

# NEWS, EVENTS AND RESOURCES

## News and Resources

### The Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies

In September 2009 a new international learned society was established by the think tank Longview - the Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies, to which Longview has handed over responsibility for this journal.

The Society is multi-disciplinary in nature, bringing together members across the health, behavioural and social sciences who have a shared interest in longitudinal and life course research. In September 2010 the Society held an extremely successful inaugural conference at Clare College, Cambridge. The conference provided the attendees with an opportunity to meet and to pool and exchange ideas. The Society is now planning its second annual conference, which will be hosted by the University of Bielefeld, Germany on 26-28 September 2011.

The Society currently has nearly 200 members worldwide, and is actively seeking to enlist more. Membership of the Society offers opportunities to:

- make collaborative contacts throughout the global longitudinal research community
- contribute papers and symposia to the Society's annual conference, and attend the conference for a reduced fee
- make nominations, be nominated and vote in elections for the future President and Executive Committee\* of the Society who are also the Society's trustees
- participate in online policy debates and forums
- access capacity building initiatives, including our annual summer school, online master classes and methodological and longitudinal practice workshops
- automatic free registration to receive our peer-reviewed international journal, Longitudinal and Life Course Studies

You may like to consider individual membership or, if your colleagues also have an interest in longitudinal and life course research, corporate membership. There is also a reduced membership fee available for students.

For full information on the Society's activities and for the online application form to join, please visit the Society website at [www.slls.org.uk](http://www.slls.org.uk)



\*The Society's Executive is: **Heather Joshi**, President (Institute of Education, London), **Tom Jupp**, Hon Treasurer (Institute of Education, London), **Elizabeth Webb**, Hon Secretary (Imperial College, London); Committee Members: **David Blane** (Imperial College London), **John Bynner** (Longview), **Elizabeth Cooksey** (Ohio State University), **Walter Heinz** (University of Bremen), **Amanda Sacker** (University of Essex), **Ingrid Schoon** (Institute of Education, London), **Tom Schuller** (Longview).

### Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study



*Understanding Society* is the successor household panel study to the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) which ran for eighteen years from 1991 to 2008. *Understanding Society*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and a consortium of government departments, is designed to provide high quality longitudinal data to answer research and policy needs over the coming decades and represents a significant investment in the social sciences in the UK. Managed by the same team responsible for the BHPS at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Essex, the study is being conducted to the highest standards of best practice within survey methodology and the methodology of conducting longitudinal surveys. Fieldwork is conducted by The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

The future of this prestigious and important study was secured with the refunding of *Understanding Society* in 2010 so that data collection up to and including wave 5 is now in place. In February 2011, a volume of first findings using data from the first year of the study will be published, promising just a taste of the rich and varied analysis that is possible using *Understanding Society* data. A Special Issue of the LLCS journal

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devoted to longitudinal analysis using *Understanding Society* and the BHPS is planned within the next twelve months, marking the start of what we are sure will be a wealth of interesting and important substantive research using the data.

*Understanding Society* went into the field in January 2009 and began the third wave of data collection in January 2011. The key features of the design reflect its scientific rationale and are intended to generate major innovations in scientific research. The study is distinctive in having a:

- **Large sample size** of 40,000 households to allow more fine-grained analysis
- **Household focus** with data collected on all members aged 10 and over
- **Annual interview** enabling analysis of short-term and long-term dynamics of change
- **Full age range sample** complementing age-focused cohort studies in the UK and providing a unique look at behaviours and transitions in mid-life and throughout the life course
- **Innovation Panel** for methodological research and survey development
- **Multi-topic design** to meet a wide range of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research needs
- **Ethnic minority research** agenda and inclusion of a boost sample of ethnic minority groups to support research on ethnic diversity and commonality
- **Collection of biomarkers and health indicators** as a resource for research at the interface of social and biomedical sciences
- **Data linkage to administrative records and geo-coded data** to provide significant new research opportunities where the survey data can be used in combination with administrative data
- **Inclusion of the BHPS sample** within *Understanding Society* from wave 2 to enable continuing longitudinal analysis of the BHPS sample alongside the new samples

The large sample size offers new opportunities to research sub-groups that may be too small for separate analysis on other studies, the UK-wide sample affords new avenues for comparative country, regional and geographic research, and the multi-topic design encourages inter-disciplinary approaches. The Innovation Panel is proving an invaluable resource for methodological research

pushing the boundaries of knowledge within longitudinal survey methodology. An annual competition for experiments to be carried on the Innovation Panel has been established and is advertised on the [Understanding Society](#) website.

Two areas of emphasis are support for research on ethnicity and identity, and health and bio-measure collection.

## Ethnic Minority Research

There has been no dedicated national survey of Britain's main ethnic minority groups since 1994, and there has never been a panel survey in which substantial numbers of minority group members have been followed from year to year. Ethnicity has therefore been a core element of *Understanding Society* from the start. Ethnic diversity and disadvantage, and issues of adaptation, opportunity and inclusion, are of wide general interest and are highly salient for research and policy purposes. The ethnic minority boost sample provides a sufficiently large sample of each of five key ethnic groups to allow these groups to be analysed separately (and compared with each other). The boost is designed to achieve an additional 1,000 individual interviews from members of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Caribbean and Black African groups. All those of mixed background are included as are other minority groups including Chinese, Turkish, other Asian and Middle Eastern.

## Bio-measure collection

*Understanding Society* is a bio-social survey providing data that will support biomedical and social science research. The addition of bio-measures permits the examination of objective biological, anthropometric and functional measures within a large sample that spans many ages and which can be studied in a household context. The study provides information about social and economic factors that influence health status and the trajectory of health outcomes. The data will enable analysts to assess exposure to and antecedent factors of people's current health status, give a better understanding of disease mechanisms such as gene-environment interactions, allow an assessment of household and socio-economic effects on health, as well as analyses of outcomes using direct assessments. The collection of bio-measures began during wave 2 (2010/11) and will continue throughout wave 3 (2011/12). An estimated 25,000 to 30,000 adults will have these measures.

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Two types of bio-measures are being collected. The first are direct measures including height and weight, waist circumference, bio-electrical impedance, grip strength, blood pressure and pulse rate and lung function. Secondly, biological samples including whole blood, saliva, and dried blood spots. In addition to the bio-measures, wave 3 is collecting cognitive ability/functioning measures for the whole sample. Combined with the questionnaire data, these data will provide a unique resource for inter-disciplinary research across the social and medical sciences.

## Data availability and further information

[Data](#) from the first year of wave 1 of *Understanding Society* is now available. An interim set of data (14,000 of the planned 40,000 households) has been deposited with the [Economic and Social Data Service](#). The full release of wave 1 data is scheduled for October 2011.

A twice-a-year *Understanding Society* e-bulletin giving updates on data release, latest research findings, training events, conferences and workshops that would be of interest to academics undertaking longitudinal research is available. Email [cgarr@essex.ac.uk](mailto:cgarr@essex.ac.uk) if you would like to receive this.

**Click [here](#) for further information about the design and content of the study.**

## Longview activities

Readers may or may not know that this journal originated from discussions within Longview, a think-tank which exists to promote longitudinal and lifecourse studies. Here I give a brief account of the issues and activities in which Longview engages. As a small organisation, we have been very keen to focus our efforts on where we can add value in a way that other organisations cannot.

- 1. Launching new initiatives.** Longview has been behind the launch of two new initiatives in the field of longitudinal and lifecourse studies: this journal, and the Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies, closely associated with it. The SLLS held its inaugural international conference in September 2010 in Cambridge UK; this was a very successful event, with around 160 participants from all over the world, and some very lively exchanges. The conference abstracts are collected in the Supplement to this LLCS issue.
- 2. Making the political case.** We have been concerned to make the case for the value

of longitudinal studies (LS), publicly and privately. This is particularly important at a time of fiscal constraint in most countries. In the UK, where such constraints are particularly severe, we had a meeting with David Willetts, Minister for Science, to press the case. We argued especially for stronger mechanisms for making effective use of existing studies. A paper on the economic arguments for LS prepared for that meeting is available [here](#). We also put the case for strengthening international links on LS. It would be interesting to know of equivalent exchanges in other countries.

- 3. Visualisation.** A strand of work which has aroused considerable interest is that of the visualisation of data. The goal here is to develop ways of dynamically representing, in accessible and interesting formats, data and interpretations which track populations and individuals over time. My sense, confirmed by a wide range of people with whom I have spoken on this, is that better and more imaginative visualisation techniques could play an enormously valuable role in improving communication at many different levels. This would include communication between researchers from different disciplines and methodologies. The Gapminder approach of Hans Roslin in Sweden is a fine example, though clearly we would need to develop a broader approach in order to cope with a wider range of research. Ideally the visualisation would be of results and interpretations as well as data.
- 4. Solving the Problem of Attrition.** This three year project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council is in pursuit of the Longview aim of linking findings of methodological research directly to the improvement of survey practice. It is a two stage project, involving secondary analysis of response data from a number of major UK longitudinal surveys, followed by a field experiment to test hypotheses about the causes of attrition, based on the first stage findings. Interviewer experience, quality and continuity from one wave to the next were targeted. The project is now in a dissemination and reporting phase, to be completed before the next (April 2011) Issue of the journal, which as it happens is a Special Issue devoted to "Attrition

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in US and UK Health and Ageing longitudinal studies". Watch this space and the Longview website!

5. **Events.** As part of our promotion of LS, Longview is mounting a number of events in the UK; we would be most interested in hearing about similar events elsewhere.

- Firstly, we are planning a series of policy-relevant seminars designed to engage policy-makers fully, as distinct from transmitting results to them. The initial two or three will be on aspects of ageing, one in collaboration with the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the London School of Economics
- Secondly, we are collaborating with the British Library and the UK Academy of Social Sciences on a series of events to be held at the British Library in spring and summer 2011. The series is designed in tandem with the BL's exhibition on the Census, and contains events which will appeal to the public and to intending or more experienced researchers
- Thirdly, Longview will host the annual Neville Butler Memorial Lecture in May 2011. We are delighted that this year it will be given by the Rt Hon David Willetts, UK Minister of Science. He is a politician well-known for his genuine commitment to using evidence in policy, and will be speaking on this topic

Longview's research networks are all strongly linked internationally. The field of longitudinal and life course studies has been enormously enriched by comparative studies, and by the exchange of results and approaches across boundaries. Longview

itself as a body is perhaps rather unusual. For that reason we would welcome information from the Journal's readers on equivalent bodies in other countries, with which contact could be established. For more information (or to read my blog) go to [www.longviewuk.com](http://www.longviewuk.com).

**Tom Schuller**, Director  
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## Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development – publication

The Institut de la statistique du Québec published in December 2010, the 'fascicle' entitled *Diverse and Changing Family Structure During Early Childhood*. This [publication](#) is based on data from the Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010). The fascicle covers family transitions experienced by the children and certain aspects of the family environment in which they are growing up, such as the atmosphere between the parents and living or custody arrangements if the parents are separated or divorced. The conclusion suggests further directions for intervention.

The Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD) is being conducted on a representative sample of children born in Québec in the late 1990s. The main goal of this study is to identify the factors that, during early childhood, contribute to social adjustment and success in school.

Printed versions can be requested from the Centre d'information et de documentation of the Institut de la statistique du Québec by sending an email to [cid@stat.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:cid@stat.gouv.qc.ca).

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## Events 2011

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**SRCD** - (Society for Research in Child Development) Biennial Meeting **March 31<sup>st</sup> – April 2<sup>nd</sup>**, Montreal, Canada. <http://www.srcd.org>

**SLLS** - (Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies) Summer School, **July 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>**, University of Antwerp, Belgium, particularly for research post-graduates and post-doctoral fellows. Other sponsors include the European Association of Population Studies and CELLO (Centrum voor Longitudinaal en Levensloop Onderzoek - Research Centre for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies), University of Antwerp. Registration at [www.ua.ac.be/cello/summerschool](http://www.ua.ac.be/cello/summerschool).

**US/BHPS** – (*Understanding Society*/ British Household Panel Study) conference **June 30<sup>th</sup>-July 1<sup>st</sup>**, University of Essex, UK. A call for papers is now open - **deadline for abstracts is 15 March**. Details at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/understanding-society-bhps-conference-2011>.