Preface

Longitudinal surveys have become highly valued by researchers and policy makers for their ability to provide insights that cannot be obtained by any other means. The contribution of longitudinal surveys to social justice agendas, for example, is now well established. In this era when the realities of anthropogenic climate change have finally achieved broad acknowledgement, study of the determinants and impacts of individual-level behavioural change has become of crucial significance to our future survival. Longitudinal surveys should come into their own in this and other arenas.

While the successful implementation of a longitudinal survey can be extremely rewarding, there are considerable complexities involved in designing and carrying out a longitudinal survey over and above those that apply to other surveys. Survey methodologists have been studying these complexities and developing better methods for years, but the results are scattered about throughout the general survey methods, statistics and indeed social science literature. A notable exception—a book devoted to methods for longitudinal surveys—is the Wiley book *Panel Surveys*, which was edited by Daniel Kasprzyk, Greg Duncan, Graham Kalton and the late M. P. Singh and published in 1989. That book contained monograph papers presented at the International Symposium on Panel Surveys held in November 1986 in Washington, DC. While the volume has remained helpful to survey researchers, there have been important changes and developments in the field in the past two decades.

In 2004 I proposed the organisation of a conference that would in some sense be a successor to the 1986 Symposium. The idea was that the conference would bring together researchers interested in the methodology of longitudinal surveys from around the world and that a series of invited monograph papers would form the edited volume that you now have in front of you. The proposal was considered by the Steering Group of the UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC), a centre located at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Essex. The remit of the ULSC includes the advancement of methodology and the promotion of best practice for longitudinal surveys, so the conference and book seemed a good fit. The Steering group agreed and the decision was taken to adopt the conference and the book as a project under the auspices of the ULSC.

The next steps were to assemble both a scientific committee to pull together the programme for the conference and a local organising committee to make all the arrangements necessary for a successful international conference. The scientific committee consisted of the following people: Roeland Beerten (Office for National Statistics, UK), Paul Biemer (Research Triangle Institute and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA),
Nick Buck (ISER, University of Essex, UK), Marco Francesconi (Dept of Economics, University of Essex, UK), Stephen Jenkins (ISER, University of Essex, UK), Graham Kalton (Westat, USA), Femke De Keulenaer (University of Antwerp, Belgium – now Gallup Europe, Belgium), Peter Lynn (Chair: ISER, University of Essex, UK), Gad Nathan (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel), Cheti Nicoletti (ISER, University of Essex, UK), Randy Olsen (Ohio State University, USA), Ian Plewis (Institute of Education, University of London, UK – now University of Manchester, UK), Ulrich Rendtel (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany), Joerg-Peter Schraepler (DIW Berlin, Germany) and Mark Wooden (University of Melbourne, Australia). I am grateful to all of them for their role in screening submitted abstracts and shaping the programmes of both monograph and contributed papers for what was to become known as the *International Conference on the Methodology of Longitudinal Surveys*, or *MOLS 2006* for short.

The conference took place on the campus of the University of Essex in July 2006 and attracted over 200 delegates from 26 countries, with 85 papers presented. The local organising committee consisted of five members of the ISER: Randy Banks, Ann Farncombe, Peter Lynn (Chair), Emanuela Sala and Janice Webb. Randy was responsible for creating and maintaining the conference website, which was well-received by participants and continues to provide a valuable archive of presented papers (www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/mols2006). Janice took charge of bookings, accommodation arrangements, meals and a host more besides. She will be well known to many of the conference participants, having helped many of them with tasks as diverse as travel arrangements, payments, dietary requirements and finding their way across the University of Essex campus. Janice’s professionalism and dedication to the job was instrumental to the success of the conference.

The role of these ISER staff in organising and administering the conference was made possible by the support of the ULSC. The ULSC is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council with support from the University of Essex and I am deeply grateful to both organisations for ultimately making this whole thing possible.

Gratitude is also due to many others: the University of Essex Conferences Office for their efficient role in the local arrangements on campus; the then Vice-chancellor of the University, Professor Sir Ivor Crewe, who generously hosted a welcome reception in a marquee in the campus grounds; the deputy mayor of Colchester, councillor Ray Gamble, who hosted a civic reception in Colchester Town Hall and attended the conference dinner in Colchester’s historic Moot Hall; and Colchester Borough Council Museums Service who organised guided tours of Colchester Castle Museum for conference participants.

On the day before the conference commenced, two associated short courses were held, each of which was attended by more than 40 participants. The courses were ‘Handling incomplete data in longitudinal surveys’, presented by Joop Hox and Edith de Leeuw, and ‘Multilevel modelling for longitudinal survey data’, presented by Sophia Rabe-Hesketh and Anders Skrondal. The courses benefited from funding by the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (www.ncrm.ac.uk).

With the conference over, attention turned to producing this monograph volume. The strength of the book lies in the quality of the chapters, which in turn reflects the experience, knowledge and energy of the chapter authors. I am grateful to the thirty or so researchers around the world who reviewed the draft chapters. All the chapters were subsequently presented in monograph sessions at *MOLS 2006* and further benefited...
from the insightful comments of knowledgeable discussants. The Editor’s role has been
to mould the chapters into a coherent whole, a task made easier by the responsiveness
and cooperation of the authors and, above all, by the professionalism of the staff at
Wiley, particularly Kathryn Sharples, the commissioning editor who showed faith in the
project. Susan Barclay, project editor, who showed commendable patience and restraint
in her regular reminders regarding my tardy delivery, and Beth Dufour, content editor,
who skillfully guided the book through its final stages. Any weaknesses of the book
remain solely the responsibility of the Editor. In addition to supporting the production
of the book, Wiley sponsored a prize for best student paper at MOLS 2006. This was
awarded to Mario Callegaro of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (now at Knowledge
Networks Inc.), with runner-up Hari Lohano of the University of Bath, UK.

The task of editing this book inevitably impinged considerably on family life and
I wish to acknowledge the forbearance of Elisabeth, Henry and Adrian who had too
often to put up with me being inseparable from my laptop.

The result of this effort I hope is worthwhile. The book covers the range of issues
involved in designing, carrying out and analysing a longitudinal survey. In discussing
ways to improve longitudinal surveys, chapters draw upon theories and ideas from
psychology, sociology, statistics and econometrics. As well as this multidisciplinarity,
an international flavour can be detected in the volume. Though the book’s UK roots
may be apparent, the branches reach out to provide glimpses of survey practice in
Canada, USA, Australia, Germany and The Netherlands. The community of survey
methodology researchers is truly global and the community specialising in methods for
longitudinal surveys is pretty small in most countries, making international communica-
tion and collaboration particularly valuable. Such collaboration is now continuing
through the biennial International Workshop on Panel Survey Methods, which was in
some sense spawned by MOLS 2006. These workshops are relatively small, informal
gatherings of like-minded methods researchers willing to share and discuss research. The
first took place at the University of Essex in July 2008 (www.iser.essex.ac.uk/seminars/
occasional/psmw2008) and the second is planned for Spring 2010 in Mannheim,
Germany. I hope that the friendly international collaboration and spirit of common
purpose that I have experienced in putting together this book and in the conference and
workshops will continue in future research and publication ventures.

This volume aims to be of particular value to researchers involved in commissioning,
designing or carrying out longitudinal surveys, as well as to those planning the analysis
of longitudinal survey data. It may also serve as a useful secondary text for students of
research methods. I hope that it might additionally help to chart out the known
unknowns and hence to stimulate further methodological research.

Peter Lynn
Colchester, October 2008