



Child development and social mobility

This briefing highlights the use of longitudinal data in informing and shaping policies relating to child development and social mobility.

Longitudinal data enable us to

- Track children's development throughout childhood and teenage years, to adulthood and beyond - including influences, aspirations and cognitive outcomes
- Study the links between family background, educational achievements and later outcomes
- Understand social mobility and the inter-generational transmission of advantage and disadvantage
- Identify drivers of socio-economic inequality and effective interventions to increase social mobility

Policy use

- Longitudinal data informed the 2011 Allen Review on Early Intervention for Children, which recommended the advance of early intervention programmes.
- Policies for early learning opportunities, such as Children's Centres and pre-school offers, and for parenting support have been developed based on longitudinal analyses of pre-school development.
- Longitudinal data have shown that prior attainment is the key driver for children's outcome during school years, resulting in school reform emphasis on improving



standards and increasing attainment.

- Increasing understanding of the gaps between rich and poor, based on longitudinal research evidence, has resulted in policies targeting people from low-income backgrounds, such as the Pupil Premium initiative.
- Longitudinal analyses have shown that continued participation in learning activities post-16 determine future employment and learning outcomes, leading to the Government's commitment to raise the participation age to 18 by 2015.

What are longitudinal studies?

A longitudinal study tracks a sample of people over long periods of time - often many decades - in order to reveal developmental trends across generations. By repeatedly observing the same variables, such as income, health or employment, these surveys provide invaluable data for research on a range of issues, their causes, and the effectiveness of different policies.

Evidence briefing: longitudinal studies



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Case: Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report

In 2010 Professor Alison Wolf of King's College London was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to carry out an independent review of vocational education. The report Review of Vocational Education considers how vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds can be improved to promote successful progression into the labour market, higher level education and training routes.

The review drew on research evidence including data from the 1958, 1970 and 1991 birth cohort studies in order to examine issues such as the development in young people's access to the labour market, educational participation and attainment, the amount of available jobs and apprenticeships, and young

people's aspirations and experiences.

Research showed that many 16- and 17-year-olds move in and out of education and short-term employment, without progressing successfully into secure employment or higher-level education and training.

The report also concluded that many of the vocational qualifications on offer are of little value in the labour market, with an estimated minimum of 350,000 people getting little to no benefit from the post-16 education system.

The Wolf review, published in March 2011, provided a number of recommendations to help inform future policy. Some of these were immediately accepted by the Secretary of State for Education, while the remaining are being considered for future implementation.

“The best datasets are longitudinal; i.e. they cover the same individuals over a prolonged period of time, so that you can look at the effects of education on the individuals who actually received it.”
Alison Wolf, Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf Report
(Department for Education, March 2011)

Supporting longitudinal research

The Economic and Social Research Council is the UK's leading agency for research funding and training in economic and social sciences.

We fund a number of longitudinal surveys and related research, including Understanding Society; Timescapes; the new Birth Cohort Study; the UK Longitudinal Studies Centre; and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, which houses three of Britain's internationally renowned surveys - the 1958, 1970 and Millennium Birth Cohort Studies.

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The information in this briefing is based on the presentations of Professor Anna Vignoles, Centre for Economics of Education, and Ms Carole Willis, Department for Education, at the ESRC/ONS Longitudinal Studies Seminar 19/7/2011.