

MEETING OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE ON LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Thursday 20th January, 2005

The Work Foundation, 3 Carlton Terrace, London 10.30-16.30

- Present:** Professor H.P. Blossfeld, University of Bamberg
Professor N. Buck, University of Essex
Professor A. Dale, University of Manchester
Professor P. Elias, University of Warwick and ESRC Strategic Advisor (Data Resources)
Professor J. Curtice, University of Strathclyde
Dr J. Elliott, Institute of Education
Professor J. Gershuny, University of Essex
Professor H. Joshi, Institute of Education
Professor K. Kiernan, London School of Economics
Ms J. Martin, Office for National Statistics
Professor J. Holland, South Bank University
Professor P. Boyle, University of St Andrews
Professor R. Blundell, Institute for Fiscal Studies and University College London
Professor M. Wadsworth, University College London
Mr N. Mclvor, Department for Work and Pensions
Dr J. Scott, University of Cambridge
Dr C. Stone, Medical Research Council
Professor J. Golding, University of Bristol
- Ex-officio:** Ms N. Beaumont, Economic and Social Research Council
Mr J. Neathey, Economic and Social Research Council
Mr M. Bright, Economic and Social Research Council
- In attendance:** Professor J. Nazroo, University College London (For Item 5)
Dr L. Feinstein, Institute of Education
- Apologies:** Professor S. Dex, Institute of Education
Professor B. Maughan, King's College London
Professor C. Skinner, University of Southampton
Professor L. Paterson, University of Edinburgh and ESRC Research Resources Board

The meeting commenced at 10.30 with Professor Elias introducing Professors Boyle, Holland and Golding, Mr Mclvor and Drs Stone and Feinstein as new committee members and welcoming Professor Nazroo who was present for agenda item 5.

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

- 1/05 Professor Golding requested a change of wording to correct an inaccuracy in minute 11/04. The fourth sentence should be modified to read 'It was noted that the study had insufficient core funding for data collection'.
- 2/05 Jean Martin requested a change of wording, previously notified to the Chair, to minute 80/04. This should read 'The committee was moving to an integrated statistical system which ~~would provide~~ has the potential to bring together information on the entire population'.
- 3/05 Dr Elliott pointed out that the reference to the NCDS in minute 31/04 should be to the MCS.

4/05 With these minor corrections, the minutes of the meeting of 15th July 2004 were accepted as a fair and accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters arising

5//05 Minute 8/04: Professor Elias stated that the proposed study on longitudinal 'following rules', which he had discussed with Professor Dex, had not been pursued due to staffing constraints. Any work to be undertaken in this area would now have to be funded from his budget, not from the ULSC. The Committee noted that comparison across cohorts was a very important area. It was agreed that any work to be developed in this area should focus on understanding the differences between cohorts, providing guidance for researchers who wished to engage in cross cohort comparisons.
ACTION: Professor Elias to prepare note for consideration at next meeting of the NLSC.

6/05 Minute 15/04: a paper detailing developments in government longitudinal studies had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be discussed as agenda item 8.

7/05 Minute 25/04: Professor Kiernan reminded the Chair that she had supplied contact details for Jeff Evans (US National Institute of Child Health and Development) following discussions about widening the Committee's membership to include expertise from the United States.
ACTION: Professor Elias to consider budgetary implications and report back to next meeting.

8/05 Minute 34/04: Professor Elias reported that progress was being made on governance arrangements for cohort studies and this would be raised at a future meeting if necessary.

9/05 Minute 36/04: to be covered under Agenda Item 10.

10/05 Minute 48/04: Professor Elias reported that the UK Data Forum planned to meet on 10th March and the issue of data access is on the agenda for the first meeting. This item was also to be discussed as agenda item 11.

11/05 Minute 57/04: Professor Elias noted that expertise and knowledge associated with developments relating to the Scottish Longitudinal study is now represented on the committee via Professor Boyle.

12/05 Minute 94/04: action carried over for Professor Buck to invite Professor Holland to give seminar at ULSC.
ACTION: Professor Buck.

13/05 Minute 106/04: Longitudinal study of homelessness - Professor Dale noted this issue could be included in any review arising from item 10 on the agenda.

14/05 The Committee agreed in principle to place all future agreed minutes and related papers on the web. This would not include papers and discussions related to matters that the committee had been requested to treat as confidential.
ACTION: Professor Elias.

15/05 It was agreed that a set of minutes of the meeting would be sent out shortly before the date of the next meeting.
ACTION: Professor Elias.

3. Terms of Reference for the NLSC

16/05 The Terms of Reference were modified following the last meeting and further circulated. The revised Terms of Reference were accepted.

4. NLSC Membership

17/05 Paper NLSC/03/2005 listed the current membership of the NLSC and gave brief details of members research interests. Professor Elias asked members to contact him if research interests or contact details listed for them were incorrect. It was also agreed that this information would be made available on the web and could include links to individual websites.

ACTION: all NLSC Members to check details and send revisions /updates to the Chair.

18/05 Professor Elias suggested that each NLSC member could nominate a deputy. While members should make every attempt to attend meetings in person, in the event of illness or last minute and unforeseen difficulties in attending, their views and expertise could be represented via their nominated deputy. Nominations would have to be approved by the Chair in advance of attendance at a meeting.

ACTION: all NLSC members to consider and put nominations forward to the Chair if appropriate.

5. Developing a longitudinal survey of ethnic minorities

[Professor James Nazroo attended the meeting for this item]

19/05 Professor Nazroo introduced his papers (NLSC/04/2005 and NLSC/05/2005) explaining the background to the scoping study he was undertaking on a potential longitudinal study of ethnic minorities, which builds on earlier work undertaken by Dr David Owen and Dr Anne Green at the University of Warwick. He explained that this work was being supported by the ESRC and ONS, and that he would report his findings to the Research Resources Board at the end of April 2005. He noted the key elements of his study included consideration of the following:

- what issues in relation to ethnicity are particularly relevant for understanding via a *longitudinal* as opposed to *cross sectional* survey?
- what information academics and policy makers need to find out, and what survey design would enable this information to be gathered?
- what data are already available and how this survey might complement or fill gaps in coverage?

20/05 The Committee discussed these issues in detail. It was noted that there would be some difficulty in undertaking a survey of this nature, as there would be a need to give a sense of ownership not only to the potential users of the data, but also to the funders.

21/05 It was agreed that a critical question for the scoping study to address was whether the survey would be focused exclusively on what might be identified as ethnic minority groups, or whether it would be inclusive of what might termed 'white comparison groups'. Members agreed that having the ability to undertake some form of comparison would be important, and that a critical question for the scoping study to address would be whether this comparison could be found from within the survey structure itself, or through comparison with existing surveys. It was queried whether all participants in the survey would be asked the same questions, or whether it was envisaged that distinct groups within the sample would be asked to respond to different questionnaires and/or different sub sets of questions within questionnaires. Professor Nazroo indicated that it would be the former, for comparative purposes.

- 22/05 Further discussion also related to the likely survey design, as it would be important in determining what information could be obtained from the data and how they could be analysed. For example; a particular design issue relates to the unit under observation - was the purpose of the survey to enhance understanding about particular 'groups' or individuals? Would the sampling strategy target households or individuals? The question of what elements of the survey would be prospective and what would be retrospective was also raised.
- 23/05 Ms Martin noted that there was considerable interest in the area of this study from a number of government departments who may be willing to co-fund in some form. She therefore stressed the importance of getting the timing of future plans in this area agreed upon at the earliest possible opportunity so that funding arrangements could be set in place.
- 24/05 It was agreed an open consultation meeting on this issue might be useful and appropriate.
ACTION: Professor Dale to discuss further with Professor Nazroo and to report on plans at the next meeting.
- 25/05 Professor Nazroo noted that he hoped to revise the documents in the meeting papers and would circulate this to members of the committee as part of his consultation. It was agreed that members might at this point discuss some of the issues raised with Professor Nazroo in more detail where appropriate.
ACTION: Professor Nazroo to circulate revised documents; **all NLSC members** to provide feedback to Professor Nazroo.

6. Developing a qualitative longitudinal study.

- 26/05 The Chair reminded members that the ESRC Research Resources Board had made £3.5m available for the qualitative research programme, from which about £3m would be devoted to the development of qualitative longitudinal research resources over the period 2006-2009. Professor Holland had won the bid to undertake a feasibility study. He stressed the importance attached to the development of longitudinal resources which engaged with and employed a more qualitative approach to methods of data collection and analysis, citing the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) at the University of Sussex as an example of such a resource. As a first step towards integrating qualitative perspectives into the existing framework for longitudinal studies, he had invited Professor Holland to membership of the NLSC.
- 27/05 Professor Holland introduced the papers outlining the stage reached in the feasibility study (NLSC/06/2005 and NLSC/07/2005) and summarised her recommendations for a 'nested model' – a collaboration between a number of research teams working on related topics. Substantive areas of research could include the life course and family life. .
- 28/05 The committee had a discussion about issues raised in the two papers provided by Professor Holland. These included:
 - the issue of data confidentiality with respect to qualitative research resources;
 - the principle of 'data sharing', which some members felt was problematic within the qualitative research paradigm.
- 29/05 Some committee members expressed their disappointment with the idea that the proposed qualitative study was not going to be designed around existing longitudinal studies. It was argued that such an approach would maximise the value of qualitative data by providing a rich contextual framework, as well as building upon the existing longitudinal research base.
- 30/05 Committee members agreed that there were a significant number of important issues that would probably benefit from more focussed attention. The possibility was raised of holding a half-day

meeting to which members could contribute their ideas on issues related to sample design, anonymity and data sharing in the context of the developing Qualitative Longitudinal Research Programme. It was also agreed that the topic would be discussed further at the next meeting of the National Longitudinal Strategy Committee.

ACTION: Professor Elias to see who is interested and who can contribute to such a meeting.

7. Developing access to the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children

31/05 Professor Golding gave an introduction to the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, based around a cohort of children born in the area formerly known as Avon during 1990 and 1991. Although the study was primarily focussed on children, it contained a significant amount of detail on parents and others who interacted with the study children. Because of the sensitive nature of data contained in the study and the geographical concentration of respondents, data were not generally available for research purposes via the Data Archive. Funding for the study had been predominantly from the Medical Research Council. An application had been made to the National Institute for Child Development in the US, for additional funding to facilitate data collection as the cohort moved through the final stages of their compulsory education.

32/05 Professor Elias expressed the view that the timing of the ALSPAC cohort, between the 1970 cohort and the Millennium cohort, provided an important additional resource for cross-cohort comparisons, albeit with data which were geographically less distributed than was the case for the other birth cohort studies.

33/05 The Committee discussed how the social science community could become more involved with ALSPAC, via improved access arrangements to these data and further information on the relationship between this birth cohort and other birth cohort studies. Dr Feinstein and Professor Golding were asked if they could envisage some new form of access to these data (e.g. some data being deposited in archives).

34/05 Professor Golding stated that, in principle at least, it should be possible to define subsets of ALSPAC data which could be deposited at the Data Archive. However, there would be resource implications associated with the production of such subsets. If these issues could be resolved, then the ALSPAC representatives stated that they would be able to cooperate with moves to improve access for social science research using these data. It was however, agreed that any improved access would exclude genetic information.

35/05 Dr Scott questioned whether some of the NLSC funding could go to the scoping study on access issues and then proposals go to RRB. The Committee agreed that this would be very useful.

ACTION: Professor Elias/Jean Martin/Jeremy Neathey to meet with the ALSPAC representatives, with a view towards commissioning a scoping study.

8. Developments in government longitudinal surveys

36/05 Ms Martin introduced this item, stating that at the last meeting it had been agreed that the cross-departmental Longitudinal Data Co-ordination Group (LDCG) would report on its activities to the NLSC. A paper providing information on government-funded longitudinal studies had been prepared by the ONS Longitudinal Data Strategy and Coordination Team and circulated on the 18th January.

37/05 Members discussed the paper, noting the following:

- The paper had not included government funded longitudinal studies conducted specifically within the devolved administrations.

- The proposed new Wealth and Assets Survey may be of significant interest to academic researchers. The potential for ESRC involvement would be followed at a future date when plans for this survey were further advanced.
- The 'Keeping Track' database (<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/keeptrack/search/basic.php>) could be updated to include new surveys listed in the paper

ACTION: Ms Martin (or LDCG representative) to update the paper for each future NLSC meeting. Professor Buck to check status of "Keeping Track" database and to report on this at the next meeting of the NLSC.

9. Developments in longitudinal administrative data linking.

38/05 Mr McIvor reported on the longitudinal database which had been formed by linking the records of DWP clients who were in DWP benefits programme in April 1998. The resulting administrative data base (the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study - WPLS) covers all individuals who have been DWP clients since that date. A unique person identifier was used to continue to update the database. Additional work had been undertaken to link Inland Revenue information (tax credits). It was further reported that the aim was to link Housing benefit data by 2005.

39/05 He informed the committee that there were legal guidelines governing the uses to which these data could be put. It was also stated that data are anonymised by the DWP team. Other relevant matters for consideration were;

- At present DWP Contractors are the only groups outside the DWP who are allowed access.
- An internal (DWP) Ethics Committee has been formed.
- The WPLS currently holds more than 110 million records about individuals, making it a valuable resource in its own right and important source of information for survey data linking.

40/05 Professor Blundell informed the committee that 90% of respondents in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing had agreed to linkage procedures. The WPLS offered interesting opportunities for such data linking.

41/05 Members of the Committee queried when researchers might have some form of access to the WPLS and they were informed that this issue was being investigated further. In general, it was agreed that further discussion was needed and that this item would be considered in more detail at the next meeting of the NLSC.

ACTION: Professor Elias liaises with the DWP on the issue of access to the WPLS and to report back at the next meeting of the NLSC.

10. A strategic review of longitudinal studies

42/05 The Chair introduced a paper outlining areas that could form the basis of a strategic review of longitudinal studies in the UK, with a view to ensuring that the research resource that together they comprise continues to be world class, and continues to facilitate the very best social science. He explained that this review might be undertaken in the form of a consultation exercise or consultancy. Key areas for consideration that he highlighted included whether there were gaps in current provision and whether the studies currently supported by the ESRC (the BHPS and the Cohort Studies) should continue to be supported in the long term, and if so in what format. An important consideration would be what needs to be done to ensure the longitudinal research resources remain the highest possible quality. He emphasised that this paper was a document to prompt discussion, and was principally 'first thoughts' from himself and the paper's other author, Professor Lindsay Paterson, rather than a definitive statement on what the review might look like.

- 43/05 The suggestion that the strategic view should encompass international comparisons was welcomed by the Committee, although it was noted that in other respects the range of issues outlined in the paper was somewhat broad, and could be focused down. In this respect, it was noted in that section 3, on the subject matter of surveys, was of particular importance.
- 44/05 The Committee agreed that the longitudinal studies mentioned in the paper were of immense value, and it would be important for any review to address what would be lost if they ceased to be supported. It was noted that any review would have to be theory driven; identifying what might be seen as gaps in knowledge as well as gaps in resources. It was agreed that the review would need to look at the extent to which the panel and cohort studies were currently being utilised, and suggest ways of encouraging researchers and students to make better use of them.
- 45/05 Some discussion centred on whether more than one review might be needed – for example focusing on one particular study (or type of study) at a time. However, it was noted that if elements of the review were disassociated it may be difficult to build the overview picture that was required.
- 46/05 Mr Neathey noted that any review would be invaluable in the forward planning process for the ESRC, as the plans for inputs to the 2006 Spending Review bidding process were already underway. Ms Martin stated that government funders of longitudinal studies would welcome being involved in the review, and stressed that they too were also driven by the timetable relating to the spending review.
- 47/05 It was noted that Professor John Bynner was undertaking a forward look study for the JCLR (Joint Centre for Longitudinal Research), and would be presenting findings in early February. Any NLSC review should link in to this.
ACTION: Professor Joshi to inform Professor Elias of further details.
- 48/05 Overall, there was concern that the review would go to a single consultant, as it was agreed that the review should have clear ownership by the Committee. It was suggested that a sub group of the Committee should take the review forward.
ACTION: A small subgroup of the NLSC, comprising Professors Elias, Kiernan, Paterson and Dr Scott, together with Ms Beaumont (ESRC) would draft tender documentation for this study.
11. **Linking social science and bio medical records – ethics, confidentiality and access for research purposes.**
- 49/05 Dr Caroline Stone gave the committee an update on various activities supported by the MRC relevant to this committee e.g. the medical sweep of the National Child Development Study and Biobank. She discussed confidentiality in medical research and ways of obtaining broad consent to allow access to research and data linking. She stated that it would be beneficial to have a co-ordinated view from both ESRC and MRC-funded researchers on how to develop access arrangements for such data sets and would welcome input from the committee.
- 50/05 The Biomedical survey of the 1958 cohort (NCDS) was discussed in some detail. Specific problems identified by data users and the body responsible for safeguarding these data (Centre for Longitudinal Studies) were as follows:
- Detailed medical history has been collected - these data are particularly sensitive.
 - The dates of birth of cohort members are widely known. Together with detailed geo-coded information, this could lead to individuals being identified.
- 51/05 Current funding, covering both the data collection and the oversight arrangements relating to this biomedical sweep, ends in 2007. It was agreed that before this date, it would be of critical importance to have some formal consideration and agreement on related ongoing arrangements (both practical and advisory) to ensure disclosure risk would be minimised. Possible solutions suggested were:

- Analysis in a safe setting (e.g. the ONS 'Virtual Microdata Laboratory'), strict vetting of applications for research using bespoke data sets.
- Developing licence arrangements between data providers and users which bound them to an agreement on use, data protection, data storage, destruction and general good practise.
- Changing serial numbers, thereby preventing data linkage by users who already have access to earlier sweeps.

52/05 A general discussion was held about a variety of issues relating to access and confidentiality – for example, what would happen if a researcher left an institution yet retained a copy of sensitive data? What would be the nature of the penalties that could be imposed for breach of conditions governing access arrangements?

53/05 Professor Dale informed members that she was working with at the Data Archive and with the Office for National Statistics to seek a resolution to some of these problems. In part these might relate to the requirements and regulations that a University/organisation could place on their employees through, for example, ethical procedures and codes of conduct. In this respect it would be important for researchers accessing data to have an institutional affiliation.

ACTION: Professors Elias and Dale would take these issues forward – specifically to raise the issue of access, confidentiality and disclosure at the first meeting of the UK Data Forum and to pursue mechanisms for the release of sensitive data for research purposes with the Office for National Statistics.

12. **AOB:**

54/05 Members asked what plans were being made to develop the NLSC Website.

ACTION: Professor Elias to present details of website development at the next meeting of the Committee

13. **Date of next meeting** Tuesday 17th May, 2005

List of abbreviations

ALSPAC	Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children
BHPS	British Household Panel Study
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ELSA	English Longitudinal Study of Ageing
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
JCLR	Joint Centre for Longitudinal Research
LDCG	Longitudinal Data Coordination Group
MCS	Millennium Cohort Study
MOA	Mass Observation Archive
MRC	Medical Research Council
NCDS	National Child Development Study
NLSC	National Strategy Committee on Longitudinal Studies
ONS	Office for National Statistics
RRB	Research Resource Board
ULSC	United Kingdom Centre for Longitudinal Studies
WPLS	Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study