

Editorial

John Bynner Executive Editor

With the completion of the seventh volume and 25th issue of the journal this October, we are rounding off the year by introducing further innovative modes of communicating longitudinal research issues and findings. This is a good time to take stock.

Comment and Debate was launched in the 2015 July issue and featured in four of the subsequent five issues. Each new debate comprised an introductory discussion paper devoted to the topic of interest followed by a number of commentaries from experts in the field and concluding with the lead author's right of reply.

The series started with *Social class differences in early cognitive development* (Leon Feinstein et al.). This was followed by *Population sampling and longitudinal surveys* (Harvey Goldstein et al.); *Life Course and longevity risk* (David Blane et al.) and; *The case for Allostatic Load* (Cyrille Delpierre et al.).

Each debate has been successful in opening up discussion, while also supplying signposts to relevant literature – thus contributing to the resource value of the debate as a whole. More proposals for *Comment and Debate* submissions are warmly welcomed.

The other communications initiative – research to policy – has been more difficult to get off the ground. A key mission of the SLLS, as reflected in the Society's policy group and connections with the think tank Longview, is to strengthen the interactions and dialogue between longitudinal researchers and policy makers. This is with a view to facilitating mutual learning and more effective use of longitudinal research findings in the policy-making process.

Our first venture in this direction came from the SLLS Lausanne conference on early childhood effects of moving home in disadvantaged families in the US (*Fragile Families study*) and UK (*Millennium Cohort Study*). A special section devoted to the symposium was compiled by Mary Clare Lennon, William A.V. Clark and Heather Joshi, comprising interlinked and integrated papers.

The interdependency proved challenging because external blind peer review addresses each paper

independently of others, entirely on its own scientific merits. This was contrary to the holistic approach favored for the section – and also tended to squeeze out the policy issues. Through much adjustment in redrafts, the review requirements were met. The final paper by Ruth Lupton then made good the policy gap with an analysis of the different features of the US and UK housing markets and discussion of the policy implications for families and children (LLCS Volume 7 Issue 3, July 2016).

We complete the year with an even more radical approach to the policy-research interface with a paper also derived from a Lausanne conference symposium – this time devoted to the research-policy relations regarding the massive six-cohort *German National Education Panel* run from the University of Bamberg

Symposium presenters included researchers and policy clients who, along with audience participants, were followed up with interviews by the symposium convener, Jutta Von Maurice. A well-rounded picture of the gaps and synergies between research, policy and general observer perspectives emerged, helping to identify key principles of effective communication.

Overall the different approaches contribute, in their different ways, to the richness of the journal's offering, supplying new reporting models, which we hope will be taken up and developed further by journal authors.

The challenge for a scientific journal is to maintain the rigorous standards of blind peer review on which scientific reputation is based while opening discussion to the wider range of contextualising policy perspectives and action principles that inform the policy process. Used effectively, the latter can play a crucial role shaping the direction the scientific program takes.

Many thanks to the conveners who gave their time to pioneering these break-through innovations and to all the contributors for the invaluable insights gained.