Re-commissioning of the Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource (CLOSER) 2024-2028

Background

- Funded in October 2012, the [Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource (CLOSER)](#) works to stimulate interdisciplinary research, develop shared resources, provide training, and share expertise. CLOSER's key areas of work were initially in data harmonisation, data linkage, research impact and training and capacity building. As CLOSER developed, engagement including public affairs became part of the core service offer. [CLOSER Discovery](#) (an online resource enabling researchers to search and browse detailed metadata, including frequencies, from the questionnaires of the UK's leading longitudinal studies) has been developed throughout this time. CLOSER initially encompassed eight studies, and recently expanded to include 11 more.

- CLOSER also compiles and delivers evidence to policymakers from LPS data around key themes. Recent examples include:
  - a recent submission to the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee inquiry on learning from Covid-19
  - Written evidence to the House of Lords Adult Social Care Committee[1] .

- CLOSER offers extensive training and convenes 'communities of interest' relating to the discovery, curation, linkage, access and use of LPS data.

- CLOSER has recently supported ESRC and MRC to establish Population Research UK (PRUK) by delivering an LPS Data Audit. This contains a number of recommendations which will contribute to the prioritisation of PRUK activity in its first phase of operation.

- In 2021, CLOSER was invited to propose an extension to its funding while ESRC and MRC established PRUK. CLOSER's activities were independently reviewed as part of this extension assessment. ESRC awarded CLOSER a reduced grant to support a more focussed set of activities, which is due to end in September 2024, in anticipation of PRUK being commissioned. As this commissioning continues to develop, it is now necessary to award CLOSER a longer grant, during which PRUK will establish a Hub and delivery Spokes.

- PRUK is a new UK resource developed by ESRC and MRC with approximately £9m of funding from the UKRI Infrastructure Fund for the period 2024 - 2028. It is designed to

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[1] committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/108853/html/

maximise the use of, and benefits from, UK LPS across social, economic and biomedical science. It is aligned with strategies at a UK Government, UKRI and council level. A joint ESRC and MRC Working Group drive its development, with oversight from the PRUK Programme Board, co-chaired by representatives of ESRC and MRC.

- UK LPS data are a major asset based on the generous donation of detailed longitudinal data by participants over decades. PRUK will maximise the potential of this data by bringing together and developing the infrastructure, processes and people that will enable LPS data to be efficiently enhanced, accessed and analysed. The PRUK Programme Board recognises that there are functions which overlap CLOSER activity and those that PRUK will be expected to deliver.

- The scope of PRUK will include all significant UK LPS, encompassing longitudinal population studies, panel studies and biobanks. In June 2023, the PRUK Programme Board agreed that CLOSER should deliver some areas of PRUK activity, subject to ESRC funding

- ESRC and MRC are major investors in LPS as research data infrastructure. The development of PRUK promises delivery of a new vision of data service infrastructure to further maximise the use of LPS for research purposes, encourage further collaboration, sharing of learning across studies and infrastructures, consultation with data users on needs and priorities, increasing access to data and code, improving discoverability.

- All ESRC investments are expected to contribute to the delivery of the ESRC Data Infrastructure Strategy which espouse the principles of working collaboratively and innovatively to build a foundation to support effective use of data resources by the research community.