

ESRC Longitudinal Studies Review 2017

Further analysis of responses to the consultation

Paper 5:

International comparisons and opportunities

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The views represented in this report are from those who responded to the consultation and do not represent the views of ESRC

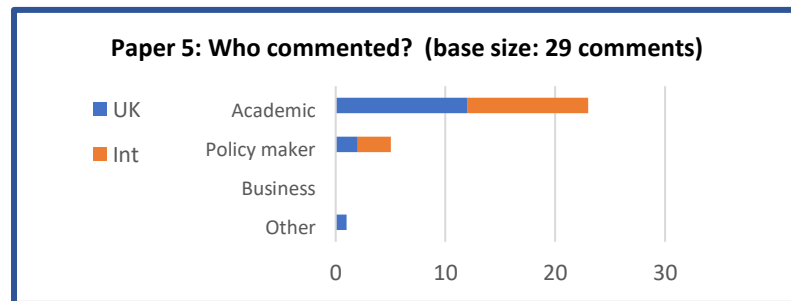


Introduction

The ESRC Longitudinal Studies Review 2017 is exploring the current and future scientific and policy-relevant need for longitudinal research resources. The review started in October 2016 and will report to ESRC Council early in 2018. An open online consultation in autumn 2016 sought input broadly, resulting in 637 completed responses from UK (83.4%) and international (16.6%) respondents. Respondents were predominantly from the academic sector (80%) as well as government, civil society and business sectors (20%). The main findings of the consultation were published in December 2016 in an [initial report](#). This report is supplemented by short briefing papers that examine key themes from the consultation data in more detail.

Paper 5: International comparisons and opportunities

This paper focuses on respondents' comments about international comparisons and opportunities for longitudinal research. A search across all consultation responses (using the strings international*, cross(-)national* and countr*) identified 29 relevant comments. Of these, 14 comments were from international respondents, who accounted for 16% (n=102) of the total number of survey respondents overall, indicating that the majority of all comments from international respondents were not specifically related to cross-national research.



Comments highlighted the value and importance attached by these respondents to opportunities for working cross-nationally and reflected the following themes:

- > Mechanisms for cross-national research
- > Key topics for cross-national research
- > Opportunities for cross-national learning

Mechanisms for cross-national research

Respondents pointed out that the mechanisms for cross-national research mirror those which facilitate comparisons across UK longitudinal studies and include:

- > Accessible frameworks for data access
- > Standardised measures – questions need to be specific enough to measure key elements at national level, but broad enough for cross-country comparison
- > Harmonisation – of variables, sampling and data
- > Consider establishing a code depository
- > Careful consideration of how data crosses international boundaries in terms of consent, access and data reuse
- > Funding further support for existing studies and projects to conduct cross-country comparison.

“The recent accumulation of longitudinal data sets in other countries offers the potential for comparative and collaborative research to detect contrasts and similarities of processes across contexts. As with comparisons across British studies, these international possibilities would be enhanced with greater attention to documentation and harmonization of data, and especially to improving the framework for data access.” (ID 99)

Key topics for cross-national research

Respondents explained that over the past ten years, increased opportunities for new comparative work have become available, due to advances in longitudinal studies by researchers in countries such as USA, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Denmark and Sweden. Various topics of cross-national interest were mentioned including:

- > Lifecourse trajectories – to better understand how policy and circumstances affect wellbeing, health, development and other outcomes
- > Child obesity and impact of policy measures, e.g. ‘fizzy drinks tax’
- > Ageing – the role of gene and environment in healthy, active ageing
- > Comparative historical analysis on core areas such as income mobility
- > Drink-driving
- > Savings practices
- > Attitudes to the law
- > Welfare state pressures and attitudes toward redistribution – understanding how people think about the welfare state and its response to globalisation, ageing and growing inequality
- > Experience of migration – learning processes of migrants in new cultural settings, new language acquisition, whether migrants fare better in different destinations countries and from different origin countries
- > Effects of Brexit
- > Study of rare conditions and genetic analysis – cross-country research can enable larger samples sizes
- > Cross-national work in relation to ODA themes.

Opportunities for cross-national learning

In addition to cross-national topics, some respondents described opportunities for cross-national learning, specifically where the UK could learn from the experiences of other countries in supporting large scale longitudinal studies. These included:

- > Scandinavian countries’ work to link longitudinal education outcome data to cohort study participant data
- > Denmark’s wider linkage of administrative data with longitudinal survey data
- > CLOSER could be expanded to support comparisons with other developed countries e.g. USA, Germany and Australia.

“The UK has an excellent reputation and track record in longitudinal studies. But other countries have been coming along very well, making comparative work possible. Comparisons with harmonised studies in other countries allows social scientists to establish what processes are universal, and what processes are modulated by the social, cultural and legislative milieu. Strengthening the data for cross-national investigations is crucial for the future.” (ID 272)

“We do cross-national work comparing US and UK data. The UK longitudinal surveys are almost like a miracle for this work. They allow us to try to separate out issues that are “just the ways human work” from issues that are cultural from issues that are more easily addressed via policy interventions that differ greatly across the two countries. This latter, in particular, makes the longitudinal studies crucial--both countries can learn from each other how to strengthen their societies with well-targeted, data-driven interventions.” (ID 522)