

## Outline response to 2017 Longitudinal Studies Strategic Review

The ESRC welcomes the report of the independent international Review Panel and is very grateful to the panel members, and particularly the panel chair, Professor Pam Davis-Kean, for their work in delivering a thorough and informative report (<https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/publications/corporate-publications/longitudinal-studies-review-2017/>). The specification requested recommendations to inform our strategy for longitudinal studies and future funding, management and commissioning decisions, including what to continue, to change, to stop and to start.

We are also appreciative of the Steering Group, who provided input to the panel on the UK context, and for all of the other contributions to the review process, including the vast response of the data-using community to the initial consultation in autumn 2016 (<https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/publications/corporate-publications/longitudinal-studies-review-2017/longitudinal-studies-review-consultation/>), and the inputs throughout 2017 from investment directors and a wide range of experts.

A great deal changed over the period of the review, including the rapid development of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), commencement of work on the UKRI Infrastructure Roadmap, and the emergence of new strategic funding opportunities which may be relevant to our plans for building on recommendations made in the Review report.

The report gives a very clear message about the value of the UK's portfolio of longitudinal studies and the importance of ESRC's long-term support for the studies, and the resources required to make use of the data they produce. There continues to be an essential role for longitudinal survey data on nationally representative samples and with broad topic coverage, in combination with administrative and other data.

Data, including that provided by our longitudinal studies, are social science's laboratory. The data investments ESRC supports are the equivalent to the social science community (and a range of other disciplines) of Large Hadron Colliders or Extremely Large Telescopes for other scientific communities. They allow us to record and explore data on people's health, behaviour, aspirations, education, employment and attitudes. The ESRC is committed to working with other funders and the research community to keep the UK's longitudinal portfolio at the global cutting edge, with the required analytic skills and impact mechanisms to maximise the value of this investment, for as long as our investment is demonstrably needed.

We are developing a new strategy to build a "UK Population Laboratory" that will ensure the strengths of longitudinal survey data, administrative data, and big data and new forms of data are recognized and supported in a way that facilitates the combination of different types of data for different research purposes. Our approach to future funding is informed by lessons from the last 50 years, and will allow us to prioritise across our data and wider investment portfolio so that the investment decisions we take are in the best interests of the UK research base.

However, the data provided by these studies is not free. Future investment relies on our ability to demonstrate the impact of these investments beyond that which is currently

captured. We know that the studies are used to explore a wide range of interests (from computer science to clinical practice, economics to geography), and by users across 50 countries. We also know that we, and the data investments we fund, have access to information on only a fraction of the uses of and impacts from this data. We will work with our longitudinal studies, UK Data Service (<https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/>) and others to explore tools and methods for better capturing use and impact, and to design a careful engagement strategy to encourage reporting, as we can capture use only if this use is properly cited. We need a strong use and impact evidence base if we are to continue to invest over 10% of our annual budget in longitudinal resources.