

# INSIGHTS 2016

FINDINGS FROM THE LARGEST  
LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF UK HOUSEHOLDS



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COVER IMAGE

*‘Sunrise’ and ‘Northern Sunrise’* © Stephen Bowler  
p6 *‘Heights of Abraham’* © Michael D Beckwith

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# FOREWORD

DAVID WALKER

CHAIR OF THE ESRC'S GOVERNING BOARD FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

**This year's EU referendum caused political upheaval, leading to Theresa May's accession as prime minister and turmoil in other political parties. It also shifted public talk to new terrain where themes are social division, income inequalities, blocked opportunity and resentment by those who feel left behind, geographically and economically.**

Other themes are identity and 'who we are' along with migration, tighter borders and stricter control on movement – of people, but also capital and goods. The risks of becoming insular as a nation are ever present and the threat to cohesion cannot be taken lightly as attention shifts to 'healing a divided Britain' but at a time of great economic uncertainty.

In the hubbub, public policy shifts. In England there's renewed talk of addressing inequality in attainment in schools. Paradoxically, selection in secondary education, proposed as a way of expanding opportunity, when examined through evidence suggests there will be many losers. Across the UK, fresh attention is being paid to the nature and conditions of employment and the fairness of employment contracts, amid chronic concern about the UK's comparatively low levels of productivity and renewed focus on the prevalence and causes of mental health problems.

All this makes *Understanding Society* the more vital and contemporaneous. It's not a matter of 'expert' knowledge – Michael Gove's crack during the referendum campaign is already legend – but drawing a reliable picture of what is actually happening inside households and to people as mothers, fathers, employees, pupils, carers, neighbours, commuters and so on. Researchers are adept, of course, at the methods and conduct of socio-economic investigation but what they also do, in a sense, is to mirror society itself, reflecting back to us a fuller (and numbered) account of our lives.

Political leaders often seem to feel obliged to put huge emphasis on change, positioning themselves and their

parties as facilitators. Because of Brexit, recent times have felt perturbed; there's much adaptation (some would emphasise opportunity) ahead. Innovation in technology often seems rapid and unstoppable, forcing the pace in our social and economic arrangements.

But social science sometimes needs to say, hold on. Aspects of employment, health and family life show remarkable stability, especially the relative position of people in the scales of income and class categories. Who your parents are, how educated they are and how much

income comes into your household remain powerful influences on what happens to you as the lifecourse unfolds. *Understanding Society* is as much about continuity as change and a way of seeing what doesn't alter for households as time elapses.

Patterns of inequality are persistent. Roots clutch; background strongly colours prospects. Meanwhile, old questions nag away, forcing families to respond while policy debate rumbles on. As the UK population ages, where do older citizens look for help as they become more likely to undergo periods of ill health and disability or simply cannot any longer manage

everything by themselves? Answers are found (or not) daily inside households, whose composition reshapes to accommodate increasing longevity and shifts in fertility.

*Understanding Society*, like other longitudinal studies, is the very opposite of a typical capital asset, the value of which depreciates over time. Each follow up produces further opportunity to link back to the preceding visit and to the interviews before, allowing researchers to try to mark events (recession, recovery, Brexit) and the implementation of new policies (among these findings there's a neat appraisal of the introduction of a shopping bag charge in Wales).

As the years go by, the value of the study grows. We commend these findings as further examples of the usefulness of this remarkable tool of social inquiry: a public investment generating an excellent return.

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# INTRODUCTION

MICHAELA BENZEVAL  
DIRECTOR OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

***Understanding Society is a unique resource for science and policy. By following the lives of all individuals within households over time, data from Understanding Society are a vital resource for understanding the causes and consequences of fundamental deep-rooted social problems – such as poverty dynamics, family breakdown, moving in and out of employment, poor educational achievement, behavioural change and poor health – and developing policies to tackle them.***

Insights 2016 illustrates some of the ways in which the Study is being used to understand four key areas: education; health and employment; families; and devolution. The evidence presented also demonstrates the value of the unique features of the Study for policy research.

A key benefit of longitudinal data is that we can better understand the timing of events and 'what comes first', which helps to shed light on when and how to intervene. This is well demonstrated by evidence in the health and employment chapter. Webber and colleagues show the significant toll that experiencing mental health problems can have on employment, while Jones and colleagues examine specific health shocks, such as cancer, and investigate the effects on employment. Sage uses the data to explore the mechanisms that link employment and health by looking at the changes in people's circumstances when they become unemployed but are subject to different labour market policies. The large sample size allows researchers to analyse particular subgroups of the population and the richness of the data means that a range of mechanisms can be investigated, providing evidence on how to support employment at different stages of illness and recovery.

By enabling researchers to link survey data with geographic information *Understanding Society* is used to examine people's situations in places that do and do not have specific policies. This is illustrated by three papers here: Burgess and colleagues' investigate the impact of

the selective education systems on adult wages; Faber and colleagues' examine education outcomes as a result of differences in broadband speeds either side of telephone exchanges boundaries; and the devolution case study explores the impact of the introduction of plastic bag charges in Wales compared with other UK countries. Identifying people who live in places with and without a particular policy, the data from *Understanding Society* is then used to ensure other differences between people living in these places are taken into account to investigate the specific impact of these policies.

*Understanding Society* data can also be linked to administrative data on individuals who take part in the study, where they consent to this. The evidence by Martin and Faber and colleagues illustrates this by using data from school test records, held by the Department for Education, to examine the impact of immigration processes and broadband speeds respectively on children's progress at schools.

Panel studies repeatedly measure the same things over time so that changes in people's lives can be investigated in the context of wider social and economic contexts. For example, Schoon and colleagues create different cohorts to investigate how economic changes affected education and employment opportunities at the transition from adolescence to adulthood during 2000s. Brewer and colleagues use data from *Understanding Society* and the British Household Panel Survey to examine changing family structures over the last few decades. Both pieces of research rely on the regularity of data collection meaning that such transitions are more accurately captured than when there is less frequent data collection.

With over 5,000 data users, and a range of innovative experiments alongside the main study, a wide range of evidence and scientific learning is produced from *Understanding Society* on an ongoing basis. Insights 2016 distinctly demonstrates some of the ways in which *Understanding Society* data is being used to produce valuable policy learning.

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DEMONSTRATES  
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# EDUCATION

- 10 Do selective schooling systems increase inequality?
- 12 School-to-work transitions: recognising diversity and inequality
- 14 Migration: how does selectivity affect the educational attainment of migrant’s children?
- 16 Faster home broadband but how does it affect education attainment?



## EDUCATION: COMMENTARY

DAVID LAWS  
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF THE EDUCATION POLICY INSTITUTE

These four education papers from the *Understanding Society Study* offer interesting insights into a number of important and topical issues relating to education challenges and policy responses.

“Do Selective Schooling Systems Increase Inequality”, by Burgess, Dickson and Macmillan of Bristol University looks at the highly topical issue of grammar schools. For the last 20 or so years, there has been a consensus amongst the main UK political parties and amongst education researchers that grammar schools are likely to widen educational inequality, even if they directly benefit those (largely more affluent) pupils who attend them. But our new Prime Minister and Education Secretary are now considering allowing additional selective education in England – with the aspiration being that this would lead to greater social mobility.

The Bristol University paper considers the impact of a selective education system on earnings inequality – by looking at relative outcomes in selective and non-selective areas of England. The research team finds strong evidence that earnings inequality is significantly higher in selective areas – the effects appear to be both large and statistically significant. The research seems to support other similar studies and underlines the risk that an expansion of selective education could widen inequalities in society – both in terms of educational outcomes and relative income.

“School-to-work transitions: recognising diversity and inequality”, by Schoon and Lyons-Amos of University College London considers the move to the labour market of two cohorts of students born in the 1980s. What is very interesting is that the study data shows how big the switch was between early work and persistent unemployment across the two cohorts born only a few years apart as they entered the labour marker in the 2000s. This may suggest that young people who wanted to go into work but who could not find a job decided not to seek educational opportunities instead – but may have engaged in continuing and unproductive job search. It would be interesting to consider if this was a rational or irrational choice; and indeed the extent to which it was a real choice between education/training and unemployment/work search.

Nicole Martin’s paper (University of Essex) deals with the important issue of “migrant selectivity” and how this might impact on the attainment of migrant children. Education researchers (including at the Education Policy Institute in London) have been looking at how many migrant groups are now delivering both better progress and (over time) attainment than those children born in England, even adjusting for pupil characteristics. The paper highlights that migrants may have characteristics which are markedly different from those they leave behind in their ‘home’ countries. For each migrant group to the UK, the research shows that they are more educated than similar people in their country of origin. However, there remains much more work to do in this area to understand variability between migrant groups, and between these groups and the existing UK population. Further data, including that from the *Understanding Society* Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Boost (IEMB), will be available from November 2016 and this will help refine and expand the analysis.

Finally, “Faster home broadband but how does it affect education attainment”, by Faber, Sanchis-Guarner and Weinhardt of the LSE, seeks to consider the impact of investing in ICT on educational outcomes. The work is of interest given the temptation to see spend on “ICT” as a short-cut to educational success.

The research looks at the impact of substantial improvements in internet connection speeds, and – perhaps unsurprisingly – finds that there is no effect on educational attainment, for any student grouping. Nor do faster connections appear to result in significant changes in study time.

There may be other benefits in improving broadband access, but this study does not identify education impacts. It would be interesting to see other research on whether improving access more generally to ICT in the school and home environment has any clear learning benefits – not least for students in households where ICT is not available at home.

These four studies shine a light on key challenges currently facing education policymakers and in helping us to understand our society better, they increase the odds of sensible and considered policy responses.

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THESE FOUR STUDIES  
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POLICY MAKERS



# DO SELECTIVE SCHOOLING SYSTEMS INCREASE INEQUALITY?

Research by *Simon Burgess; Matt Dickson; Lindsay Macmillan, University of Bristol*



THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE THAT EARNINGS INEQUALITY IS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER AMONG INDIVIDUALS WHO GREW UP IN SELECTIVE AREAS COMPARED TO THOSE WHO GREW UP IN COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM AREAS.

**Issue examined**  
Earnings inequality between those who grew up in selective schooling areas and those who grew up in comprehensive system areas.

**People included**  
Analysis focuses on 2,511 individuals who were born in 35 selective or similar nonselective LEAs from 1961-1983.

**Selective schooling systems, and their grammar schools, continue to be a prominent policy issue in England. Questions are asked such as, should grammar schools be reintroduced across the country? Should they be expanded where they currently exist? These questions are passionately debated and continue to be controversial. Popular stories in the press are of the form “I went to a grammar school and look how well I’m doing now”. However, whilst interesting and often inspiring, these anecdotes are not a basis for policy.**

From the time of a unified system of education in the 1940s, through to the 1960s, the UK had a selective schooling system, which used scores from a test at age 11 to allocate children to schools. To simplify, roughly the top 25 per cent attended grammar schools and the rest attended a secondary modern school. From 1965 a comprehensive system was introduced although local authorities switched to this new system at their own pace. Some local authorities implemented the comprehensive system immediately and some took a lot longer to implement the reforms – today there are still a few areas that have selective school systems, including Kent and Lincolnshire.

What do we know about grammar schools? There have been two main areas of research so far: analysing who gets in to grammar schools, and evaluating the impact of attending a grammar school against not doing so. Briefly, the answers are: children from better off families hugely disproportionately get into grammar schools; and pupil achievement is higher in a grammar school than in a secondary modern school.

The research in this study looks at a wider question, with the aim of measuring the systemic impact of a selective system as compared to a standard comprehensive system. The study focuses on inequality. Rather than looking at differences in mean earnings between people, it looks at the whole distribution of earnings of people growing up in selective areas compared to those growing up in comprehensive school areas. It shows that selective school systems as a whole increase earnings inequality.

Selectivity of an area has been calculated based on the percentage of children aged 13 in the Local Education Authority (LEA) who had a place allocated by the selective system (grammar or secondary modern places). In the research an LEA is defined as selective if more than 20 per cent of children in the LEA were assigned their school place by selection. Non-selective LEAs are those where less than 5 per cent of 13-year-old children were assigned by selection. These thresholds mark a clear delineation between what were selective and non-selective areas.

The research matches areas operating the selective-school system in the 1960s and 1970s to otherwise similar areas operating the comprehensive system. The matching is based on the local unemployment rate, the local male hourly wage rate and the proportion of children in private schools. We then identify individuals who grew up in these matched areas.

Having identified a population of selective-system pupils and comprehensive-system pupils, we can then compare the adult life outcomes in 2009-2012. The study focuses on earnings, and uses a sophisticated statistical modelling approach to compare the pupils’ spread of wages across the UK. It takes account of a range of background characteristics including the individual’s current place of residence (and hence the labour markets they can access), and their gender, age, and ethnicity and also each individual’s parents’ occupational class and education.

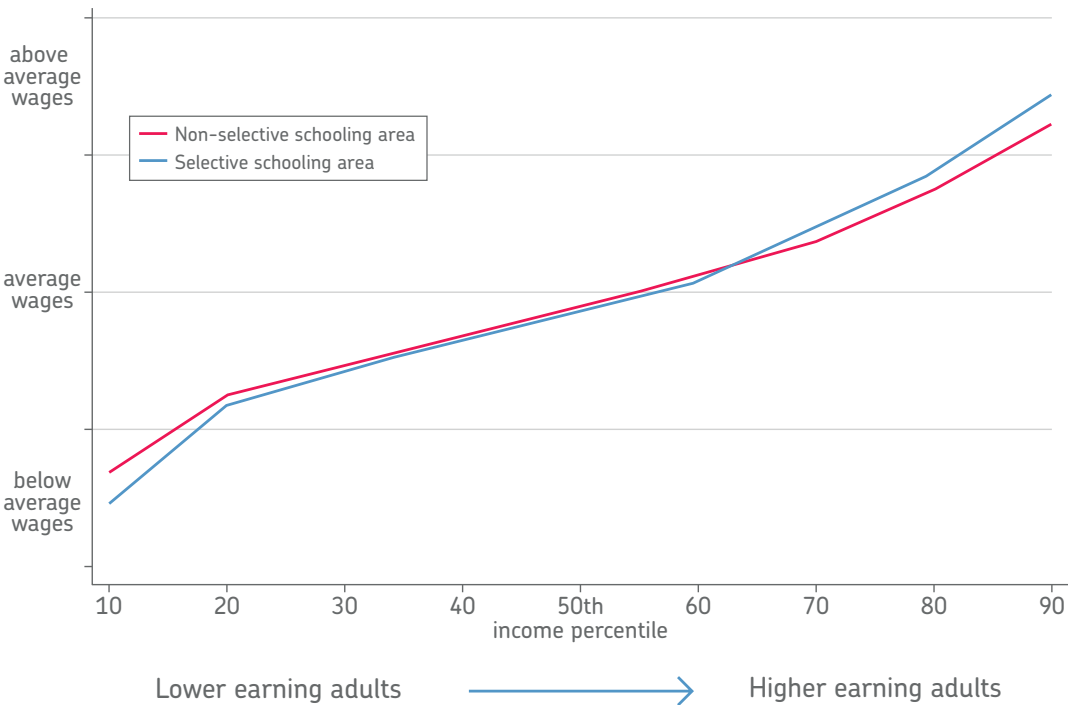
There is strong evidence that earnings inequality is significantly higher among individuals who grew up in selective areas compared to those who grew up in comprehensive system areas. The scale of this inequality is substantial: if you grow up in a selective system area and end up a top earner, for example with earnings in the top 90 per cent, you earn £1.31 or 9 per cent an hour more than the similar individual who grew up in a comprehensive system area.

At the other end of the scale, if you grow up in a selective system area and don’t do so well – earning in the bottom 10 per cent – you earn 90p or 35 per cent an hour less than the similar individual who grew up in a comprehensive system area.

Overall, the results of this study are relevant for education policymakers both in the UK and beyond, and add to the view that selective education systems have severe downsides in terms of the greater inequality that they give rise to. Far from there being only winners and no losers from the selective system, those who do not get into the grammar school are disadvantaged compared to similar children who lived in similar comprehensive areas. This impact is seen in their adult earnings. Given that the majority of children within selective systems who do not access the grammar school are from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, they are disproportionately disadvantaged by the system, implying that selective systems have been regressive with respect to social mobility – in stark contrast to claims that grammar schools are ‘engines of social mobility’.

## INCOME INEQUALITY ACCORDING TO SELECTIVE/NON-SELECTIVE SCHOOL TYPE

This graph shows that people who grew up in areas with selective schools and ended up as top earners (the right hand side of the graph) have higher incomes than top earners from areas with non-selective schools. However, it also shows that people who grew up in the same selective areas but ended up in the bottom of the earnings distribution (the left hand side of the graph) have lower incomes than similar people who grew up in non-selective areas.





# SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS: RECOGNISING DIVERSITY AND INEQUALITY

Research by *Ingrid Schoon and Mark Lyons-Amos, University College London*

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A LARGE NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT GO TO UNIVERSITY, YET SUCCEED IN MAKING IT INTO THE LABOUR MARKET.

**Issue examined**  
School-to-work transitions in two age cohorts born in 1980s.

**People included**  
828 individuals (468 of those born between 1980/84 and 360 of those born between 1985/89), using pooled data collected by *Understanding Society*/BHPS between 1996 and 2010.

**This study examines changes in the sequencing and timing of school-to-work transitions in two cohorts born in the 1980s, and moving into adult roles just before and after the turn of the century. It challenges dualistic assumptions dominating current policy debates, which focus on either smooth or problematic transitions, and calls for improving vocational-oriented transition pathways between school and work.**

Although there is increasing pressure to get degree-level qualifications in order to compete in the current knowledge economies, a large number of young people do not go to university. The findings illustrate diversity in viable transition pathways; they show how family background and individual agency interact in shaping transition pathways, and how young people navigate a changing landscape of education and employment opportunities.

To do this, the researchers compared the experiences of two age cohorts, born between 1980/84 and 1985/89. The study identified five distinct clusters describing patterns in the timing and sequencing of education and employment transitions between ages 17 to 23. These differentiate between two pathways dominated by continuous employment – either (1) directly after completing compulsory schooling at age 16 or (2) after some further education, (3) those who participate in extended education; and two pathways characterised by exclusion from the labour market – (4) either through prolonged experience of unemployment, or (5) inactivity (i.e. no employment activity, such as looking after the home and long term sickness).

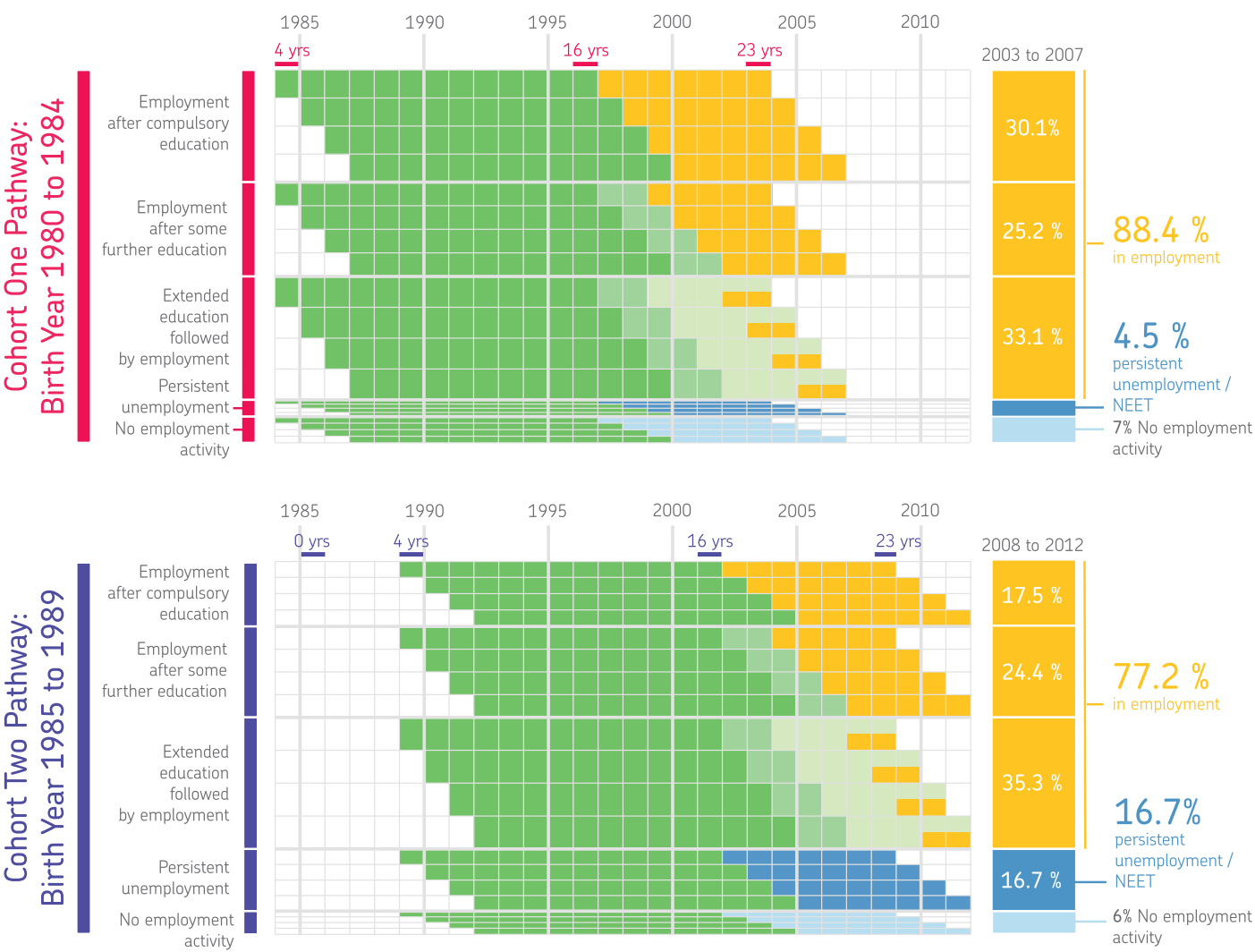
In the later-born cohort the proportion of those who are experiencing persistent unemployment or not being in education, employment or training has increased from 4.5 to 16.7 per cent. There has been a slight increase in young people experiencing extended education (comprising about a third in each of the above age cohorts). Yet, in both cohorts the majority of young people opt for a work-focused route and are able to secure continuous employment. While in the later-born cohort fewer young people leave education directly after completing compulsory schooling at age 16, an increasing number continues in education for another two years before entering employment.

Born just five years apart, the findings illustrate the diversity, as well as considerable changes in transition experiences, for the two cohorts. The younger cohort was more negatively affected by growing youth unemployment due to the Great Recession, and an increasing number of young people encountered problems in finding continuous employment, while the older cohort might have been protected (to some extent) due to having acquired more skills and experience before the economic crisis hit Britain.

In this research, the effects of persisting social inequality in young people’s transitions from education are noticeable; young people from less privileged backgrounds are less likely to participate in extended education. Instead they focus on finding paid work earlier on – either directly after compulsory school leaving or after some further education. This research also found that individual education aspirations play a significant role in shaping subsequent transitions, after accounting for parental background and regional employment opportunities, suggesting that aspirations are important in themselves, regardless of other constraints on students’ decisions.

The study also shows that the way aspirations work is different for some young people than others. Uncertain aspirations at age 14 (not knowing whether to continue in education or not) can have a beneficial effect for less privileged young people by preventing them from leaving school early, and enabling them to gain more skills and qualifications, even though they do not have an explicit career plan.

## SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS



A large number of young people do not go to university, yet succeed in making it into the labour market. Young people who chose the traditional work-focused route to independent adulthood have become invisible in current debates concentrating on the polarisation of experiences. Despite making up the majority of the workforce, their career pathways have received little attention or support. While the route to a university education is well signposted and supported through state subsidies, the route into work for 17-23 year olds is incoherent, ill-prepared and confusing.

There is a need for information and guidance about how to navigate the way into the world of work. Many advocates have called for coherent and high-quality progression routes for those who do not go to university. This research provides the evidence that such routes do work. However, it will require investment in the quality of apprenticeships and vocational training to ensure all young people get a good start in life.

**Legend**

- Compulsory education
- Further education
- University
- Employment
- Persistent Unemployment
- No employment activity



# MIGRATION: HOW DOES SELECTIVITY AFFECT THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF MIGRANT'S CHILDREN?

Research by **Nicole Martin**, University of Essex

OVER TIME, SELECTIVITY – HOW MUCH MORE EDUCATED MIGRANTS ARE THAN PEOPLE WHO DID NOT MIGRATE – HAS DECLINED

**Issue examined:**  
The educational attainment of migrants' children in British schools

**People included:**  
Estimates on how selectivity has changed over time used data from 2,143 migrant men and 2,458 women in wave 1 for whom it was possible to link to information on levels of education in their country of origin. Analysis of the effect on school results uses information on the test scores of 688 children in the linked NPD. Other questions are based on between 601–619 children in the young person's questionnaires, and 830–1852 children about whom parents answered questions.

**Educational attainment has been increasing among the children of migrants to the UK in recent decades, against a background where second generation children were initially disadvantaged compared to children with two British-born parents.**

However, different migrant-origin groups have different trajectories. For example, children from some ethnic minority backgrounds such as Chinese and Indian are achieving better results on average than white British students – whilst others, for example black African students, have achieved parity, and other groups such as Pakistani and black Caribbean students have on average achieved lower grades.

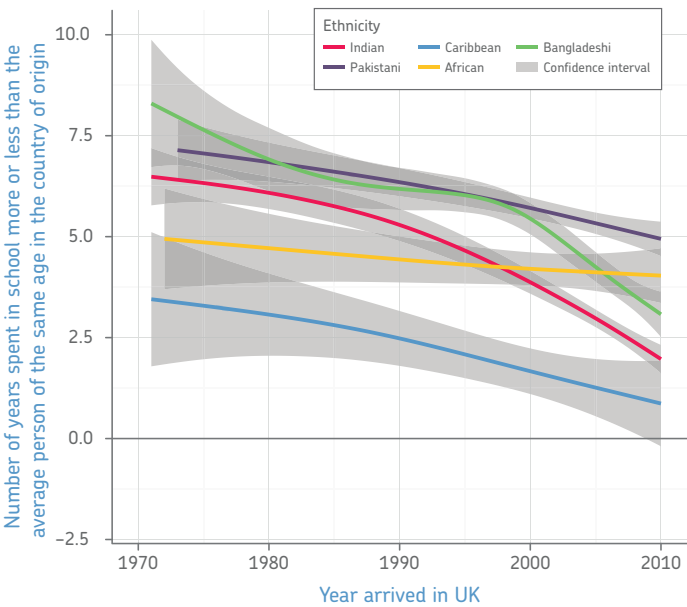
One explanation for why different groups have found it easier or harder to progress in education is that migrants come from a wide range of countries, some of which are richer than others, some of which have higher levels of education, and all of which have different cultural practices. This might well explain some of what is going on. However, it is also true that migrants are not typically representative of their country of origin – it has been established by previous research that most migrants to the UK are generally more highly educated than people in their country of origin. In fact, on average migrants to the UK are more educated than the UK born population, although this doesn't adjust for age, or children who move here and are educated in UK institutions. According to *Understanding Society* data, 19 per cent of the adult population living in the UK who were born here have a degree, compared to 36 per cent of adults born outside the UK but now living here.



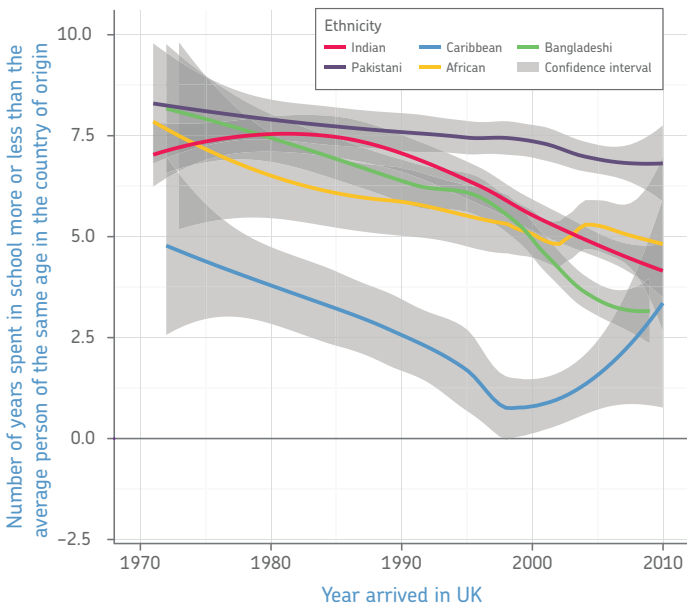
This research investigates how the education level of migrants to the UK (compared to people who did not migrate) has changed over time. In order to do this, information that *Understanding Society* respondents provided about their parents' education, age and when they moved to the UK is linked to an international database of educational attainment across the world in intervals of 5 years from 1950–2010. This means that it can be seen whether someone migrating to the UK was more or less educated than someone of the same sex and 5 year age group as them in the 5 year time period around when they moved. For instance, in 2010, a woman arriving aged 27 from the Côte d'Ivoire who finished school at age 11 would have had 0.35 years of schooling more than the average for women of her age who did not migrate. Analysing the data in this way showed that, of all the groups looked at, migrants to the UK were on average more highly educated than people of the same age and gender in their country of origin.

However, over time, selectivity – how much more educated migrants are than people who did not migrate – has declined. This is not because people

EDUCATIONAL SELECTIVITY – MEN



EDUCATIONAL SELECTIVITY – WOMEN



moving to the UK have become less educated, but because average levels of education in the countries of origin that most migrants to the UK come from have increased at the same time.

What does this mean for the second generation? The groups that are the most selected are also those whose children have been able to achieve more in education on average than those whose own education is not as different to people who did not migrate – might it be that this difference in selectivity that explains this?

This study looked at whether parents who are more educationally selected were more likely to invest into their children's education. More highly selected parents were more likely to send their children to a private school, to say that exams are important – an opinion their children also held – and to attend parents' evenings regularly, than those whose parents are less highly or negatively selected. However, this was not true for helping with homework and for young people feeling that their parents are interested in their schoolwork. This suggests that for some things, more selected parents are doing things that less selected parents are not – but when it comes to helping with homework and showing an interest, it is simply how much experience of education parents have had.

The final step in this piece of research was to see whether the educational selectivity of parents – how educated they are relative to people in the sending country – affects the educational attainment of children, and if so, how much of the gap between the attainment of different groups does this explain? *Understanding Society* has linked up the results of certain school exams (in England) to the survey data, which means that at actual test scores can be examined.

This study focused on Key Stage 2 when children are age 11, looking at the results for English and Maths. Children whose parents had more years of schooling did better at school, as expected. Importantly though, children whose parents were more positively selected – i.e. had more years of schooling than their



peers in their country of origin – also did better at school, on top of the increase brought about by having more educated parents. However, although this slightly attenuated the gaps in attainment between children with parents from different countries of origin, it did not eliminate it completely. This shows that selectivity is a useful predictor of how well the children of migrants will do in school, but not capable of explaining all of the differences in attainment that exist between children with parents from different countries.

This points to two conclusions. Firstly, children whose parents are not highly selected do not have to do poorly at school, and that factors other than parental migration history have a significant impact on why and how children from different ethnic groups succeed at school. Secondly, immigration policy that emphasises education and skills might be expected to impact on the educational attainment – and therefore labour market participation – of the children of future migrants to the country.



# FASTER HOME BROADBAND BUT HOW DOES IT AFFECT EDUCATION ATTAINMENT?

Research by Benjamin Faber; Rosa Sanchis-Guarner; Felix Weinhardt, London School of Economics

33 JUMPS IN THE AVAILABLE BROADBAND SPEED HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON STUDENT TIME SPENT ONLINE, TIME SPENT DOING HOMEWORK OR THE PROPENSITY OF USING ONLINE RESOURCES FOR HOMEWORK.

**Issue examined**  
The impact of available ICT on school test scores, study time and computer use, for children aged 11 to 15.

**People included**  
Pupils aged 7 to 16 during the period 2002-2008, using data from the National Pupil Database, the BHPS and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.

Governments around the world are currently committing substantial amounts of public funds to increase available broadband internet connection speeds. In the UK, the Government is currently investing over £1 billion in providing superfast broadband coverage to 95 per cent of households by 2017. Both the European Union and the United States of America have similarly ambitious plans to increase access to broadband services providing download speeds of 30Mbps or above.

These policies are motivated by claims that high-speed internet is crucial to achieving policy objectives in two key areas: education and growth. This study provides evidence on whether improved broadband speeds actually improve educational outcomes. Many of the most common online activities of students (e.g. research for homework, online games, streaming videos, downloading music) require fast connections, and it is an open question whether upgrades in the available Information and Communications Technology (ICT) increase learning productivity, as suggested by many policymakers and educators, or lead to distractions that could in principle also have negative effects on learning outcomes, which many parents seem to worry about.

To estimate the effect that improved ICT has on students, we used English administrative data to link test scores for primary and secondary school students to the available internet speeds at their home addresses. We also use data from the Youth Questionnaires of *Understanding Society* and its predecessor the British Household Panel Survey (in addition to other sources) to investigate the impact of available ICT on study time and computer use of children aged 11 to 15 years old.

The research does not simply look to see if children in houses with better broadband speeds do better at school, as this might be a case of correlation but not causation. Richer households can afford faster internet packages and better ICT equipment and, at the same time, pupils from wealthy backgrounds attend good schools and perform better at the national key-stage exams.

To identify the causal process – rather than just a spurious correlation – the study exploits the random jumps in available broadband speed that are a feature of DSL-broadband technology. There are approximately 3900 telephone exchange stations that provide all English addresses with telephone connections. The extent and shape of the catchment areas surrounding telephone exchanges are by-products of history: rapid growth in fixed-line telephony during and after the Second World War along with capacity constraints led to invisible and essentially randomly placed boundaries. We look at residences just either side of these (invisible) borderlines between different exchange areas, who were very similar on most characteristics. However, neighbours on different sides of a boundary can face substantial differences in the available broadband speed at their home addresses – a household on the slower side of an invisible catchment area boundary needs 20 or 50 per cent more time in order to access the same amount of online content as a neighbouring household on the faster side of the boundary.

The analysis conducted here shows that even substantial changes in internet connection speeds have no effect on educational attainment. This is true for students from all ethnic backgrounds, of different age groups, both sexes, all socioeconomic groups, and across key subject areas. The value of *Understanding Society* here is that researchers can unpick what is driving the result, by looking at the behaviour of young people, as well as their test scores. The study finds that jumps in the available broadband speed have no significant effect on student time spent online, time spent doing homework or the propensity of using online resources for homework. As neither test scores nor the number of study hours are affected by available ICT, it can be concluded that study productivity is not affected either.

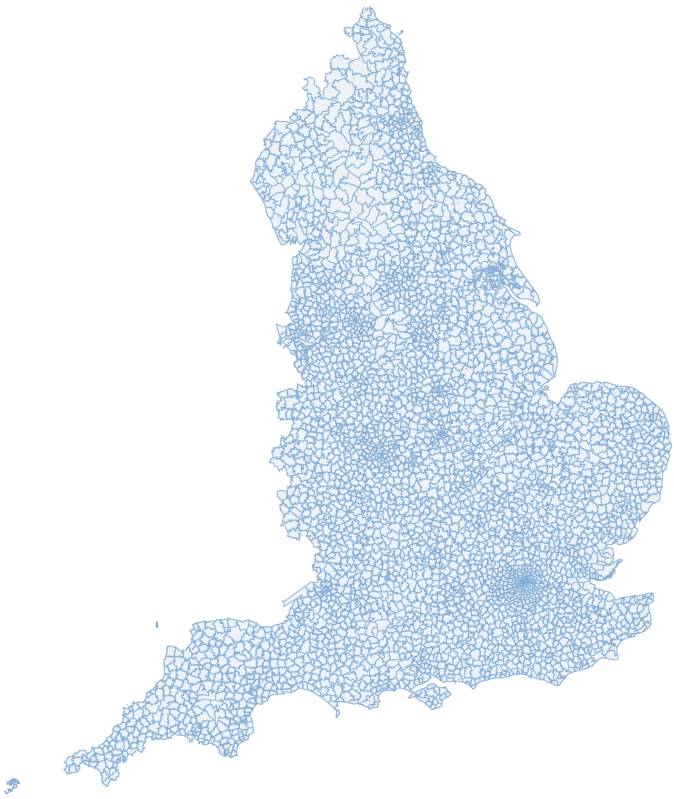


Access to fast broadband has been claimed as being key for educational success, and the lack of such connections identified as a drawback for rural communities' development. The results of this research suggest a less negative scenario. Given the amount of funds committed to ICT upgrades both in the UK and the EU,

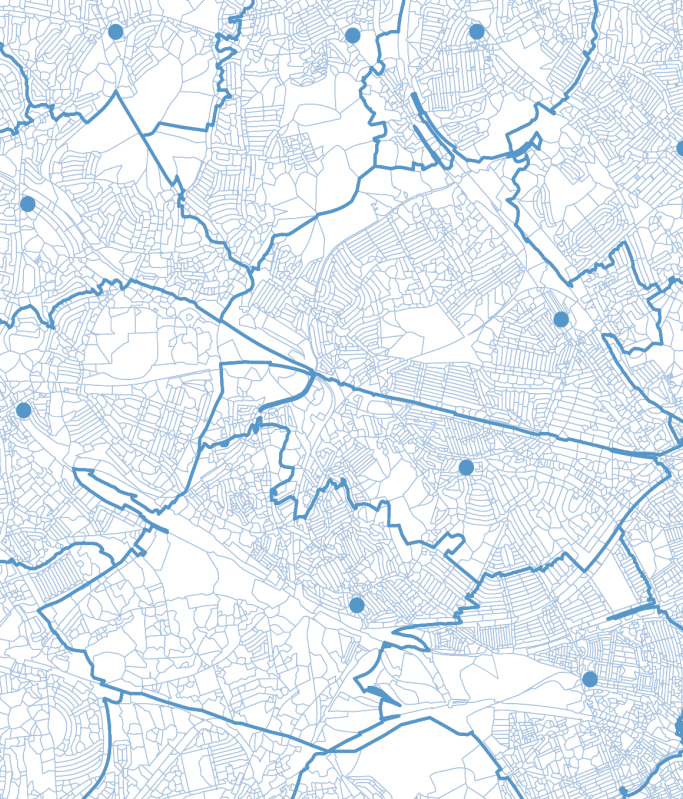
and the bold claims made about superfast broadband investment, this research highlights that, with weak justification for the policy from an educational perspective, the business case depends even more on other factors.

## TWO MAPS OF EXCHANGE STATION CATCHMENT AREA BOUNDARIES IN ENGLAND

EXCHANGE STATION CATCHMENT AREA



ZOOM INTO NORTH LONDON





# HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT

- 20 Changes in employment status: does poor health matter?
- 22 What happens to employment after an acute health shock?
- 24 Unemployment is bad for health: so what's the role for social policy?



## HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT: COMMENTARY

STEPHEN BEVAN  
HEAD OF HR RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT – INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES

**The health of the working age population in the UK has become a high priority for policymakers over the last decade or so. As the population and the workforce ages, a higher proportion of people of working age are developing work-limiting long-term health conditions. There appears to have also been a significant increase in the prevalence of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety among working age people, and the significance of this in understanding patterns of worklessness, sickness absence and premature withdrawal from work has only recently been recognised by policymakers. In addition, there has been a realisation that workforce health is not 'owned' by a single policy 'domain' or department and yet required joined-up planning and implementation if declining workforce health is not to threaten UK productivity, labour market participation and social inclusion.**

The three studies presented here which draw on data from *Understanding Society* to look at contemporary challenges in health and employment highlight the need for policymakers to embrace the emerging evidence on workforce health if they are to bring about sustainable improvements in labour market outcomes for working age people living with health problems.

Don Webber and colleagues shed some important light on the challenges of poor health on labour market transitions. It is a real concern that people with poor mental health stand out as having worse employment outcomes and are more likely than those with physical conditions alone to be 'stuck' in more precarious and low paid work – if, indeed, they are at work at all. We must also recognise that comorbid mental illness is increasingly a feature for people living with chronic and fluctuating physical illness. This is a major area of policy focus currently and these data should inform the evaluation of policy interventions targeted at supporting people with depression and anxiety to improve their labour market status and, through this, their health.

Of course, for some people, health problems can appear suddenly and can have a catastrophic effect on their employment status. The data presented by Andrew Jones, Nigel Rice and Francesca Zantomio provide a fascinating insight into the ways that acute health shocks such as a cancer diagnosis, a heart attack or a stroke have long-term effects on their ability to stay in, return to and thrive at work. Their data illuminates how age, education and economic

status is associated with the way people respond to these health shocks and the role that perceived job insecurity plays in shaping their decisions about work. This is an under-researched area but, as policy interest in extending working lives among older workers intensifies, these data have already moved forward our understanding of the challenges being faced by this section of the workforce.

The most common policy response to unemployment in developed Western economies has been a constellation of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) aimed at getting people closer to the world of work and improving their 'job readiness'. Although we have plenty of data on the relative effectiveness of many of these interventions, we know little about whether participation in these initiatives has a positive or negative effect on the wellbeing of the 'clients' they are designed to help. Daniel Sage's analysis tells us a lot about this and raises important questions about whether ALMPs can, by themselves, help to improve some aspects of wellbeing as well as employment outcomes. This supports other evidence – especially from the 'supported employment' field – that work can have therapeutic benefits for people with mental illness. Daniel's research has important messages about the design and implementation of ALMPs which policymakers would do well to embrace.

Taken together, these studies have made intelligent and imaginative use of the *Understanding Society* data to challenge some of our thinking about

the complex relationship between work and health and the effectiveness of the interventions we use to support people to stay in, or return to, work. My sense is that there is a realisation among policymakers that the sometimes punitive emphasis of policy in recent years needs to give way to a more supportive set of interventions which recognise that the problems people face are complex and will not respond to simplistic solutions.

The establishment of a new Work and Health Joint Unit to co-ordinate policy across government – which has the strategic aim of halving the disability employment gap – can draw on this growing evidence-base to shape policy and innovation. From encouraging employers to think about how marginal improvements to work could lead to both better productivity and health to pro-active employment support for 'client' groups with very specific health conditions, this agenda requires action on a wide front.

BB  
**THE PROBLEMS  
PEOPLE FACE ARE  
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NOT RESPOND  
TO SIMPLISTIC  
SOLUTIONS.**



# CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT STATUS: DOES POOR HEALTH MATTER?

Research by **Don J Webber**; **Dominic Page**; **Michail Veliziotis**; **Steve Johnson**, University of West of England



POOR HEALTH – ESPECIALLY POOR MENTAL HEALTH – IS A KEY REASON THAT PEOPLE MOVE OUT OF EMPLOYMENT, OR INTO TEMPORARY AND PART TIME EMPLOYMENT.

**Issue examined**  
The working patterns of people with poor health.

**People included**  
15,859 individuals from Waves 1-18 of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)

**People with poor health have lower levels of participation in paid employment and therefore are more at risk of poverty. However, the working patterns of people in poor health have been the subject of limited quantitative research. This study sets out to identify whether poor physical and/or mental health influences the transition between different employment states. In general, understanding transitions between employment states matters as they can tell us what comes first – the poor health, or the employment state.**

This particular research looked at different measures of poor health to identify the largest contributory factor to employment transitions. This is important when considering policies, as it may suggest the type of health intervention to prioritise. This paper compared the influence of poor general health, poor physical health, poor mental health, both poor mental and physical health, and drug or alcohol problems. The categories of employment transitions are: movement into and out of employment, between full and part time work, and between permanent and temporary work. The findings apply to a range of wage levels and allow for a number of personal characteristics.

Poor mental health emerged in this analysis as the key health factor associated with labour market disadvantage. Those reporting poor mental health are more likely to have low wages, and to be at risk of being out of work, in comparison with people reporting good mental health. The employment rate for those reporting poor mental health was 49.3 per cent compared to 73.7 per cent for those reporting good mental health. The gaps are particularly stark in some areas, most notably their much reduced likelihood of transition from unemployment to employment (30.6 per cent compared to 40.4 per cent), increased likelihood of moving from full time to part time work (5.5 per cent compared to 2.9 per cent), and significantly reduced likelihood of moving out of low pay (29.4 per cent compared to 32.9 per cent). In contrast, people with poor physical health are more likely enter and remain in employment when compared to other groups with poor health – although this group is clearly disadvantaged compared to those reporting good health.

Having qualifications is particularly important for movement into work and reduces the likelihood of moving into low pay from a better paid job. However, while education is important, it is not sufficient alone to compensate for poor health when it comes to employment outcomes. Having a degree or further education tends to lessen the impact of poor health (mental or physical) – but people with higher levels of education are still negatively affected in their employment by having poor health.

This research is relevant for labour market policymakers, and especially those interested in enhancing activity rates. The recent focus in labour market policy on moving people from disability benefits (which also cover ill health) into work clearly aims to lessen the negative impact of poor health on employment. However, this research suggests that poor health – especially poor mental health – is a key reason that people move out of employment, or into temporary and part time employment. Without a parallel effort to alleviate mental health burdens, active labour market policies are likely to trapped in a vicious cycle.



IN GENERAL, UNDERSTANDING TRANSITIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT STATES MATTERS AS THEY CAN TELL US WHAT COMES FIRST – THE POOR HEALTH, OR THE EMPLOYMENT STATE.





# WHAT HAPPENS TO EMPLOYMENT AFTER AN ACUTE HEALTH SHOCK?

Research by **Andrew Jones; Nigel Rice** and **Francesca Zantomio**, University of York

EXPERIENCING A HEALTH SHOCK DOUBLES THE RISK OF LEAVING THE LABOUR MARKET. THIS IS NOT NECESSARILY A TEMPORARY REACTION.

**Issue examined**  
The labour market behaviour of individuals who experience a major health shock

**People included**  
60,648 individuals from *Understanding Society* waves 1 to 5.

**Understanding the labour market behaviour of individuals who experience a major health shock is important to inform policy designed to reduce the employment gap between individuals with and without long-term health conditions.**

Maintaining employment is at the core of support for disabled people of working age, with the introduction of the Employment and Support Allowance to replace Incapacity Benefit. There are other good reasons to understand workers' reactions to a major health shock. Leaving paid employment often has enduring financial consequences for families as a whole, including an increased risk of poverty. Leaving work can also cause wider losses in wellbeing, in terms of personal identity and self-esteem, and fewer opportunities for social contact.

This research investigates how workers who experience cancer, a stroke or a heart attack (which we call a 'health shock') have responded in the post-crash labour market; do they leave the job market or remain in employment? If they remain in work, do they change how many hours they work, see their earnings fall, or perceive their employment as less secure, and do their feelings of attachment to their job or employer change? This study also examines how reactions to health shocks vary by personal characteristics such as age, gender, household composition, the severity of the health shock incurred, and socio-economic status (education and household income).

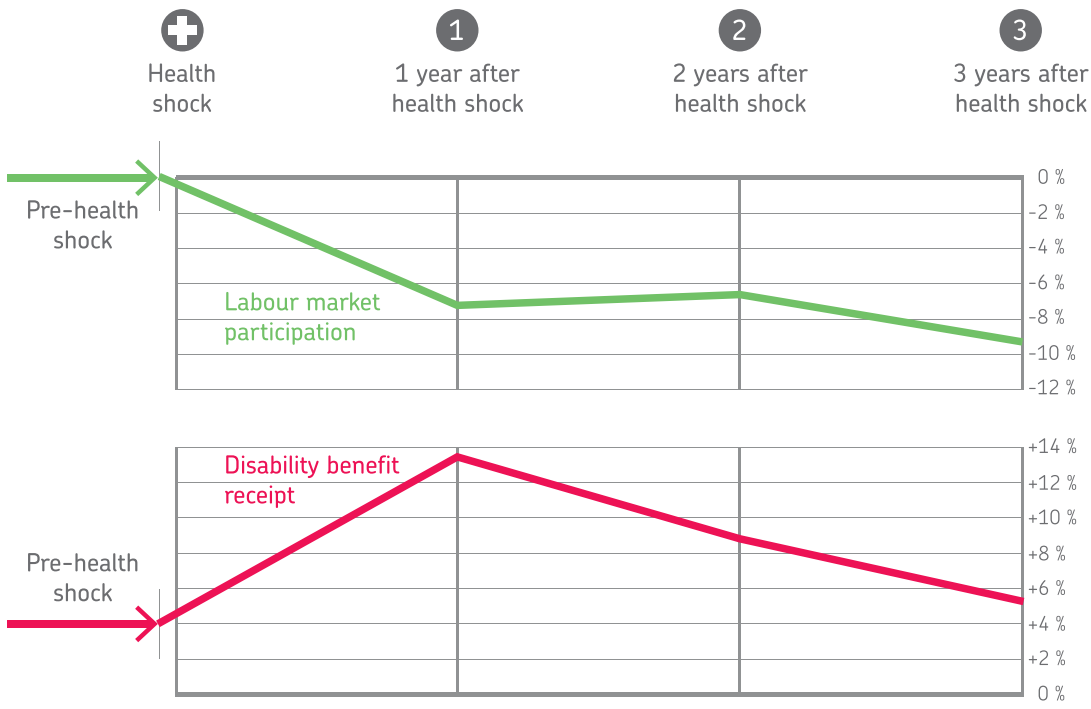
This research finds that experiencing a health shock doubles the risk of leaving the labour market and increases disability benefit receipt. This is not necessarily a temporary reaction. The decrease in employment is confirmed in following years (up to two years following a health shock). Moreover, additional workers who have had health shocks leave the labour market in the longer run – after an attempt to adjust work patterns through reducing working hours.

Undoubtedly, a major driver of people leaving employment is the disability induced by more severe health shocks, which is measured in terms of reduced ability to perform daily activities. How disabling the health shock is affects dramatically not only the chance to continue employment, but also the perceived job security for workers who remain active.

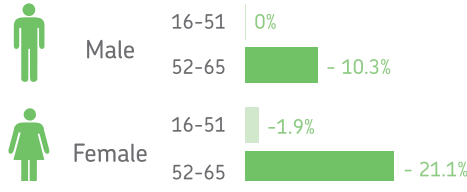
However, there is more than disability acting as a barrier to work. For example, the adjustment to health shocks differs remarkably by age, in a way that is not explained by differences in disability. Despite a significant reduction in abilities to perform daily activities, younger workers do not reduce their employment, and rather display a stronger attachment to their job or employer following a health shock. On the contrary, older workers more than double their labour market exit probability, although important differences arise between older men and women.

Older and higher educated women are the most likely to leave the labour market, although on average they experience shocks that are less disabling than those experienced by men. This suggests an important role for preferences for leisure, financial constraints and intra-household division of labour in explaining labour supply adjustments. Wealthier women can afford to leave employment, even more so if they receive financial support from a partner. Regardless of disability, leaving work to enjoy greater

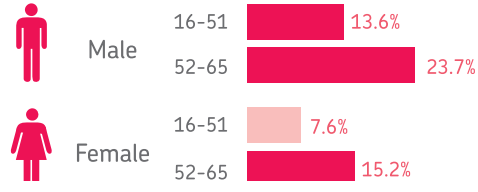
## CHANGE IN LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION AND DISABILITY BENEFIT RECEIPT AFTER HEALTH SHOCK



Percentage point change in labour market participation, by gender and age groups, one year after the health shock



Percentage point change in receipt of disability benefit, by gender and age groups, one year after the health shock



leisure time might become a more attractive prospect after experiencing a major health shock. Indeed, experiencing a health shock (especially later in life) might increase some people's desire to reduce their working hours in favour of more leisure.

However, financial constraints might lead individuals to remain employed even under such circumstances. This is evident when considering how the likelihood of leaving employment varies by household income. Workers who belong to the richest third of the population, despite being the least affected in terms of disability, are more likely to leave work than those on middle incomes, presumably due to the availability of alternative financial means. Similarly, when differentiated by educational status, there is a larger reduction in labour market participation for more educated workers, despite the fact that they appear to experience less

severe disabilities compared to the less educated. The fact that less educated workers keep working in same job in the face of health difficulties is likely to be the result of greater financial constraints, but also fewer opportunities for securing alternative, less physically demanding jobs.

Up-to-date evidence on the causal impact of deteriorations in health on work – such as this study – is crucial for effective policy design. Evidence that disability following a health shock is a major driver of labour market exit calls for policies that remove barriers to labour market inclusion of the disabled. At the same time people face very different choices. In some circumstances, such as that of older and more educated female workers, leaving employment can be a preferred choice, affordable because of household arrangements or the availability of alternative income.



# UNEMPLOYMENT IS BAD FOR HEALTH: SO WHAT'S THE ROLE FOR SOCIAL POLICY?

Research by *Daniel Sage*, University of Stirling

66  
ALMP PARTICIPANTS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO REPORT HIGHER WELLBEING THAN NON-PARTICIPATING UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE.

**Issue examined**  
The role of active labour market policies (ALMPs) on the connections between unemployment and health, wellbeing and social capital.

**People included**  
Between 102,888 and 186,442 individuals aged 18-65 from the British Household Panel Survey waves 1 to 18 and waves 2 to 3 from *Understanding Society*.

One of the most consistent findings in social science research is that unemployment is associated with a wide range of negative health and social effects. This is true across time and place, with unemployment related to outcomes such as low wellbeing, poor physical health and weak levels of social capital.

Importantly, there are two crucial findings in the literature on unemployment. First, unemployment often has a causal effect; many unemployed people are not predisposed to poor health or low wellbeing but experience them as a consequence of losing paid work. Although as the previous two chapters show, the opposite is also true, poor health can lead to job loss. Second, these effects are linked to both material and social factors. Unemployment has negative effects because of low income but also because of social and psychological factors that are encountered, irrespective of economic ones, such as loss of social contacts, routine and structure, self-esteem etc.

These two findings have profound implications for social policy. If unemployment causes negative effects because of its economic and social environment, it follows that a qualitative change in this environment has the capacity for such effects to be changed, even ameliorated. One way in which the unemployment environment can be transformed is through active labour market policies (ALMPs). These are programmes that aim to move unemployed people closer to the labour market and encompass a wide variety of interventions. Some ALMPs are mandatory and others voluntary – some programmes offer participants intensified forms of advice and support whilst others focus on skills, education and work experience.

ALMPs have been introduced and expanded across developed welfare states in Australasia, Europe and North America, yet the UK stands out as one of the leading innovators in ALMPs. New Labour governments between 1997 and 2010 introduced a range of interventions – the New Deal programmes – that were gradually extended to increasing numbers of out-of-work groups, such as lone parents and disabled people. More recently, Conservative-led governments since 2010 have added a range of new interventions, most importantly the flagship welfare-to-work scheme, the Work Programme.

During the past decade researchers have hypothesised that ALMPs have the potential to mitigate some of the negative effects of unemployment. This is because compared to non-participation – so-called ‘open unemployment’ – some ALMPs may mimic the characteristics of paid work. These include routine, daily structure, regular social contact and the use of skills. If it is these traits of employment that are conducive to good health and wellbeing, ALMPs may have the capacity to reverse the negative effects of unemployment.

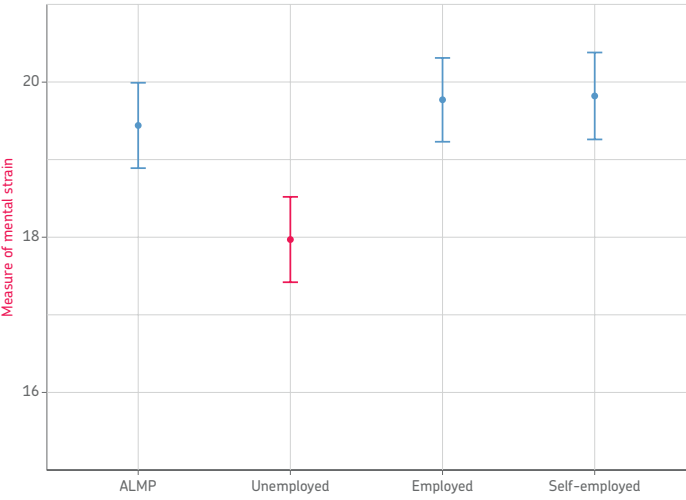


Using *Understanding Society* and its predecessor the British Household Panel Survey, this research examined whether ALMP participation was associated with higher levels of subjective wellbeing, physical health and social capital (such as social interaction and community participation) compared to ‘open unemployment’. The findings showed that ALMP participants are significantly more likely to report higher wellbeing than non-participating unemployed people, supporting the majority of other research into ALMPs and psychosocial states. Yet in relation to both physical health and social capital, there were no positive ‘ALMP effects’ for participants.

This raises an interesting question. Whilst ALMPs do not appear to raise health or social capital, they nevertheless have a significant, and relatively large, effect on wellbeing. Further research is required to unpick the extent to which wellbeing and health operate independently of each other.

The findings present three implications for future research into unemployment and social policy. First, whilst there is strong evidence to suggest that ALMP participation is associated with higher wellbeing amongst the unemployed, a crucial caveat is

MENTAL STRAIN ACCORDING TO EMPLOYMENT STATUS, ADJUSTING FOR OTHER FACTORS



When it comes to mental strain, people who become unemployed but participate in an ALMP programme are similar to those who are employed or self-employed. It is only those who become unemployed and do not participate in an ALMP programme who have significantly worse mental strain. The chart above shows the measure of mental strain based on the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), which is used routinely as a measure of psychological distress.

the diversity of ALMPs as a form of intervention. A significant limitation of the study is that it is unable to differentiate between fundamentally different types of ALMPs. Thus, the positive wellbeing effects of ALMPs that were identified in this study do not imply that all interventions will have positive consequences.

Second, there is no evidence of how long wellbeing effects last for and, consequently, whether ALMPs have a long-term effect or instead act as short-term buffers against the psychological distress linked to unemployment. Third and finally, it is unclear whether ALMPs benefit all participants. Unemployed people represent a heterogeneous group and existing evidence shows how job loss affects different kinds of people in contrasting ways.

Nevertheless, unemployment has been consistently demonstrated as one of the most damaging social and economic events that individuals can experience, whilst unemployed people with higher levels of wellbeing have been shown to be significantly more likely to find paid work. For these reasons, further focus on how ALMPs can mitigate the deleterious effects of unemployment should become a priority for future research, and for policymakers designing and evaluating these programmes.



# PARENTS AND CHILDREN

- 28 Does having an unemployed father effect children's work prospects?  
30 Family instability throughout childhood: building a more detailed picture  
32 Parents' health and children's help



## PARENTS AND CHILDREN: COMMENTARY

JEREMY TODD,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FAMILY LIVES

**The complexities of modern family life and the factors which have an impact on family wellbeing and child outcomes can never be underestimated, as the research in this theme clearly shows. As a national family support charity, Family Lives helps thousands of families on a daily basis through our helpline, website and community services.**

It is understandably difficult to create policies which account for all the challenges families face. The impact of education, employment, physical and mental health, poverty, family stability, imprisonment or drug and alcohol issues can seem overwhelming when trying to ensure no one slips through the net, and that the impact of one policy will not be to the detriment of another. However, this is absolutely what is needed. The latest review of the Family Test, introduced in October 2014 by the government, does not show any fundamental change yet.

Part of developing good family policies requires understanding that families transit in and out of different states – a lone parent family may not always be so, a working family may find themselves unemployed, or a grandparent may overnight find themselves raising grandchildren.

These research findings reinforce the need to look at the whole family in terms of both the cause and effect of issues such as paternal unemployment and lone parent families. The generational impact of unemployment, as shown by Zwysen's research on intergenerational scarring, reinforces this, as well as the need for earlier intervention. We should also be addressing the cause and not just the symptom and may need to do more to first tackle the underlying causes of familial unemployment, whether that's self-esteem, aspirations, skills and education, wellbeing or health issues. We may find this a more effective and efficient route to solving long-term unemployment as well as having additional benefits on the whole family.

Family forms across a child's entire childhood are the subject of the research by Brewer and Nandi. Whilst the research seeks to develop a better method to measure this more accurately, the findings show large differences in lone parenthood according to the age of child's mother. Not only

education but age of the mother is thus a critical factor in experiencing lone parenthood.

It is of course much harder to understand what makes a parent thrive despite being a young single mum, what makes a child brought up by an unemployed father decide to be different and the recent political focus on resilience and character does tap into this. From our work, we know the positive impact of parenting support for young mums or befrienders. The research highlighted here raises questions around whether there could be an alternative approach, building on what we already know about the impact of parents' aspirations to improve their child's lives. In our work on young children at risk of obesity, we see the role that parents' attitudes and approach can have on the child.

Going a full circle, the third piece of research by Ermisch, focuses on the child parent relationship in later life. As their health changes how does the help that parents receive from their middle-aged off-springs change – and what other factors appear to influence this? The findings indicate that whilst children's help is responsive to problems of mobility or living independently in the community as a result of health deterioration, it is not responsive to severe difficulties requiring daily care. In one respect this is a positive finding notwithstanding that some families are facing the extra pressure of being the 'sandwich' generation

and also having to look after their children. However, given the crises in our social care system it is also a worrying finding – policy makers should not assume that families will be able to respond to all types of care needs in a regime of tougher means testing and reduced services.

Over the last couple of years, the Government has recognised the relationship between different issues and the role of families. The work of Family Lives now spans across education, health, work and pensions as well as justice. Giving the Family Test a statutory footing and joining up the dots between policies would help improve services. But what we need more than ever, more than a Family Test or a new narrative, is long-term investment, both financial and political rather than the continual cycle of changing benefits, services and priorities.

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WHAT WE NEED  
MORE THAN EVER,  
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# DOES HAVING AN UNEMPLOYED FATHER AFFECT CHILDREN’S WORK PROSPECTS?

Research by **Wouter Zwysen**, University of Essex

66 YOUNG ADULTS WHOSE FATHERS WERE UNEMPLOYED WHEN THEY WERE GROWING UP ARE NOT ONLY LESS LIKELY TO WORK THAN THOSE WITH WORKING FATHERS, THEY ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO WORK PART-TIME AND WORK ON AVERAGE THREE HOURS LESS PER WEEK.

**Issue examined**  
The impact of a father’s unemployment when a child was growing up, on the child’s likelihood of unemployment when they are a young adult.

**People included**  
3,965 individuals from waves 1 and 2 of *Understanding Society*, supplemented with wage information from the UK Labour Force Survey.

Social mobility is very high on the political agenda. Most evidence focuses on the relationship between income or education of parents and children. This study uses the rich information available in *Understanding Society* to analyse another important aspect of inter-generational social mobility – whether employment has consequences for future generations. Specifically, this research is concerned with the least advantaged young adults as they have the most difficulty in achieving upward mobility.

This study focuses on whether the father is working whilst his children are growing up. This focus on the father helps to keep the non-working group relatively homogenous and to allow comparison with previous studies. Growing up in a household in which the father is not working is associated with many negative outcomes: more delinquent and negative behaviour, lower mental health and wellbeing, worse performance in school and also a lower probability of working yourself. It is important to understand why these relationships are found; is it something in parental unemployment that affects their children? Or are children and fathers in the same family simply similar in ways that increase their risk of unemployment?

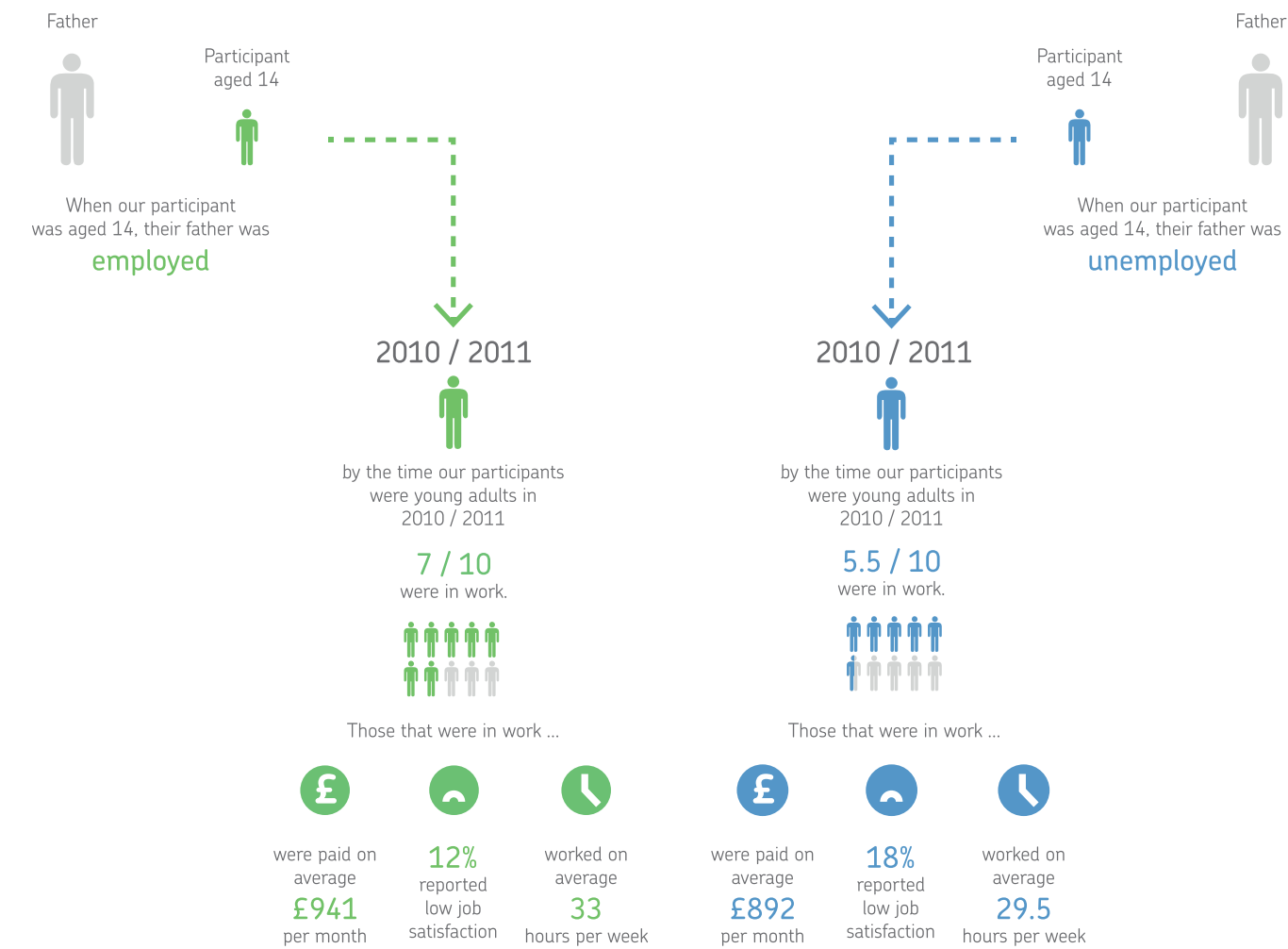
Comparing two young adults who are similar in many important ways such as their age, health, education and background and relation to their parents, the study finds that those whose fathers were out of work when they were growing up are 14 per cent less likely to be employed than those whose fathers did work, irrespective of their job. Because this research compares young adults who match each other on many characteristics, it is fairly certain that any differences seen in their trajectories are due to the difference between them – their fathers’ unemployment.

What are the possible reasons for this finding? Unemployment often leads to financial trouble which can affect children’s opportunities, for instance by moving house and school, or not being able to afford extra-curricular activities. There may also be a psychological cost; stress may lead to worse results at school or lower confidence. Parents are an important source of information about jobs for young people – but because the most useful networks are formed at work, children whose fathers did not work will not have access to as good information or contacts to help them find work. Finally, experiencing unemployment can change the perception of being out of work and the stigma attached to it.

This research looked at whether young adults work, how much they work, their pay and contract, and whether they are satisfied with their job. This means a range of outcomes can be explored, and the mechanisms at work can be understood. If a financial or psychological shock drives the inter-generational effect, children whose fathers were unemployed in childhood would not only be more likely to be unemployed themselves, but also work in worse jobs. On the other hand, if they are less likely to hear about jobs or feel the stigma of being unemployed is less, it would affect whether and how much someone works, but not the quality of work.

Young adults whose fathers were unemployed when they were growing up are not only less likely to work than those with working fathers they are also more likely to work part-time and work on average three hours less per week. This shows that there is not just an effect on the probability of finding work but more generally on the intensity of work.

## THE EFFECT OF HAVING AN UNEMPLOYED FATHER DURING CHILDHOOD, ON CHILDREN'S WORK PROSPECTS



In contrast, there is no effect on earnings or working on a temporary contract so while children of workless fathers work less as adults than their counterparts whose fathers did work, they do not work in much worse jobs. Young adults whose father did not work when they were growing up are less satisfied with their work however, regardless of pay and type of contract. This might mean their jobs are worse in a way that is not measured or that employment is experienced differently.

These results mean that it is unlikely that paternal worklessness in childhood affects the labour market outcomes of these children through lowering their overall human capital – for instance through lower education. Taking financial differences and psychological wellbeing into account also does not explain the higher unemployment probability of children whose fathers did not work.

The remaining possible explanations are that their fathers are less able to help them find work, or that being out of work is seen as less problematic. Interestingly, young adults whose fathers did not work when they were growing up are more likely to be unhappy when working than when unemployed. For all other young adults it is the reverse, being out of work is associated with lower satisfaction. There may therefore be a difference in how being out of work is perceived, which needs further research. Young adults whose fathers were unemployed at a formative period may attach less of a mental stigma to unemployment than their peers with employed fathers.



# FAMILY INSTABILITY THROUGHOUT CHILDHOOD: BUILDING A MORE DETAILED PICTURE

Research by **Mike Brewer, Alita Nandi, Seetha Menon, Paulino Font Gilabert,** University of Essex

66

FOR CHILDREN BORN IN THE 1990s TO A WOMAN AGED 25 OR UNDER, 40 PER CENT WILL HAVE EXPERIENCED TIME IN A LONE PARENT FAMILY BY THE AGE OF 5.

**Issue examined**  
Children's experiences of family instability

**People included**  
3,060 children born to British Household Panel Survey sample households in 1991-1997, and children observed in *Understanding Society* households and born in 1994-1997. The study uses data from waves 1-18 of the British Household Panel Survey and waves 1-5 of *Understanding Society*.

Research has persistently shown that children's family circumstance can provide a key explanation for how social inequalities perpetuate across generations. Children born to well-educated mothers are likely to spend much of their childhood with both their birth parents, and children born to less educated mothers are likely to spend more time living in a lone parent family or with step-parents. The experience of these different family situations affects both family income – as lone parents are typically less well-off than couple families – and parental contact time – as children will typically spend less time with (usually) their father after parental separation.

In the UK, there continues to be concern amongst policymakers about the detrimental impacts on children of experiencing a family dissolution, or spending time living in a lone parent family. This study contributes to this debate by investigating children's experience of different family forms across their entire childhoods. Cross-sectional studies tell us that the UK has high levels of lone parenthood, and lone motherhood is more common amongst younger or less educated women. However, it is only with longitudinal studies like *Understanding Society*, which track individuals over time, that we can measure accurately family forms across a child's entire childhood. Using *Understanding Society*, and its predecessor the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) this study combines retrospective information respondents provided about their past marriages and spells of cohabitation, and parenting roles, with the circumstances of their children on whom data has been collected during the study. By doing this, the changing family circumstances of several thousand children born through the 1990s, 2000s and the first years of the current decade can be observed over their childhoods.

Although longitudinal data offers a unique opportunity to understand changes in a child's family situation, and how this might affect their outcomes, constructing partnership histories is not without its difficulties. Missing data – because families drop out of the study or do not provide complete information – can be problematic, particularly as it is highly likely that both types of missing data are more likely to occur for children who experience changing family circumstances, rather than stable circumstances. Because of this, a large part of this research project was concerned with showing how to avoid the biases that would result if those children whose family circumstances are not known were just disregarded.

As an example, the figure shows what fraction of children have lived continuously with their birth parents, for children born to women who were aged 31 or more, and how this varies by the child's age. Two estimates are shown: one based on children born to BHPS households in 1991 to 1997 and the other based on children born to *Understanding Society* households in 1994 to 1997. Because of missing data and attrition, unless one makes various assumptions, it is not possible to produce a single answer to this question. Instead, all that can be done is to estimate upper and lower bounds on what the true answer would be.

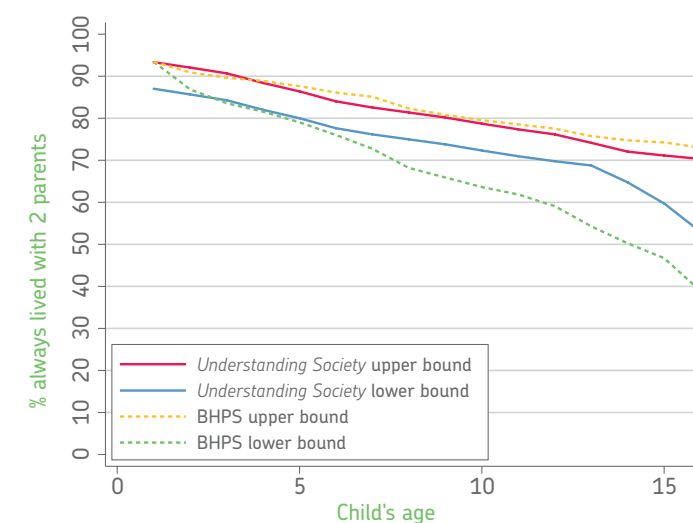
For BHPS, the gap between the upper and lower bounds is caused by families who leave the survey, and so it gets larger as children age. For *Understanding Society*, the gap between the upper and lower bounds is caused by adults who did not provide complete a partnership history.

This work confirms previous research that shows that retrospective data on family circumstances – data that is generated by asking adults to give details of their previous partnerships since adulthood – can give a different answers to questions like “how many years have you spent as a single adult?” from data that comes from following adults over time and asking them each year about their family circumstances. It is not clear, though, whether this difference is due to individuals mis-remembering the details of past relationships, or re-interpreting the nature of such relationships when they have the advantage of hindsight.

This research so far provides robust measures of the fraction of children born since the early 1990s that have spent time living in a lone parent family, accounting for the different sorts of missing data. It finds large differences according to the age of the child's mother. For children born to a woman aged 25 or under, 40 per cent will have experienced time in a lone parent family by the age of 5, rising to 55 per cent by the age of 16. For children born to women aged over 30, 15 per cent will have experienced time in a lone parent family by the age of 5, rising to 28 per cent by the age of 16. Children with mothers with higher levels of education are also less likely to experience time in a lone parent family, over and above the fact that better educated mothers tend to be older too. There is also evidence that the risk that a child experiences any time with a lone parent rose slightly through the 1990s and 2000s.

This research shows how robust estimations can be made of the fraction of children born since the early 1990s that have spent time living in a lone parent family, accounting for the different sorts of missing data. Such data will be important to researchers and analysts wanting to understand trends in cohabitation, marriage and divorce, and in improving our understanding of the impact of these on adults' and children's outcomes. It is also hoped that these research findings will offer a rich perspective on how family life in the UK is changing.

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH BOTH PARENTS USING DATA FROM BHPS AND UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY





# PARENTS' HEALTH AND CHILDREN'S HELP

Research by **John Ermisch**, University of Oxford

CHILDREN'S HELP TO PARENTS FOR DEALING WITH MINOR PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR HEALTH MAY PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN KEEPING PARENTS IN THEIR OWN HOME AND AVOIDING THE HIGH COSTS OF IN-HOME AND INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

**Issue examined**  
The impact of the health of older parents on the extent and kind of help they receive from their middle-aged offspring.

**People included**  
*Understanding Society*, waves 1 and 3; *BHPS*, 2001 and 2006 waves along with 2011-12 wave of *Understanding Society*.

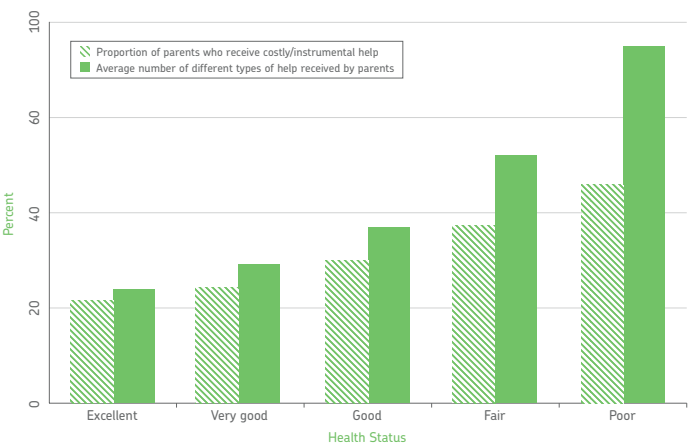
**At some points in the life course the needs of one generation of adults substantially affect the behaviour of the preceding or subsequent generations. This study is concerned with the impact of the health of older parents on the extent and kind of help they receive from their middle-aged offspring. It is one manifestation of solidarity between parents and children during the adult family life course.**

In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service provides doctor and hospital services free at the point of use. State support for personal care in a person's own home is organised by local authorities. Access to these services is based on assessment of need. Financial help for these services depends on personal resources, and its amount varies with the authority in charge because of different allocation criteria and budgets. Many authorities only give financial support to people with very extensive care needs, meaning state support is not available to many. Institutional care is an expensive substitute for in-home care, and local authority means testing rules entail that people will be expected to pay for their own care, either in-home or institutional, in most cases. Therefore help given by adult children to parents who are suffering from poor health or disabilities may play a crucial role in keeping parents in their own home and avoiding the high costs of in-home and institutional care.

Using *Understanding Society* data, the primary research question here is: how responsive is help from children to the health of their parents? Answers to this question contribute to the wider research on inter-generational transfers and inform policy debate related to social care policies and their interaction with the family. Although there is a large literature theorising about and documenting the incidence and types of such transfers in different countries, it is challenging to assess reliably how responsive they are to 'need' for a number of reasons. First, reliable measures of need generally require information from the parent's perspective, preferably the children's as well, but more usually survey information from parents. Second, there are many kinds of need for children's help. Those easier to measure are health and disability of parents, whether or not they have a partner to support them and financial circumstances. Third, it is difficult to disentangle particular associations for example between help and need from cross-sectional data. This is because such data make it impossible to distinguish between children's response to a parent's needs, and differences between families. For example, families are likely to be different in some ways that are very difficult to measure – altruism, reciprocity, geographical proximity, and resources for instance – and if we cannot measure them, then we cannot be sure they are not causing spurious correlations in our results.

The present study used longitudinal data from *Understanding Society* (plus the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing) which covers up to ten years of parents' lives, and importantly, has information based on the parent's perspective. These data allowed an analysis of how children's help changes over time as their parents' health also changes – rather than comparing correlations between parent's health and children's help calculated from variation between different families. If we look at changes in children's behaviour across time in the same family, then we can ignore all the ways that families are potentially different from one another because we are only looking at changes within each individual family.

## PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS RECEIVING 'INSTRUMENTAL HELP' FROM CHILD BY THEIR HEALTH STATUS 2011-12



'Instrumental help' is defined as any of four items: receiving lifts in a child's car; help with basic personal needs; washing, ironing or cleaning; and dealing with personal affairs.



Because we can also look at when parent's health changed, we can see directly if children subsequently change how much they help their parents.

These findings indicate that children's help is highly responsive to problems arising from a parent's health that limit their mobility or their ability to live independently in the community, but is not responsive to severe difficulties requiring daily care. Cross-sectional data would overstate how responsive children are to their parent's health. This is because other influences on children's help, which we do not observe, are correlated with a parent's health and marital status.

This study also looked at specific types of help, such as giving lifts in the car. 'Instrumental help' like this is measured in the BHPS and *Understanding Society*. Instrumental help is found to respond only to the mother's poor health, not the father's, perhaps because of closer relationships with mothers than fathers (for example, people see their mothers more frequently). There is also evidence that parents who are older and who have a grandchild receive more instrumental help from children.

The impact of a grandchild may reflect reciprocity, as the data show that parents who give more help to their children (e.g. childcare) also receive more help.

*Understanding Society* provides an extremely valuable and unique opportunity to analyse intergenerational relationships, in this case to analyse the role of middle-aged children's caring on the health of older parents. Such issues have important policy implications for social care policies and their interaction with the family. Children's help to parents for dealing with minor problems associated with their health may play a crucial role in keeping parents in their own home and avoiding the high costs of in-home and institutional care. Policies could support children in these efforts, not necessarily financially, but in facilitating a partnership between public-supported social care and family care, so that the latter does rule out help from the former.



# DEVOLUTION –

## A ROUTE TO BETTER POLICY MAKING

- 36
- Devolution – Case Studies:

  - Reforming council tax in Scotland
  - Impact of the carrier bag charge in Wales
  - Commuting, connectivity and wellbeing in London



# DEVOLUTION –

## A ROUTE TO BETTER POLICY MAKING

RAJ PATEL  
IMPACT FELLOW AND ACTING DIRECTOR, UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY POLICY UNIT

**Understanding Society’s Policy Unit aims to stimulate the use of longitudinal data from the Study for policy development and learning on a wide range of topics. In this year’s report we take a closer look at how the Study is being used in the context of devolution and the major opportunity this presents to researchers and policy makers alike.**

The UK faces immense economic and social challenges, with highly varied needs and fault lines that are setting apart communities. Notwithstanding the tremendous progress made in some places over the last two decades, these fault lines change far less quickly than one would assume, with the economic recession of the 1980s still shaping economic geography, culture and politics in the UK today. Add evidence from the damaging uneven effects of the 2008 recession and distributional impact of austerity since 2010 and the UK’s fragmenting political economy risks growing even deeper roots.

Devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the running of London, and the current debate about decentralisation of executive powers in England can improve democratic participation, policy making and better co-ordinate policy with delivery partners. Although the hands they wish to play can be constrained by external events and the nature of devolution, home nations and regions can bring a much greater focus to the most pressing issues of concern to their constituents.

As a result public policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is diverging from Westminster, beyond existing historical differences such as Scotland’s higher education, health and local government policies – though one should not completely rule out convergence on some

issues either. Signs are that the devolved administrations are also taking a different approach to generating economic and social impact.

Better evidence on the effects of policies becomes paramount, and uniquely, devolution offers an opportunity to more robustly test and evaluate policies. This is because the UK now acts as a living laboratory for social, economic and health policy innovation. It provides an opportunity for natural experiments that arise when one region decides to pursue a unique policy. This exposes people in one part of the country to an intervention not experienced by others, which it could be argued resemble random assignment.



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However, in the *Devolution as a Policy Lab* report (February 2016) by Akash Paun and Jill Rutter from the Institute for Government and Anna Nicholl, at the Alliance for Useful Evidence previously, the authors argue that policy makers were failing to exploit this opportunity. This may in part be due to political, cultural or organisational barriers. Policy makers of course do borrow and learn from international experiences, though this is often facilitated by the presence of overarching bodies such as the OECD which can compare and

contrast policy design and its effects.

*Understanding Society* is a valuable resource responding to the challenges and opportunities presented by UK’s diverging governance mechanisms and economic geography, and acts as a powerful policy learning and evaluation tool. The Study is already bearing fruit in this respect. Whilst cross-sectional use of the Study can be made at regional level due to its large sample size and the richness of its data, its power lies in comparative analysis across the home nations and regions and exploiting its longitudinal design to understand the impact of policies.



REFORMING COUNCIL TAX IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland there has been growing debate about devolution of tax, welfare and spending powers, with political parties committed to different positions on what they would do with additional powers. Dr David Comerford, University of Stirling, and Dr Stuart McIntyre, University of Strathclyde have been examining the opportunity for land and property tax reforms in Scotland<sup>1</sup>. The ability to link *Understanding Society* to different administrative datasets, and it being a representative sample of the population in each of the four nations of the UK, enabled the researchers to estimate the impact of changes to domestic property tax (Council Tax) on the Scottish population.

According to the authors, whilst Council Tax is a form of property tax, it is poorly designed. They evaluated the rate at which a flat rate property tax, calculated as a proportion of property value, would have to be levied to replace the revenues from the current Council Tax, and then examined the impact upon households. Relative to Council Tax, who would be the winners and losers?

Using an administrative dataset of housing transactions from the Registers of Scotland, combined with housing stock data from the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics database, they first estimated the total value of residential property in Scotland, which enabled an evaluation of the property tax rate needed to replace the current Council Tax revenues. Their analysis found that a flat rate property tax of around 0.7% of property values is required to maintain total tax neutrality. Denmark, for example, which has a flat-rate domestic dwellings property tax, charges 1% of property value (subject to a threshold with a higher rate of 3% above the threshold).

The researchers then evaluated the impact of replacing the Council Tax with a flat rate property tax in a representative sample of Scottish households using *Understanding Society*. They found that replacing the Council Tax with a flat rate property tax would have more winners than losers – and reduce a key measure of inequality – the Gini coefficient – thus promoting greater fairness.

The research fed into the report by the Commission on Local Tax Reform. The work of the Commission was intended to inform new policies on local taxation, which were put to the electorate in the Scottish Parliamentary election in May 2016. Although the report of the Commission was equivocal, and avoided an explicit recommendation for a flat-rate property tax, proposals for a version of this subsequently featured in the 2016 Manifestos for both the Scottish Green Party, and the Scottish Labour Party.

IMPACT OF THE CARRIER BAG CHARGE IN WALES

A different example, from Wales, shows how the introduction of policies at different times in devolved administrations enables us to evaluate their impact. In October 2011 Wales become the first country in the UK to introduce a minimum Single-Use Carrier Bag Charge (SUCBC) of £0.05 to try and reduce the environmental impacts of plastic bags. The researchers, Gregory Owen Thomas, Wouter Poortinga and Elena Sautkina<sup>2</sup> from the University of Cardiff, made use of this natural experiment.

The main aim of the research was to examine whether the Welsh carrier bag charge changed pro-environmental behaviour as compared to Scotland and England. A second aim was to see whether the charge had ‘secondary’ attitudinal and behavioural effects, i.e. a spillover effect.

Spillover is a phenomenon where an intervention targeted at improving one type of behaviour may lead to an increase or decrease in other, untargeted behaviours – in this case other pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. Such effects have attracted interest for government policymakers as a cost-effective and non-intrusive way to change multiple behaviours. The general hypothesis was that external influences, such as regulation, would lead to weak spillover effects in Wales compared to any changes in bag re-use in England and Scotland which would primarily be driven by internal motivations.

Six pro-environmental behaviours were examined: turning off the tap when brushing teeth; wearing warmer clothes indoors instead of turning up heating; buying recycled paper products; using public transport; walking/cycling short trips; and car sharing. The attitudinal questions examined were on what best described the respondents feeling about their current lifestyle and the environment, how environmentally friendly their current lifestyles were and where they agreed or disagreed that being green was an alternative lifestyle that was not for the majority.

The results show that people used their own shopping bag more often in Wales after the charge compared to England and Scotland. However, using one’s own bag more often was linked to increases in the sustainable behaviours and stronger environmental views but effects were small – and significantly weaker in Wales than the rest of the UK. It was associated with an increase in three other behaviours in England and Scotland: increased frequency of turning off the tap when brushing teeth, an increased frequency of wearing warm clothes instead of turning on the heating, and increased frequency of using public transport. England and Scotland also showed that it was associated with a greater change in satisfaction with environmental lifestyle, and a greater change in perception of being “green” as an acceptable lifestyle.

The overall conclusion was that the carrier bag charge in Wales encouraged bag re-use, but if people change their behaviour without an ‘external motivator’ (such as the carrier bag charge), then that may lead to quite small changes in ‘self-perception’, attitudes, and as a result behavioural spillover.

<sup>1</sup> The initial version of this research was published as part of the technical appendix to the Commission on Local Tax Reform’s report “*Just Change: A New Approach to Local Taxation*”. The target of this report was Scottish Government and policy makers in Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Owen Thomas, G., Poortinga, W., Sautkina, E., May 2016: *The Welsh Single-Use Carrier Bag Charge and behavioural spillover*, Journal of Environmental Psychology, Volume 47, Pages 126–135.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Chng, S., White, M., Abraham, C., Skippon, S., July 2016: *Commuting and wellbeing in London: The roles of commute mode and local public transport connectivity*, Preventive Medicine, Volume 88, Pages 182–188.

COMMUTING, CONNECTIVITY AND WELLBEING IN LONDON

Cities and urban environments are critical sites for enquiry and action in relation to health and well-being. A key challenge is how to make cities more liveable and tackle the problem of pollution, offering a better quality of life. A major lever that the Mayor for London has is transport policy and the scope to influence commuting behaviour. Commuting is also a source of anxiety and stress for many people.

Samuel Chng-Chong-Wei and colleagues<sup>3</sup> from the University of Exeter Medical School and Transport Research Laboratory explored the relationships between how people commute, local neighbourhood connection to public transport and subjective wellbeing.

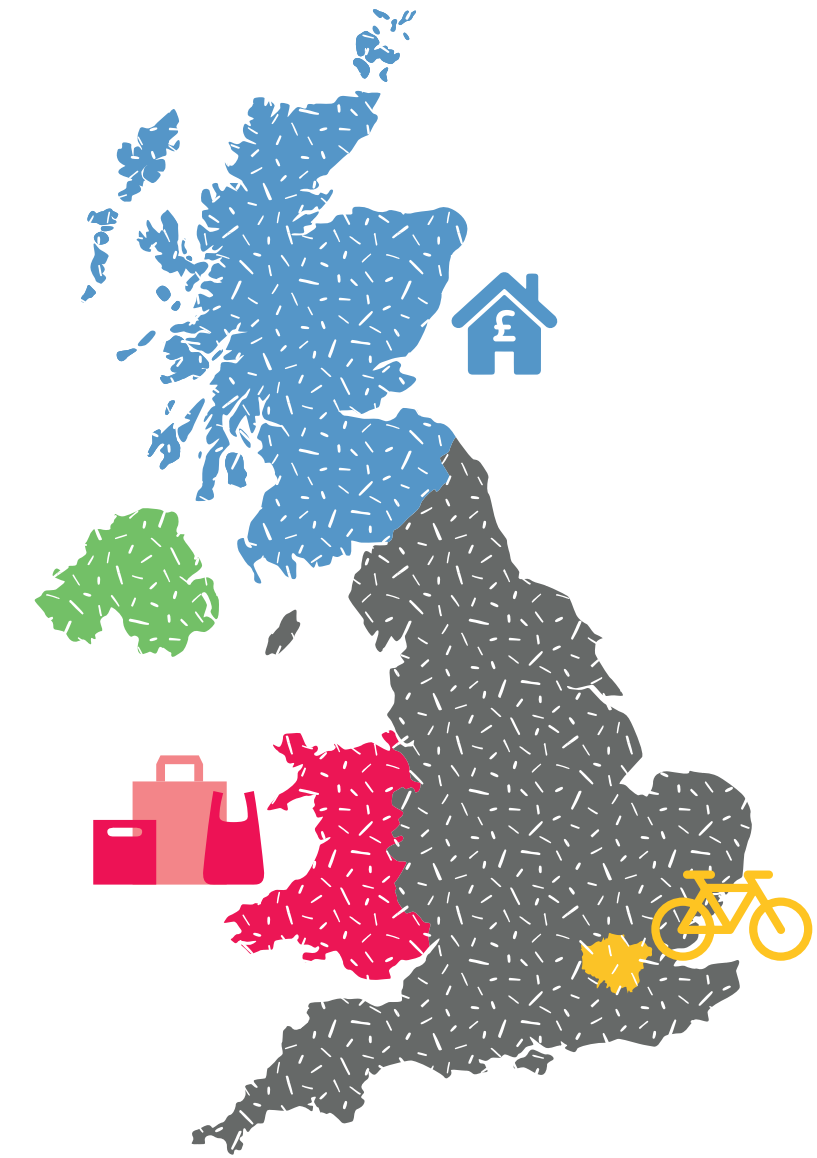
The scope to use individual level data in conjunction with administrative data on public transport infrastructure quality near one’s residence, i.e., the level of ‘neighbourhood connectivity’, was an innovative dimension. Subjective wellbeing was measured in terms of life satisfaction (a positive expression) and mental distress (a negative expression) on the basis that these may be affected differentially. For example, cycling to work might promote wellbeing by encouraging positive emotions and/or by reducing the mental distress arising from anxiety associated with traffic jams.

Only individuals who walked to work had significantly higher life satisfaction than car drivers (but not other modes). In contrast people who walk to work do not have lower mental distress than those who drive.

People who were better connected to public transport tended to have significantly lower mental distress in general but train users with better connectivity had higher levels of mental distress. One possible explanation, that would require further research, could be that this may reflect the experience of train users whose commutes are regularly on overcrowded regional trains into the Capital, or who are faced with delays and cancellations, despite ostensibly being better connected.

Perhaps most surprisingly, public transport connectivity was unrelated to the likelihood of using it for commuting. Instead, public transport commutes were more likely amongst those who had comparatively fewer children and cars within the household and amongst younger commuters who made longer distance commutes.

Overall, the findings show that there is no simple set of interventions to promote change in commuting behaviour whilst also improving wellbeing amongst Londoners – different transport policies may affect positive and negative aspects of life differentially which policy makers need to take into account.



CONCLUSION

**Devolution offers the opportunity to pursue more divergent policies but has also created a living policy laboratory in the UK, providing a fertile ground for examining policies. These findings, broadly speaking, suggest that there is an alternative to Council Tax that is more equitable, the 5p carrier bag charge has had a major impact on reducing plastic bag use but only a small spillover effect on pro-environmental behaviours and there is no silver bullet for improving subjective wellbeing by influencing a change in commuting behaviour. *Understanding Society*’s rich data is providing valuable policy learning within and beyond the UK – but more innovative use can be made of its unique features.**



# ABOUT THE STUDY

## TEN KEY FEATURES

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TO DATE, SIX WAVES OF THE MAIN STUDY, AND EIGHT WAVES OF THE IP, HAVE BEEN DEPOSITED AT THE UK DATA SERVICE FOR RESEARCHERS TO DOWNLOAD AND USE.



**Understanding Society is the UK Household Longitudinal Study, which annually collects information from all individuals in approximately (at wave 1) 40,000 households over time. It was set up by the Economic and Social Research Council, under the scientific leadership of the Institute for Social and Economic Research.**

The study began in 2009 and includes four samples:

- a general sample of households representative of the population of the UK
- an ethnic minority boost (EMB) sample comprising around 1,000 individuals each of black African, Bangladeshi, Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani groups and smaller samples of other ethnic minority groups; a new immigrant and ethnic minority boost (IEMB) sample was added at wave 6

- the former British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) sample (wave 2 onwards), which means that for a sizeable proportion of the sample data extend back to 1991
- an Innovation Panel (IP) which was set up to enable researchers to experiment with survey methods to improve the quality of data collected, particularly in longitudinal studies.

To date, six waves of the main study, and eight waves of the IP, have been deposited at the UK Data Service for researchers to download and use; over 5,000 people have downloaded the data and over 500 papers and reports have been produced (that we know of!).

*Understanding Society* has ten unique features, which taken together provide an unprecedented window on the changing lives of people in all countries of the UK.



ABOUT THE STUDY

1 – A PANEL STUDY OF ALL AGES

Unlike many longitudinal studies that focus on people born in a specific year (cohort studies), *Understanding Society* collects data from people of all ages. New people join the study as they move, or are born, into homes with original study members. This means it can be used to understand the experiences of the whole population over time.

2 – ANNUAL CONTINUOUS DATA COLLECTION

*Understanding Society* collects data annually so that short and long run changes in people's lives can be investigated. This means data collection takes place close to important events in people's lives – eg, getting married, becoming unemployed – so that the causes and consequences can be explored. It also means it is often possible for researchers to examine associations before and after policy changes. For the BHPS sample, contained within *Understanding Society*, we now have over 25 years of annual data on their lives. A continuous fieldwork period allows investigation of seasonal trends and event specific questions.

3 – THE WHOLE HOUSEHOLD

As a household study, *Understanding Society* collects information from everyone in the household so that inter-relations – between generations, couples and siblings – can be explored.



4 – NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL DATA

*Understanding Society* includes all four countries of the UK, and can be used across a wide range of geographic levels, which means that researchers can compare the circumstances and experiences of people in different places, and increasingly with the devolution of power, different policy contexts. More detailed geographical information can be linked with different location indicators. For example, geographic linkage enables us to link to the level of deprivation, greenspace, air pollution, availability of transport and other services in people's local areas.

5 – ETHNIC MINORITY BOOST

The EMB and more recent IEMB samples mean that *Understanding Society* has sufficient sample sizes of different ethnic minority groups to allow the experiences of specific ethnic minority groups (and across migrant generations) to be investigated. The scope of such analysis is enhanced by an extra five minutes of question time set aside each wave for asking specific questions (such as remittances, migration history, ethnic identity) to ethnic minorities and a comparison majority sample. It is currently the only open access, longitudinal household survey that covers ethnic minorities.

6 – MULTI-TOPIC

*Understanding Society* covers a wide range of social, economic and behavioural factors that are important to people's everyday lives and to society more generally. These include:

- family and household life
- education, employment and work
- income, housing, wealth, expenditure & deprivation
- health and wellbeing, health behaviours
- environmental behaviours, political attitudes
- neighbourhood conditions, transport, use of services
- social support and networks, caring and volunteering.

This means that the study has data relevant to a wide range of government departments and researchers. Furthermore, the impact of one aspect of people's lives e.g., family change can be investigated on others, for example, health and behaviours. User consultations are held on the content periodically to ensure that emerging agendas are reflected but balanced alongside longitudinal consistency.



UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY  
COVERS A WIDE RANGE OF SOCIAL,  
ECONOMIC AND BEHAVIOURAL  
FACTORS THAT ARE IMPORTANT  
TO PEOPLE'S EVERYDAY LIVES



7 – INNOVATION

The Innovation Panel (IP) uses a sample of 1,500 households that have been interviewed every year since 2008. It creates a realistic testing ground for researchers who can apply to conduct methodological experiments each year. Accepted experiments are carried in the IP, and data made available for the wider research community to explore. In addition, *Understanding Society* has an associated study option, which allows researchers to design their own, usually qualitative studies or web surveys, to be carried out on a subsample of respondents. The IP plays a key role in ensuring the future success of *Understanding Society* and shapes decisions about how to improve survey design around the world.



8 – BIOMARKERS AND GENETICS DATA

Nurses collected data (at waves 2 or 3) to measure people's health – for example, their height, weight, blood pressure, and lung function. Blood samples were taken which provide information on the risk of different diseases such as diabetes, as well as genetic data. These kinds of data better enable researchers to understand the two way relationship between social and economic circumstances and health, in ways that will improve policy development, for example on how different aspects of health affect people's ability to work.

9 – LINKED ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Another unique source of data is the ability of *Understanding Society* to link (with consent) to administrative records that are available on respondents from other sources. We have linked to data from the National Pupil Database which has children's formal test results to examine the association between these and, for example, their family circumstances and support.

10 – POLICY ENGAGEMENT

A Policy Unit has been established to directly support government departments and devolved administrations to use the *Understanding Society* data for policy purposes and work with other organisations (e.g., charities and think tanks) to promote policy learning across a wide range of topics.





## FIND OUT MORE

Find out more about the Study online at:  
[WWW.UNDERSTANDINGSOCIETY.AC.UK](http://WWW.UNDERSTANDINGSOCIETY.AC.UK)

Sign up to our newsletter at:  
[WWW.UNDERSTANDINGSOCIETY.AC.UK/EMAIL/SIGNUP](http://WWW.UNDERSTANDINGSOCIETY.AC.UK/EMAIL/SIGNUP)

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