

Longview: a Historical Overview: John Bynner (director, 2005 - 2010)

Origins

Longview originated in a now widely recognised need for collaboration, coordination and especially promotion in the development and use of large-scale longitudinal research resources. The think tank was born of the Joint Centre for Longitudinal Research which had been the first formally established collaboration between the institutions responsible for running the main British birth cohort studies: [MRC National Survey of Health and Development \(NSHD\)](#), University College London; [Centre for Longitudinal Studies \(CLS\)](#), Institute of Education, [Institute of Child Health](#) (independent of UCL at the time), International Centre for Child Studies (ICCS) and the [National Centre for Social Research \(NatCen\)](#), the principal survey research agency involved in collecting much of the large scale longitudinal data. As retired Director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies in the Institute of Education, I was invited to undertake the [scoping study](#) in 2004 that determined the shape that the think tank would take and subsequently in 2005 became Longview's first director.

With baseline funding from NatCen and ICCS, Longview was established and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (Company Number: 05496119) in June 2005. The Think Tank acquired charitable status from the Charity Commission in May 2006 (Registered Charity number: 1114094). Throughout its life Longview has relied for financial support on sponsorship, commissioned research, consultancy grants and private donations starting with grants of £78,000 and £24,000 respectively from NatCen and ICCS. In 2007, Longview took over responsibility for the International Centre for Child Studies, which Neville Butler, one of the leading pioneers of birth cohort study, had founded and directed since 1985. Due to Neville's retirement through illness, I took over as ICCS Director in 2006. Following my own retirement from the director role in 2010, Tom Schuller was appointed as Longview Director.

Aims, Mission and Operations

Longview's aims rested on the principle that good policy builds on the best evidence that longitudinal research can provide:

1. To promote longitudinal research to policy makers, social scientists, behavioural scientists and health scientists, and funders and inform the general public
2. To improve communication between policy makers and researchers about the results of longitudinal enquiry and the questions that it should address.
3. To help meet the challenges of undertaking longitudinal enquiry through methodological development and improved survey practice.
4. To seek means of integrating theoretical perspectives and research approaches across the scientific disciplines engaged in longitudinal study.
5. To appraise capacity in the UK to design, undertake, analyse the data and interpret the results of longitudinal research, identifying the training needs in different sections of the longitudinal research community.

In the course of its life to date Longview has managed to contribute in varying degrees to achievement in all the areas defined by these aims seeing its mission as bridging the gaps: between longitudinal research and policy; between methodology and research practice; between academic disciplines and facilitating interdisciplinary understanding. Rather than

building an institution with significant staffing, the think tank has relied on expert groups, supported by part time research officers, to carry out the commissioned work and communication activities that it undertook. The crucial administrative tasks were carried out by multi-tasking part-time PAs, first Polly Dare, from NatCen for the first two years and second, Catherine Westlake since then. ICCS administration until 2009 was done by Diana Pomeroy and Colleen Daley.

Governance

As a registered charity, the think tank was run continuously by a Board of Trustees, who throughout contributed enormously to its development and achievements. The Board initially comprised representatives of each of the partner organisations, Norman Glass (Chairman) (NatCen), Carli Lessof (NatCen), Neville Butler (ICCS), Michael Wadsworth (NSHD), Harvey Goldstein (U of Bristol), Heather Joshi (CLS), Nick Buck (ISER, U of Essex), Michael Marmot (UCL). Following the merger of Longview with ICCS in 2007, trustees Anne Cummins and Roy Ackerman joined the Longview Board - Ann Cummins taking on the role of Vice Chair. Following my retirement from the role of director in 2010 and Tom Schuller's appointment as director, the Board was reconstructed as a smaller group, with experts brought in from outside the longitudinal research community to join the continuing trustees. The final membership comprised Mike Wadsworth (Chair), Harvey Goldstein, Heather Joshi, Jude England (British Library), David Walker (National Audit Office) and Leon Feinstein (Cabinet Office).

In Memoriam

[Neville Butler](#), Professor of Child Health in Bristol, founder of the 1958 and 1970 birth cohort studies, founder Director of the International Centre for Child Studies (ICCS) and Longview trustee died in February 2007. [Norman Glass](#), Senior HM Treasury official, Director of NatCen, founder and first Chairman of the Longview Board of Trustees, died in June 2007.

Reviewing the Terrain

Shortly after Longview was established, the opportunity was offered by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for the think tank to undertake the first of a series of scoping studies to help build the evidence base for major Government investment in longitudinal research resources. The study was partly driven by the opportunity, newly won by ESRC, to bid for funds from the Government's large-scale research facilities fund - including joint funding with the Medical Research Centre (MRC).

ESRC Reviews and Scoping Studies

The first of these studies, [Strategic Review of Panel and Cohort Studies \(2006\)](#) provided a comprehensive overview of the situation and progress of large scale longitudinal studies in the UK and overseas - 90 were reviewed and summarised and a selection included in an [Appendix](#) to the report. The evidence collected was used to support successfully the case for major public investment in longitudinal research resources. The target for the funding comprised the expansion of the [British Household Panel Survey \(BHPS\)](#) from 5,000 to 40,000 members to form what is now '[Understanding Society](#)' and a new and much expanded (2013) Birth Cohort Study - now titled the '[Life Study](#)'. The final component of the funding, not awarded until 2011, was to provide infrastructure support for all of the U.K.'s major

cohort studies including the 1946, 1958, 1970, 2000 and 2013 birth cohorts, the 1991-92 [Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children \(ALSPAC\)](#), the [English Longitudinal Study of Ageing \(ELSA\)](#), the [Southampton Women's Survey](#) and the [Hertfordshire Cohort Study](#). The '[Cohorts and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource \(CLOSER\)](#)' facility was established in the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education in 2013. ESRC subsequently contracted Longview to undertake three further scoping studies: [Biomarkers in the Proposed Expanded Household Panel Survey \(2006\)](#) was the first of these following shortly after the Strategic Review. The next commission was to undertake two reviews [Scientific Case for a New Cohort Study \(2007\)](#) leading afterwards to [Options for the Design of the 2012 Birth Cohort Study \(2009\)](#).

Other Reviews

The Scottish Government commissioned Longview to carry out with [ScotCen](#), the Scottish branch of NatCen, a scoping study on [Use of Longitudinal Research in the Evaluation of the Scottish Government's Strategic Outcomes \(2012\)](#). Most recently, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) commissioned Longview to assess the value of the existing longitudinal data resources for the "[Measuring National Wellbeing](#)" programme. [The Measurement of Wellbeing: the Contribution of Longitudinal Studies \(2012\)](#) followed.

Delivery

Rather than building a body of permanent research staff to undertake each study, the model that proved its worth was to establish panels of expert consultants, including crucially, trustees, Mike Wadsworth and Harvey Goldstein, supported as needed, by part-time research officers. Apart from bringing together documentary evidence, interviews were conducted by panel members with the key researchers having responsibility for running the relevant longitudinal studies and the academic and policy users of the longitudinal data they produced. In the case of the *Strategic Review* and the *Case for the New Birth Cohort Study*, two-and-a-half-day residential workshops held in Oxford colleges [Links] were used to discuss with experts from the UK and overseas, the results of the consultation and agree the basis of the report. The work stimulated Mike Wadsworth and I to produce an edited collection of chapters by experts supplying the scientific and policy context accompanying the development of the British birth cohort studies since 1946 when the NSHD began. [A Companion to Life Course Studies](#) was published by Routledge in 2011, with a paperback version to follow in January 2014.

Institution Building

Longview Conferences

These two day meetings began in 2006 with a consultative workshop devoted to the ESRC Strategic Review on Panel and Cohort Studies followed by another in 2007 devoted to the Scientific Case for a New Birth Cohort Study. The success of first consultative conferences established a precedent for Longview running a conference annually: St Anne's College Oxford (2005); St Catherine's College Oxford (2006, 2007, 2008); Clare College Cambridge (2009, 2010). The primary aim of each conference was to bring together academics and

policymakers to hear about and debate findings from, and issues arising in the development of, longitudinal studies. Apart from the consultative function, when needed for the scoping studies (2005, 2007) each of the other conferences had a substantive theme:

[ESRC Panel and Cohort Studies Review](#)

St Anne' College, Oxford, September 2005

[Longitudinal Studies The Future - Cycles of Deprivation](#)

St. Catherine's College, Oxford, July 2006

[ESRC Scientific Case for a New Cohort Study](#)

St Catherine's College, Oxford, 2007

[Longitudinal Resources Strategy/Escape from Disadvantage](#)

St. Catherine's College, Oxford, October 2008

[New Thinking in Longitudinal and Life Course Study](#)

Clare College, Cambridge, September 2009

[Developments and Challenges in Longitudinal Studies from Childhood](#)

Clare College, Cambridge, September 2010

The first of the Clare College conferences in 2009 included on its programme consideration of the case for a learned society devoted to longitudinal and life course study. At the following conference in 2010 the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies was formally established (see below).

Longitudinal and Life Course Studies International Journal

Arising from the reviews undertaken for the scoping studies, a gap in the research literature was identified in relation to the reporting of large-scale longitudinal studies and the 'life course perspective' in terms of which much analysis of the data collected in them is carried out. With the help of a [Nuffield Foundation](#) three year development grant a team was established to produce the online open access international Journal [Longitudinal and Life Course Studies \(LLCS\)](#) with me as Executive Editor and Jane Raimes as Journal Manager. Section Editors were also appointed taking responsibility for managing the peer reviews in four broad areas: Health Sciences (Michael Wadsworth), Social and Economic Sciences (Robert Erikson), Development and Behavioural Sciences (Barbara Maughan), Statistical Sciences and Methodology (Harvey Goldstein). The journal was launched with the publication of its first Issue in 2009. At the time of writing this the journal is in its 12th issue, publishing three Issues a year and with 1500 individual readers and 25 leading university libraries registered to access it. All journal Issues are 'Open Access' to SLLS members and to registered readers and libraries for a small subscription, and 12 months after publication, become freely available. All manuscripts approved for publication are also made available through online repositories. The journal is indexed with the [Digital Object Identifier \(DOIs\)](#), through [CrossRef](#) and archived with [CLOCKSS](#) and The British Library.

Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies

Towards the end of the period of the LLCS Nuffield Foundation development grant, it became clear that to sustain the Journal by meeting its production, design, editing, and peer review management costs, a regular income in the order of £20,000 per annum was needed. The consequence was the decision to establish the [Society for Longitudinal and Life](#)

[Course Studies](#) (SLLS) that would be an invaluable forum for research communications and collaborations on an international scale and through a contribution from membership fees would help to meet the journal's financial needs. The society was established at the 2010 Longview conference in Clare College Cambridge. With a membership of currently over 400, SLLS is now the journal's publisher, produces a bimonthly newsletter and also runs popular annual conferences and doctoral student workshops in different European countries. Through co-sponsorship agreements with SLLS, additional re-current income for the journal comes from the [Medical Center, Free University \(VU\), Amsterdam](#), the [Institute for Economic and Social Research, University of Essex](#) and the [Survey Research Centre, University of Michigan](#).

Research and Communication

In addition to the major scoping studies, specially established expert groups have also been successful in submitting bids to funders to support project work of a more conventional kind.

Cognitive Capital

The first of these initiatives was a seminar series devoted to the use of birth cohort study data in the study of '[Cognitive Capital](#)' for which the Nuffield Foundation provided support. The aim of the expert group who developed the idea, led by Mike Wadsworth and myself, was to distil the most useful policy information about the Cognitive Capital construct from new analyses, thus also adding to the existing scientific evidence base. The six seminars directed principally at policy makers and policy oriented academics were held in 2007. Each of these addressed the question what could be learned from birth cohort study about the acquisition and loss of cognitive capital at different life course stages moving from the early years to old age. The series finished with a synthesising session. The plan was to develop the excellent presentations and discussion of preliminary analyses at the seminars into a new research programme linking cognitive capital to 'escape from disadvantage'. Although ultimately the proposal did not succeed, a substantial outcome from the work was a selection of edited papers that formed the basis of an [LLCS Special Issue](#) under the editorship of Marcus Richards.

Solving the Problem of Attrition

Longview's methodological interest was pursued first through a specially formed expert group and then through a successful proposal to ESRC for a three year research project under the "Survey Design and Measurement Initiative" on the theme of [Solving the Problem of Attrition](#). With research leadership and coordination supplied by Harvey Goldstein and myself, the work involved secondary analysis of longitudinal datasets in three universities (CLS, Institute of Education, ISER, University of Essex and University of Southampton/NatCen) to identify predictors of attrition under different conditions. The findings pointed to interviewer characteristics as a key target for intervention. Secondary analysis was followed by a field experiment based on follow-up of respondents in one of the (cross-sectional) surveys in the NatCen Omnibus series. The experiment tested the effects on sample loss of different combinations of interview quality (as assessed by NatCen) with whether the repeat interview was carried out with the same interviewer, were tested. At

the time of writing a paper reporting the results is being considered by a journal for publication

In addition to conference presentations and papers, the main outcome of the research was a [workshop](#) in which senior representatives of leading survey research agencies discussed the findings and drew conclusions about improving field practice in a collaborative programme. Subsequent ESRC evaluation judged the research as 'Very Good'. Bidding for the grant and managing it had to be handled through NatCen as a (Je-S) recognised recipient for Research Council funding, which brought home the difficulty an organisation like Longview had in attracting funds for independent research outside a partnership with a university or other recognised body like NatCen.

Events and Initiatives

Meetings

Apart from the annual Longview, and subsequently SLLS, conferences, a series of events were organised in parallel to them directed more specifically at promoting longitudinal research in particular areas and encouraging its development. These initiatives included a [one day conference](#) in February 2008, organised with the Greater London Association to consider the case for a London birth cohort study which attracted 80 policy people from across the London Boroughs. Another was a meeting with Local Government Association representatives to promote the value of longitudinal research, including the use of administrative data, in local policy contexts. The third was a two-day meeting in March 2009 aimed at policymakers, social work practitioners and child policy oriented academics on the theme of [Parents Matter](#). The first day was devoted to the role of parents in child development from infancy through the primary school years and the second day to adolescence through the teens to the twenties. Leading international experts were invited to London to present key longitudinal research findings and ideas on the subject in plenary sessions and parallel group sessions gave practitioners the opportunity to present evaluations of local interventions that they were engaged in.

Neville Butler Commemorations

Neville Butler Memorial Prize

Two final initiatives reflected particularly the continuities between Neville Butler's life and work first as Professor of Child Health in Bristol University and then in developing the whole field, latterly through ICCS and through Longview's mission and achievements. His life was commemorated in two ways. Through generous support from the Neville Butler Memorial Fund and from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Neville Butler memorial prize competition was established and ran annually for four years. An award of £5000 was given to the post-doctoral (or equivalent experience) early career longitudinal researcher who produced the best essay on their longitudinal research. Prize winners were:

2011 - Dr. Laura Howe, (University of Bristol)

[Childhood Obesity: Socioeconomic Inequalities and Consequences for Later Cardiovascular Health](#)

2010 - Joint 1st prize - Luna Muñoz and Mayada Elsabbagh

To be added

2009 - 1st prize - Simon Whitworth and Martina Portanti

To be added

Neville Butler Memorial Lectures

In parallel with the memorial prize and with funding from the Neville Butler Estate, the Neville Butler Memorial Lectures were established in a shared arrangement with the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education. Neville had expressed the wish that any lectures commemorating his life should address child health and development through the life course.

The series of four lectures were given by leading experts in the field: [Neil Halfon, University of California LA](#) (2009); [Michael Rutter, Department of Child Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London](#) (2010); [David Willetts, UK Government Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills](#) (2011); and [John Hobcraft, University of York](#) (2012).

Final Reflections

Longview was founded at a time when recognition was only just beginning that large-scale investments in longitudinal research resources demanded both coordinated approaches and especially the promotion of the work they did to those who might make best advantage of it in the policy and practice communities. Longview contributed to the development of the whole area through the strategic reviews undertaken, producing reports that helped shape this rapidly developing field and give it the public profile in the UK that it now has. In effect Longview's job was done with the establishment of, on the one hand [SLLS](#) and to a lesser extent, [CLOSER](#) the remit of which is to enhance harmonisation, coordination and quality across longitudinal datasets and to promote their value. Longview's future as a catalyst and stimulus for the development of such work will now continue in an international context as a division of SLLS. Such a development can only be seen as a huge benefit internationally with a focus on the critical interface between policy and research and how the gap between them can be best bridged in different national settings. Longview's main contribution is perhaps best seen in helping to convince the UK policy, professional and academic communities of the benefits of the unique and indispensable evidence that longitudinal research provides.

John Bynner, November 2013

