

John Bynner – Executive Editor

At a time when investment in longitudinal and life course research is threatened by cutbacks due to the economic downturn, the findings have never been more necessary. Polarising pressures coupled with accelerating technological change, face each new generation with challenges in the direction the life course is going to take. These demand increasing personal, family and community resources as protection. But the dependency that this may engender is also seen as problematic - sometimes part of the problem rather than the solution.

The impact of these economic, social and policy shifts cascades through communities, enabling those who can undertake the necessary life course investment through education, to take advantage of new opportunities as they arise, while poverty, social exclusion and reduced physical and psychological well-being is experienced by others. Only through monitoring not just population change, but the lives of individuals and groups under new conditions, can we learn how the life course is changing. Countries need the evidence as a basis for the prescriptions that are needed for moderating and ameliorating the worst effects, while identifying indicators for boosting positive outcomes. Longitudinal and life course studies build the knowledge base from which the evidence comes.

This issue of *LLCS* demonstrates some of the range of disciplinary interest that the field of life course study embraces, with this time generally more of a health focus. The four papers span physical and psychological health, education and economics. Two have a major historical component in making comparisons between cohorts inter-generationally across time. And one uses longitudinal studies conducted from 1936 to 1963 with children in Scotland, as offering a 'quasi experimental' opportunity to assess the effect on engagement in post-school education and later occupational status, of earlier education reforms. This underlines the point that history that makes up the life course studies discipline set.

Topics addressed in this issue are: prediction of unequal educational outcomes from birth and early social characteristics; childhood socio-economic position and adult psychological stress; sex difference in the relationship between childhood

hearing impairment and adult obesity; post-school education and social class destinations. The issue has a significant international flavour, with Sweden, New Zealand, England and Scotland all represented by authors. One study uses longitudinal data resources from another country to pursue the scientific questions of interest.

A novel feature this time is the publication (as a separate supplement) of the abstracts of papers and posters presented at this year's 5th Conference of Epidemiological Longitudinal Studies in Europe (CELSE2010), held in Paphos, Cyprus in October. In supplying an overview of the uses of longitudinal studies in scientific and related areas, the 400 abstracts included are not only a testament to the organisation and productivity of the conference, but comprise a lasting resource of much value to longitudinal and life course researchers everywhere.

All these matters are pertinent to an important event referred to in the "News, Notes and Resources" section. The September 2010 conference of the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (SLLS) held in Cambridge was its first, and offered the opportunity to hold the first General Meeting, at which the Society was formally established and its constitution ratified. The significance of this development for the *LLCS* journal is that, during 2011, when the grant from the Nuffield Foundation, which 'pump-primed' the development of *LLCS*, comes to an end, the Society will take over full responsibility. Policies for revenue-raising are underway, including increasing the membership of the Society, which now includes corporate membership. A major recruitment drive will shortly be underway.

The range of the Society's remit will be evident from the abstracts of the papers and posters presented in Cambridge, to be published as a supplement with the next *LLCS* issue early in the new year. So, all told, longitudinal and life course research has never been more needed while the infrastructure and communications machinery needed to support it is steadily being put in place.

The invitation to *LLCS* readers is to participate in this exciting venture by joining SLLS, if you have not yet done so, and to encourage your colleagues to follow suit. This goes hand in hand with expanding the journal readership, through which

EDITORIAL

major recruitment to SLLS, and hence benefit to the journal, will continue to come. Content for future issues, some stimulated by the CELSE and SLLS

conferences, is steadily building. Make sure you and your colleagues are in the lead by adding to it!