reports commissioned from Professors Bynner and Hobcraft at the next meeting of the NLSC. A trawl for dates towards the end of October would be conducted.

(Action: LC)