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OUR BCS70 HEROES

This celebration of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) is dedicated to our incredible study members.

You are each unique, irreplaceable and extremely precious to this very valuable study. Together, you've provided the key to many new scientific discoveries, helping us better understand how our society works and the issues that affect all our lives. It's an amazing legacy.

We hope you take enormous pride in the difference you've made. Thank you for the last 50 years. We look forward to learning even more from you in the years ahead.



FOREWORD

Fifty years ago, when you were born, you became part of something unique - a group of babies who would be tracked by scientists more closely than almost any before.

Today, as members of BCS70, you're part of one of the most valuable studies of human development in the world.

I first encountered BCS70 in 2011 when I was working as a science journalist and started researching a book about the British birth cohort studies. The rich history of these studies mirrors that of science, society and Britain itself. When I published the book, called *The Life Project*, I heard from so many readers who loved hearing your story and learning about you.

Thanks to your generosity in giving researchers your time and information, BCS70 has collected invaluable data about how human lives unfold. This has led to remarkable discoveries in fields ranging from health to education, and has shaped government policy in social mobility, social exclusion, adult numeracy and literacy, and more. By doing this, the study has touched the lives of almost every person in Britain today.

Among the many insights it's given us, BCS70 has helped show how best to raise the next generation - and how important it is for parents to take an interest in their children's education. It's also cast light on mental health and how problems can originate in childhood. The study has helped us understand how our early experiences can profoundly influence the way the rest of our lives play out. But it has also shown us that our origins do not define our destiny - and how disadvantage can be overcome.

At 50, you and the study are more treasured than ever before. That's because, with each new survey, researchers can look back at the wealth of information already collected and work out ways in which past events could be connected to what's happening to you today.

You've lived through a remarkable era: extraordinary global events and unprecedented social, economic and technological change.

You've seen women achieve greater equality (though not yet enough), and seen the internet revolutionise our lives. Your life histories, captured by BCS70, reveal your experiences of these turbulent times. There are very few studies in the world that follow your generation in this way.

I wrote in my book that amazing things happen when we do something as simple as track people through their lives. It allows researchers to understand why we tend to follow particular paths. BCS70 is a scientific marvel, and it's all because of your goodwill and selfless willingness to take part.

HELEN PEARSON

Science journalist, editor and author of *The Life Project*



INTRODUCTION

Turning 50 is a special milestone for each of you, and for the amazing study you've been part of all this time.

This year is a big anniversary for me too as I'll be celebrating 10 years as Director of BCS70. It has been a great privilege to lead this study for the past decade. When I took on the role, I certainly felt an affinity with you all as I am only four years younger than you.

The study really is a jewel in the crown of British social science. It has been used by hundreds of researchers internationally to help us to understand different aspects of our lives and what influences them.

BCS70 is one in a well-established and world-renowned series of British birth cohort studies, each following the lives of a group of people born around the same time. These studies began with cohorts born in 1946 and then 1958, followed by BCS70 and, more recently, the Millennium Cohort Study. BCS70 captures the unique experience of your generation, known as 'Generation X', a term popularised by Douglas Coupland's novel.

Researchers have been able to use your information to make comparisons across the generations. It is fascinating to

track how social trends have affected the lives of each generation from early childhood onwards. For example, breastfeeding was out of fashion in 1970 compared to in both 1958 and 2000, and smoking during pregnancy was 'in'. But for some trends your generation has been much healthier than subsequent generations. For example, childhood obesity was rare when you were growing up, whereas it is a major public health problem today. Comparisons such as these help us to understand that we are not just atomised individuals - we are each part of a generation living through a shared historical moment, despite the enormous diversity of our backgrounds and life stories.

My own focus as a researcher is on educational and social inequalities. I have used BCS70 to explore the factors which predict educational success and social mobility. My work has shown that where we start in life matters, but also that early inequalities are not destiny. One of the first projects I carried

out using BCS70 highlighted the powerful impact of reading for pleasure on teenage learning. I went on to show that reading continued to exert an influence on your vocabulary in adult life. Without information about people's lives over such a long period, which BCS70 gives us, we would not be able to understand how learning develops during the whole of life, not just during childhood.

The information you have so generously provided over the years becomes more valuable each time you talk to us.

By sharing the story of your lives, you've given an incredible gift to science. It's a gift that every one of us, and future generations too, should be very thankful for.

I hope you feel proud of everything the study has achieved so far, and that you enjoy a very happy 50th birthday year.

ALICE SULLIVAN

Director of the 1970 British Cohort Study



THE BCS70 STORY



Nearly 11,000

Study members who have taken part in six or more surveys over the years

YOU'RE GOLDEN

For half a century, you've been part of something truly amazing. By contributing to BCS70, you've helped to tell the story of your generation – a generation which has grown up, worked, played and loved against the backdrop of remarkable political, economic, social and technological changes in Britain. The study is a record of how these have shaped your lives.

There are precious few other studies, anywhere in the world, quite like BCS70, and this makes it even more special. It's treasured by researchers, policymakers and others working to create a fairer, better society for all of us. And your participation in it is priceless.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS...

There have been 10 BCS70 surveys in all. That's a lot of questions!

But that's not all. Over the years, you've completed an array of tasks, from drawing pictures of people, to reading maps, interpreting graphs, and naming as many animals as possible in one minute. All these exercises have been firmly rooted in science. They've helped us explore how our skills develop, and how our skills can impact on different aspects of our lives.

We've collected objective health measurements from you as children as well as adults. Many of you also provided blood samples in the last survey. In the future, this information will help us find out what influences our physical health.



Around 18,000

Tubes of blood collected in the Age 46 Survey

Most popular BCS70 baby names:

Boys:

Paul
Andrew
Mark
David
Jason

Girls:

Sharon
Joanne
Sarah
Lisa
Julie

IN MEMORY

We remember with gratitude and sadness the members of BCS70 who have passed away, and the 425 babies included in the very first survey who were lost before they could live.

LEARNING FROM YOUR LIVES

We anonymise the information we collect from you and make it available to registered researchers through a central repository called the UK Data Service. This immense data store houses over 8,000 datasets, including BCS70 survey data. Every year, BCS70 information is downloaded hundreds of times by scientists working in a wide variety of fields, from economics to psychology and education.

Researchers based in the UK are the biggest users of BCS70. But the study has a huge fan base beyond these shores. In fact, researchers in every continent (with the exception of Antarctica) have explored the study's rich data.

Findings from the study are many and varied. They've underpinned public policy and helped us with the choices we each make about the way we live our lives. They've often been covered in the news. In this booklet, we've featured just a snapshot of all the 1,000 and more pieces of published research you've made possible over the last 50 years. It's quite an astonishing legacy!

THE STORY CONTINUES

One of the hallmarks of a study like BCS70 is how it becomes even more valuable over time.

Every one of you matters enormously to this incredible study. Your individual experiences help us see the bigger picture, and if we lost you, we wouldn't have the whole story.

Thank you for everything you've already done for BCS70. We look forward to continuing this journey with you.

Nearly 250

Times we've spotted BCS70 in the media in the last seven years

45

Different countries where researchers have downloaded BCS70 information in the last decade

1,000+

Pieces of BCS70 research published in the last 50 years



1970s



It's April 1970. Simon and Garfunkel have topped the UK charts with *A Bridge Over Troubled Water*, the Beatles' split has hit the headlines, and the crew of Apollo 13 are preparing for lift off.

Meanwhile, in hospitals and homes up and down the country, thousands of new babies, all born within a week of each other, are being recruited to what will become one of the longest running and most important studies of its kind – the 1970 British Cohort Study.



Neville Butler, a paediatrician, was the energetic driving force who conceived this ambitious plan to set up a study of all babies born in a single week. He had form. Twelve years before he had established the 1958 National Child Development Study, which to this day continues to track the lives of thousands of people all born in one week in 1958. This study had already generated valuable information to help the survival rates of babies in Britain. Doctors and scientists felt that even more could be learned from a new birth cohort, to further improve babies' chances.



THE EARLY YEARS

And so, just as you were getting used to your new surroundings, we began documenting the story of your lives. More than 17,000 babies were surveyed, thanks to your parents, the vast network of midwives who interviewed them, and the study's first directors, Roma Chamberlain and Geoffrey Chamberlain (not related). It was thought that as many as 98 per cent of all births in Britain in that April week were included. The last completed questionnaire finally reached the study's headquarters on 21 December 1970, just in time for Christmas.

The seventies introduced us to glam rock and punk, Tony Hart and Morph, *Fantastic Mr Fox*, *Star Wars*, and *Concorde*. The decade also brought widespread industrial unrest. With strike action threatening energy supplies, the government brought in the three-day working week, candlelit evenings became the norm, and streetlights went out. Events culminated in the Winter of Discontent and the election of Margaret Thatcher as the 1970s drew to a close.

Against this backdrop, we followed your progress. While the first survey had been medically focussed, at age 5 we looked more broadly at how your lives were unfolding – and we have continued to do this ever since. This is one of the study's key features, and it enables researchers to understand the connections between different aspects of your lives.

But first we had to find you as we hadn't kept in touch. The NHS sprung into action, helping to trace you and dispatching health visitors to interview your families. We asked you to complete a few different tasks for this survey. One of these was to draw pictures of people. We could see how your minds were developing by looking at how many different parts of the body you'd included in your drawings.

Children born overseas in the same week and now living in Britain joined the study at this point, and others would join later, helping to make sure the cohort reflected our diverse society. Over 13,000 of you took part in this survey, an estimated 81 per cent of the whole group. Amazing!



1 in 7



OF YOU WERE BORN
AT HOME

THANK YOU TO YOUR PARENTS

It all began when your parents said 'yes'. We can't thank them enough for agreeing for you to be part of this very special study and for everything they have personally contributed to it. We wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for them.

In your words

"I always enjoy doing surveys and answering questions – so did my mum and I can see why she signed my up for it. I imagine her sitting up in bed and filling out those first questionnaires when I was born."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The information we collected from you in childhood has helped us understand the different ways your early years can imprint on the rest of your lives.

PARENTS' SMOKING HABITS

BCS70 has uncovered some of the most compelling evidence on how parents' smoking habits can impact children.

Back in 1969, when your mums were pregnant with you, it wasn't widely known, unlike today, that smoking can be harmful to babies. In the first BCS70 survey, just over 40 per cent of mums told us they were smokers.

A landmark piece of research, published in 1972, and based on the 1958 National Child Development Study, showed that mums who smoked in pregnancy were more likely to have smaller babies. The findings sparked a major national public health campaign.

Since then, BCS70 has revealed even more about the possible consequences of smoking in pregnancy. Reinforcing the earlier research, scientists found that

BCS70 babies weighed less if their mother had smoked while pregnant, potentially making them more vulnerable. This was true whatever the mother's social circumstances. However, for disadvantaged mothers who smoked in pregnancy, there were additional risks. Their babies were in greater danger of being stillborn, or dying soon after they were born, if they smoked.

Over the years, BCS70 has led to many other discoveries about smoking. We now know that children whose mothers smoked were more likely to have had wheezy bronchitis by age 10. We've also learned how parents' habits can rub off on their offspring. Children whose mothers smoked in pregnancy and continued smoking were 4 per cent more likely to become smokers themselves.

In your words

"I'm so very glad that my parents signed me up. Sadly my parents are no longer alive, but the BCS70 is one of the many, many things I am grateful to them for. They have given me a gift to carry with me through my whole life."



40%

OF YOU WERE READ TO EVERY DAY (AT AGE 5)

CHILDHOOD INEQUALITIES

One 2003 study on childhood inequalities, based on BCS70, created more of a stir in policy circles than perhaps any other single piece of BCS70 research before or since.

This research compared the results of the tasks we set you at different stages of childhood up to age 10. It showed that children from better off families who initially showed poor cognitive skills stood a good chance of having caught up by age 10. But the same wasn't true of children from low income families. What's more, by age 10, bright, economically disadvantaged children appeared to be being overtaken academically by children from richer families who hadn't shown such early promise. This mattered for children's futures as performance in these early ability tasks was linked to the level of qualification people went on to achieve by age 26.

The findings informed the policies of successive governments. They were used as evidence in Labour's 2003 Green Paper, Every Child Matters, helping to underpin the case for greater investment in pre-school provision. Later, the coalition government drew on these and other BCS70 findings in its 2011 social mobility strategy.

KIDS TV AND ADULT OBESITY

Although you grew up before the advent of CBeebies and around the clock Netflix, the information we collected about the TV you watched as kids has been a valuable resource for research.

One study found a link between how much TV you watched when you were 5 and your BMI (body mass index) at age 30. Taking account of a range of other factors, including family background and how much sport you did when you were 10, each additional hour of TV watched on weekends at age 5 increased the risk of adult obesity by 7 per cent.

More recently, researchers found that people who watched a lot of TV when they were 10 were much more likely to spend more than three hours a day in front of the box at age 42 than those who had watched relatively little TV in childhood. This study also showed that 42-year-olds who watched TV for at least three hours a day were more likely to say they were in only "fair" or "poor" health and to report that they were either overweight or obese.

1 in 3

MUMS WORKED REGULARLY OUTSIDE THE HOME (IN 1975)

PRE-SCHOOL BENEFITS

A report based on BCS70 was the first to provide conclusive evidence that nursery schools and playgroups could have a positive effect on children's cognitive development.

Researchers found that children who had gone to some sort of pre-school generally did better in the cognitive tasks we set you at ages 5 and 10. Importantly, the actual type of pre-school didn't much matter, be it a day nursery, nursery school or hall playgroup. They each provided a different kind of experience, but all gave a boost to children's development.



1980s

It was the decade of big hair, fluorescent socks, electropop, BMX bikes and the ZX Spectrum. But there was another side to the eighties.

The recession hit hard and levels of unemployment reached three million. While the second half of the decade saw the economy recover, for many families in Britain the effect of job losses would be deeply felt and longer lasting.

We checked in with you twice in the 1980s. Again, we had the task of finding each of you. Thankfully, schools were a great place to start looking. They checked their records for any pupils born in your week.

At age 10, we covered a range of topics, including your health, education, leisure activities, and family life. Nearly 15,000 of you took part. There were questions for your parents and teachers, and you had your own questionnaire to complete this time too. You also had a few different exercises to do. This included something called the Friendly Maths Test, which had been specially designed for BCS70.



COMING OF AGE

LOADSA MONEY!



THE SOCIAL LADDER

In the Age 10 Survey, we asked about your family's income for the first time. Over the years, you've told us about your own earnings, your qualifications, and the jobs you've had. Combined, this information has enabled us to study your generation's experiences of mobility (moving up or down the social ladder) compared to previous generations. These findings have informed government strategies designed to address social inequalities.

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST BIRTHDAY PARTY?

An enormous celebration was held for you at Alton Towers on 8 April 1989 to mark your 19th birthdays. A reported 4,000 of you attended.



40%

OF YOU HELPED WITH THE WASHING UP EVERY DAY (AT AGE 10)

Six years later, we were back in touch. Secondary school was coming to an end, and you were at an important crossroads in your lives. Would you stay on in education (less than half of you did), join a government training scheme or look for a job?

Branded as Youthscan, the Age 16 Survey was huge in scope, with 16 separate components to complete.

BCS70 director at the time, Neville Butler, was a talented fundraiser and had managed to secure support from a wide variety of benefactors to pull off the epic survey. Raising the money was one thing, but there were other hurdles ahead.

The plan had been to complete the survey while you were all still at school. But strike action by teachers meant there were problems getting questionnaires back from some schools. The study team made changes to some of the material so you could do parts of the survey at home instead.

In your words

"I feel privileged to have taken part so far. I feel like a special person to have been born in that specific week."



22%

OF YOU GOT A TAKEAWAY TWICE A WEEK OR MORE (AT AGE 16)



An enormous effort went in to publicity to maximise the number of survey responses. There were prizes up for grabs for those who completed their Youthscan packs, and comedian Lenny Henry even gave the survey his backing: "It's well crucial that you take part... you'll be speaking for all your generation" he urged in one of the newsletters we sent you.

In the end, almost 12,000 of you completed at least part of the survey. It would then be quite some time before we had the chance to speak to you again about the directions your lives had taken you.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The information collected about you in the eighties has been used in all sorts of published research. Here's just a small snapshot.

FOCUS ON EYESIGHT

One BCS70 study discovered a potentially widespread problem of school children being prescribed glasses unnecessarily.

For the Age 10 Survey, we asked your parents if you wore glasses. You also had a sight test to check your vision. Analysing this data, one researcher found that as many as 1 in 5 children who had been prescribed glasses in fact had no problem with their eyesight, and that a further 15 to 20 per cent had only very minimally impaired vision. It appeared, then, that somewhere in the region of 35 to 40 per cent of children's prescriptions were unnecessary, and that precious NHS resources were being wasted on glasses kids didn't actually need.



IMPROVING CHILDREN'S CHANCES

Research on BCS70, and other longitudinal studies, has shown how difficult it can be to overcome a disadvantaged childhood. Children who grow up in poorer families are more likely to experience poverty as adults too. But we also see from your lives how people can and do buck the trend.

One study found that children from poorer families were less likely to be in poverty at age 30 if their parents had shown a lot of interest in their education. For boys, fathers' interest was most important, whereas mothers' interest made the biggest difference to girls. Children whose parents had read to them often when they were little were also more likely to escape disadvantage.

These insights pointed to ways of improving children's chances in life and were used as evidence in a government-commissioned report by Labour MP Frank Field in 2010.



At 16, you told us your favourite TV programmes.

Boys:
EastEnders
Top of the Pops
Miami Vice
Auf Wiedersehen, Pet
Brookside

Girls:
EastEnders
Top of the Pops
Brookside
Dallas
Coronation Street



LEISURE PURSUITS

BCS70 has shown that how teenagers spend their spare time can have a lasting impact on their lives.

In one study, researchers found that family background had a lot to do with the types of activities young people were attracted to at age 16. Teens who were not doing so well at school and were from less well-off families tended to go to youth clubs. On the other hand, 16-year-olds from more affluent families and those who were performing well at school were more likely to go to scouts, guides and other uniformed clubs. However, when it came to sports clubs this social divide disappeared as these activities drew a cross-section of the population.

The researchers found that certain types of leisure activity could have positive benefits for teens later on in their lives, whatever their social background. For example, young people who had gone to sports or community centres, uniformed clubs or church activities at age 16 were less likely to smoke at 30. Sports and community centre attendees were also at less risk of depression in adulthood.

These findings helped to underpin the government's Youth Matters policy in 2005, which sought to improve local facilities for teenagers.

In your words

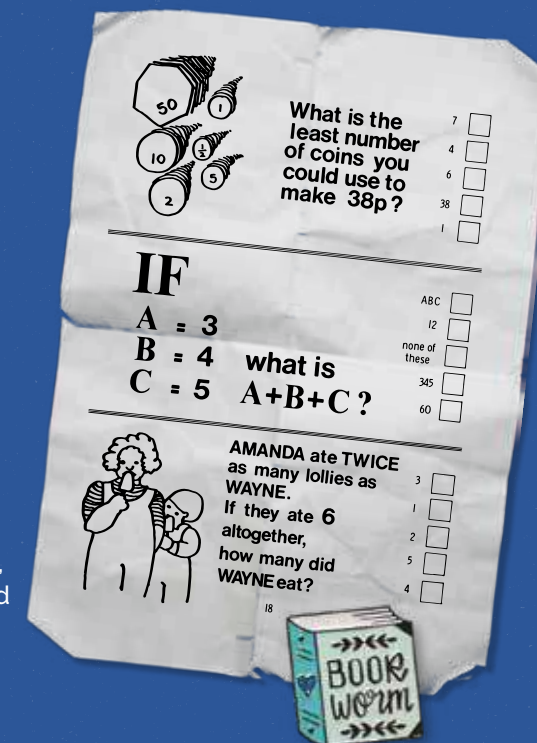
"It's good to know my life experience is of wider use than just mine. It feels a bit like an extra legacy to leave behind!"

READING BENEFITS

By taking part in BCS70, you've helped raise awareness of how reading benefits children. Insights from the study on the value of reading for pleasure have been widely reported in the national press, referenced in government policy, and used by numerous literacy charities, schools and libraries both in the UK and internationally.

When you were 10 and 16, we asked you how often you read for pleasure, and the kinds of things you liked to read. You completed various cognitive assessments, including a vocabulary task at age 16, which we asked you to do again when you were 42.

A research team here at the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, home to BCS70, discovered that children who had often read for pleasure made more progress in maths, as well as spelling and vocabulary, between the ages of 10 and 16 than those who had rarely read. This was true even after taking account of children's social background. In fact, reading seemed to have a bigger hand in children's cognitive development than having highly educated parents.



BCS70 has also shown that reading habits in childhood continue to have a substantial influence on people's vocabulary as much as 30 years later. Those who had read regularly at age 10 scored an average of 67 per cent in the vocabulary assessment you did at age 42. Infrequent readers scored only 51 per cent.

The coalition government drew on these findings when it set out its plans for helping schools improve reading standards in 2015. Meanwhile, libraries, library associations, campaigning groups, charities and schools, not just at home but across the globe, have all used the research to help promote the value of reading for pleasure.

1990s



MOVING FORWARD

A new decade had begun. We saw grunge enter the mainstream, a Britpop battle make the evening news, and the dotcom industry take off. In 1997, Labour swept to victory with a commitment to “education, education, education”, heralding a new era for Britain.



The nineties also saw the dawning of a new era for BCS70. In 1991, after steering it through two decades, Neville Butler handed over the study reins. He placed it in the capable hands of John Bynner at City University in London, whose team already managed the 1958 National Child Development Study. If BCS70 was going to move, then there was no better new home for it.

With the two studies now under one roof, surveys of both cohorts could be planned in unison. We could explore the same topics and questions with you and the Baby Boomers born before you. Researchers would be able to more closely compare the experiences of two different generations.

This period also marked a turning point in how the study was used by the research community.

A new infrastructure, put in place by John Bynner, meant researchers became more aware of this amazing resource. They could more easily access it from a central repository (today known as the UK Data Service), and they had guidance to help them analyse the study data. This led to an explosion in the amount of research being done. Earlier this year we reached a real milestone when we logged the 1000th piece of BCS70 published research.



In your words

“I didn’t really realise for ages that it wasn’t something that everyone did at school. Since then I have felt privileged to be part of the story of the study and it has been important to me to keep it up.”

43%

OF YOU OWNED YOUR OWN HOME, AND 21% LIVED WITH PARENTS (AT AGE 26)

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

BCS70 didn't start life as BCS70. From the British Births Survey, to the Child Health and Education Study, to Youthscan, the study has been known by several names over the years. When the study found a new home in 1991, it also got a new identity – the 1970 British Cohort Study. A name which has stuck.



Ten years had passed when we next had the chance to catch up with you all again. When you were 26, in contrast to the age 16 Survey, we gave you just one simple questionnaire to fill in at home. This covered all the main aspects of your lives, including your health, work and family. It also asked your views on a range of topics, like gender equality, politics and unemployment. We've asked about these again in subsequent surveys, so we can see how your generation's attitudes and values may have changed as you've got older.

With the end of the millennium in sight, in 1998 the BCS70 team moved one last time, to the Institute of Education, University of London. Here a new Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) was formed. This centre is now home to four national cohort studies, including BCS70. Each of these follows the lives of a group of people of the same age. Today, the Institute of Education, including CLS, is part of University College London.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Research using the information you shared in your 20s has cast light on a range of important issues.

ADULT BASIC SKILLS

BCS70 has highlighted the challenges some adults face with reading, writing and numbers. This evidence helped to shape government initiatives designed to help people improve these basic skills.

When the participants in our 1958 National Child Development Study were surveyed at age 23, we picked up a problem with literacy and numeracy skills. To find out if people of your generation had similar difficulties, we asked 10 per cent of you to take part in a special survey when you were 21.

The research suggested that problems with basic skills were just as common as they had been for the group born 12 years earlier. Roughly 12 per cent of those of you surveyed reported some kind of difficulty. Participants also completed a series of objective literacy and numeracy

assessments. Those who performed poorly in these tended to have left school without any qualifications. Young men in this group were more likely to have spent a lot of time on training schemes, which hadn't led to employment, and to have experienced unemployment to a much greater extent than people who did have these skills. Young women in this group tended to have had a number of different jobs and then left work to have children. Few people had taken courses to help them with their problems.

And the challenges people with poor literacy and numeracy faced persisted as they moved through life. At age 30, men and women of your generation who had poor numeracy at age 21 were more than twice as likely to be unemployed compared to those who were competent with numbers, and those with poor literacy and numeracy were less likely to be home owners. Women with poor

In your words

"As one of five children, the study made me feel special as I was the only one doing a study. I was getting a little bit more attention than usual."

literacy were also at increased risk of poor physical health and low self-esteem. They tended to feel a lack of control over their lives and to be less politically engaged. For men, poor numeracy was linked to depression while poor literacy was linked to a lack of political interest.

This important body of evidence informed the government's Skills for Life initiative which helped over 5.7 million adults learners between 2001 and 2008. It also prompted a special focus on basic skills in the BCS70 survey at age 34.



A DIFFICULT TRANSITION

Your experiences of transitioning from school to the next stage of life have highlighted the damaging effects of periods of not being in education, employment or training (known as 'NEET').

A study with a group of you at age 21 found that, between the ages of 16 and 18, around 1 in 10 of your generation had been NEET for a period of six months or more. Young people who had no qualifications were six times as likely to have been NEET as those with qualifications at O level or above. Men were at increased risk if they hadn't been read to when they were little and if they had grown up in the inner city or on a council estate. For women, lack of parental interest in their education and family poverty were both risk factors.

For men, the consequences were mainly linked to future employment status; those who had been NEET in the two years after leaving school were over three times as likely to be NEET at 21. Women who had been NEET were over five times as likely to be NEET at age 21, with many having become young mothers. But they were also at greater risk of psychological difficulties, including feelings of dissatisfaction with life and of a lack of a sense of control.

These findings informed the influential Bridging the Gap report, which led to the launch of the Connexions careers service for young people in 2001.

CAREERS TALKS

Teenagers who had careers talks from external speakers, organised by their schools, went on to earn bigger salaries in their mid-twenties, one BCS70 study has shown.

When you were 16, we asked you about careers talks you'd had in your last two years of school, and when you were 26 you told us about your earnings. Analysis showed that those who had attended talks in their fourth year of school enjoyed a wage uplift at age 26. What you thought of those talks was also important. Those who rated them "very helpful" experienced a bigger wage premium per talk compared to those who found them "unhelpful".

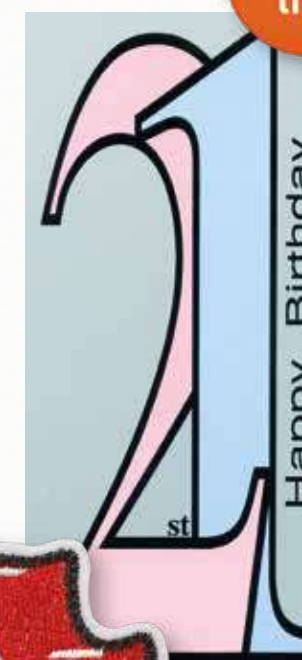
PARENTS' INFLUENCE

BCS70 research has shown that children whose parents took an interest in their education at age 10 went on to achieve higher level qualifications by their mid-20s. Mothers' interest had a greater impact than fathers' interest.

9%

OF YOU DRANK MOST DAYS, AND 13% NEVER DRANK OR ONLY DID ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS (AT AGE 26)

Choose life.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The information you shared in your 30s has been used to explore a wide range of issues, from women's pay to how closely our fortunes are tied to those of our parents.

BENEFITS OF DEGREES

By the time you were 18, there had been a significant increase in the numbers of people going to university in the UK. When we surveyed you at age 30, 20 per cent of you had a degree or a higher level qualification. This compared to 13 per cent of participants in the 1958 National Child Development Study when they had been a similar age.

Researchers have used BCS70 to examine the financial advantages of having a degree, and whether that's changed as the graduate population has grown. BCS70 has also provided insight on the wider benefits of higher education.

One study found that, at age 30, BCS70 graduates were less likely to smoke, be obese, or show signs of depression than their peers without degrees.

In your words

"If it helps society and the government understand challenges faced by my generation then that can only be a good thing for future generations to come."

Graduates were also significantly less likely to be unemployed between the ages of 25 and 30 compared to non-graduates.

There were other benefits for society too. Graduates were more tolerant towards other races, more likely to vote in general elections and more active in their communities.

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER?

BCS70 has been used to explore whether children 'inherit' their cognitive abilities from their parents. In one study, researchers analysed the results of the numeracy and literacy tasks you completed at age 34, alongside the results of the cognitive assessments completed by those of you with children aged 3 to 6 years. Taking into account a range of other factors, such as parenting style, number of siblings and income, they found that children did better in the assessments if their parents had good reading, writing and maths skills.



PARENTING DECISIONS

Your generation tended to start a family later in life than the Baby Boomers before you, though by the time you were in your 40s, you had caught up. When we surveyed you at age 42, almost 4 in 5 of you had at least one child. Among the 1958 cohort, when they had been this age, the proportion was only slightly higher. BCS70 has been used to investigate a range of issues relating to parenthood. In one study, researchers found those who were close to their parents and saw them regularly at age 30 were more likely to have had children between the ages of 30 and 34.



6%

OF WORKERS WERE JUGGLING MULTIPLE JOBS (AT AGE 34)

WOMEN'S PAY

BCS70 has been used in conjunction with other studies to explore how women's pay has changed over time.

Researchers compared information about your earnings at age 30 with similar information from the 1958 National Child Development Study and a study following a group born in 1946. They found that women working full-time in 2000 were still earning about 8 per cent per hour less than men. This gender wage gap for full-time workers of a similar age had been bigger in earlier years. However, once the researchers factored in people's qualifications, they found this narrowing of the wage gap reflected improvements in women's education rather more than policies for equal pay. Among those working full-time at age 30, the average woman was better qualified than the average man, and so, in theory, should have received more than the average men's pay. In more recent years, the gap between women's and men's pay got wider, as it did for workers reaching their 40s in earlier times.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

Creating a society where we all have the same chances in life, regardless of where we start out, has been a priority for successive governments. BCS70 has informed policies designed to help achieve this goal.

Information your parents provided about their education, jobs and income when you were growing up, and information you've shared about your lives since, means we can examine how closely tied your position on the 'social ladder' is to that of your parents. By comparing this to equivalent information from studies following people born before as well as after you, we can see whether social mobility has increased or decreased from one generation to the next.

Economists found that your generation had experienced less mobility than those born 12 years before you.

For example, of the men born in 1970 who grew up in the poorest families, 38 per cent were themselves among the lowest earners at age 30. Only 11 per cent made it from the bottom to the top income bracket.

By comparison, those born in 1958 had greater odds of moving up the income ladder; 30 per cent of men who had been in the bottom income bracket at age 16 were there at age 30, but 18 per cent had risen to be among the top earners.

In 2011, the coalition government drew on these findings in its social mobility strategy, Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers. By continuing to follow your lives, and those of younger generations in Britain, we can learn more about the inequalities in our society and how to tackle them.

2010s

THE MIDDLE YEARS

As you entered your 40s, Britain stood on the precipice of a long period of austerity. A month after you celebrated the big 40, the coalition government took office and brought in measures aimed at improving the country's financial position. In the future, BCS70 will help us understand the impact of Austerity Britain on people's lives.

Current BCS70 director, Alice Sullivan, took over the reins in 2010, becoming the third female scientist to lead the study, following in the footsteps of Roma Chamberlain and Jane Elliott. She began planning the next survey.

The 60-minute interview at age 42 covered all the aspects of your lives you were used to us asking about, including relationships, work and income, and health.

There were also questions about identity, attitudes and values, and about belief in God and life after death. We asked about children, and if you didn't have any we asked if that had been through choice or for another reason.

You also took a shorter version of a vocabulary test you had previously taken when you were 16.

20%

**OF YOU KNEW
THE MEANING
OF THE WORD
'PUSILLANIMOUS'
(AT AGE 42)**



20%

**OF YOU HAD NEVER
MARRIED OR BEEN IN
A CIVIL PARTNERSHIP
(AT AGE 46)**

FINDING THE MISSING PIECES

In your 40s, we took the opportunity to fill in some of the gaps about your teenage years. The Age 16 Survey had coincided with a teachers' strike and this had affected the information we had been able to collect. As a result, we had incomplete records about the types of secondary schools you had attended. This meant researchers couldn't easily use BCS70 to examine how secondary education affected the rest of your lives.

To address this, as part of the Age 42 Survey, we included a retrospective question about the type of school you had gone to at age 16. This new information has opened up the ways BCS70 can be analysed.

**80% of you attended a
comprehensive school**

**9% went to a
secondary modern**

**4% attended a
grammar school**



We next caught up with you in 2016-18. As well as an interview and paper questionnaire, we had some word and memory exercises for you to do. In one task, we asked you to name as many different animals as you could in one minute. The average was 24 and the record was an impressive 70.

This was the first survey since your childhood to have a strong medical focus. If you agreed, a nurse visited you to carry out a range of measurements and assessments about your health. You might remember some of these. For example, we asked you to stand on one leg for 30 seconds, first with your eyes open and then again with them closed, so we could check your balance. We also measured your grip strength and blood pressure.

Many of you agreed to provide a blood sample, and we asked if we could extract your DNA from this, so it could be used in genetic research.

Your health measurements, blood samples and DNA, combined with all the other information you've shared with us over the years, will help us learn about various common diseases and conditions. They will also help researchers working in a field known as 'epigenetics'. Epigenetics explores how our genes (or DNA) can be changed by our environment and experiences.

We're looking forward to keeping you up to date on how your information is helping to unlock the secrets of our health.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We've already made many important discoveries from the surveys in your 40s. This is just a small selection.

UNIVERSITY PROSPECTS

Evidence from BCS70 has shown how a private education increases people's chances of getting into top universities.

When we surveyed you at age 42, you told us whether you had a degree and, if you did, where you had gone to university. In the same survey, we asked what type of secondary school you'd attended when you were 16 – information we hadn't managed to collect about all of you at the time due to a teachers' strike (see page 11).

Researchers found that 7 per cent of you had degrees from one of the country's most elite universities (known as the Russell Group), and 16 per cent had degrees from other universities. When they looked at how these figures varied by the type of secondary school you had attended, it was clear that people who had been privately educated had an advantage.

They were not only more likely to have a degree, but in particular, were more likely to have got this at one of the Russell Group universities. In fact, a striking 31 per cent of private school pupils had graduated from an elite university compared to 13 per cent of grammar pupils, 5 per cent of comprehensive pupils and 2 per cent of secondary modern pupils.

On the face of it, it appeared a grammar school education also helped people's university prospects, with a bigger proportion of pupils from this type of school going on to university and also getting an elite degree, compared to pupils from comprehensives, for example. However, grammar pupils typically came from more advantaged backgrounds and had higher test scores at the end of primary school. And once these factors had been taken into account, going to a grammar school didn't add any additional advantage.



MENTAL HEALTH

The information you've shared with the study has cast light on your generation's mental health and shown how problems in adult life can originate in childhood.

At age 42, we asked about your moods and feelings. Participants in the 1958 National Child Development Study had answered similar questions at this age, 12 years before.

Researchers comparing the information from the two studies found that your generation experienced poorer mental health in your 40s than those born in 1958. Across both groups, women were more likely than men to report poor mental health. However, the increase in problems was particularly marked for men, with 16 per cent of men in your cohort reporting poor mental health at age 42 compared to 10 per cent of men in the older cohort at this age.

In a more recent study, researchers found that having good emotional health in childhood and adolescence had the biggest impact on future life satisfaction as an adult.

This was partly explained by the fact that happy children tended to go on to do well in their careers, get married and have good physical and mental health in adulthood, all of which contributed to people feeling satisfied with life.



WEIGHING IN

As we get older, many of us may find we need to work harder to keep the extra pounds at bay. However, evidence from BCS70 has shown how people of your generation have tended to tip over into the overweight category at a younger age compared to generations born before you.

Researchers investigated changing patterns of overweight and obesity through time, using information from BCS70 and four other studies. Looking at a cohort born in 1946, they found that half the men had become overweight by the time they were 41 and half the women by age 48. But this tipping point had lowered significantly for your generation, with half the men having fallen into the overweight category by age 30 and half the women by the time they were 41.

The researchers also found that people born since 1990 were far more likely to have been overweight or obese in childhood compared to those born in 1970 or earlier.

The government drew on the evidence from this landmark study when it set out plans to reduce childhood obesity in 2016.

In your words

"I am so proud to be part of this study. To know that the information you have collected on us since birth has impacted on both medical and social changes is amazing."



PARENTING

BCS70 has given us important insights into your generation's choices and experiences in relation to parenthood.

When you were 30, if you didn't have children, we asked if you planned to in the future. Researchers found that most people who didn't have children at age 30 were postponing rather than deciding against parenthood. Just under two thirds wanted children. By comparison, 1 in 8 were clear they did not intend to have children while others were undecided. At age 42, 30 per cent of those who had hoped to become parents were still childless.

Men and women 'postponers' with higher levels of qualifications, and those who had married, were, by age 42, the most likely to have realised their hopes and become parents. Over one third of men with no secondary school qualifications, who at age 30 had said they wanted to have kids, remained childless at 42.

LIFE STORIES

MIKE

"It drops in and out of your life; you don't hear anything for five years, and then it comes around again and gives you an opportunity to contribute to some sort of improvement in society", says Mike, reflecting on being a BCS70 study member. "I always try to be accurate, transparent and as forthcoming as I can be. I feel a little glow after the big interview has happened that maybe something good will come of it."

Raised in rural Hampshire, Mike first became aware that he was part of the study when he was 10, but remembers that it wasn't a particularly big deal for him back then.

"There were other BCS70 study members in my primary school, so it just seemed like, 'oh, it's just a thing people do'. I didn't realise at the time that most other study members have probably never met anyone else taking part."

He vividly recalls it being fun during childhood but remembers that the study seemed to change emphasis when he reached adolescence.

"The early years seemed to be looking at how we were developing physically. They would tap us on the knee and check our breathing, but when we got to our mid-teens they started asking us about our views and attitudes towards society."

Over the years he's gradually recognised the importance of his contribution and now feels a duty to take part every time he's called.

Mike enjoyed primary school, but then went to a tough secondary school where academic achievement was discouraged by his fellow pupils. During his teens, he was a Vespa-riding scooter boy with a love for Paul Weller.

After leaving school at 16 he joined a large company specialising in defence and began an engineering apprenticeship. They paid for him to go to night school, and he eventually gained qualifications to go to university to study engineering.

"I feel a little glow after the big interview has happened that maybe something good will come of it."

"Getting that opportunity was unbelievable really. The training programme had been developed over decades, and you just wouldn't get it now. It was very well structured and gave me thorough engineering grounding which I feel really lucky to have received."

One year into the course, he decided to transfer to art school to study 3D design and later web design. Graduating in the mid-90s, Mike found it difficult to get his break in the creative industries but finally found an opening as a graphic designer in London. He later headed back south to work in marketing and communications in the university sector, a role he enjoyed for 13 years.

Mike was later made redundant, but a couple of years prior he had met his future wife, and they had enrolled on a photography course together. Mike would use these skills to start his own business as a wedding photographer and web designer, an occupation he enjoys to this day.

"Being made redundant was depressing at the time, but I realised that it was also an opportunity to start my own business - and that's what I've been doing since then. It was a huge turning point in my life."

JO

"I think that the teenagers of today need to be treated more like adults and should be given better job opportunities. Teenagers of today are too often branded as hooligans and people who do no good. Some of them are admittedly like that, but the majority of them aren't."

That's how Jo answered a question in the Age 16 Survey about what would make things better for her generation. Speaking to her about where her own life has taken her, you can see 16-year-old Jo's passionate views and clear insights reflected in her career choices.

"I decided that I wanted to do primary teaching or social work. I enjoyed working with kids. I had a Brownie pack. I still do. But I was also really interested in social work. I thought people needed to be treated a bit more fairly. My mum had lengthy periods of mental ill-health when I was growing up, and I always felt that she was quite stigmatised, and that had an impact on her and on the rest of the family. So I wanted to do something about that."

Jo applied to study teaching and social work, and heard back about her social work application first: "I just went for it, went for the interview, got on the course and that was it."

The course was at Jo's local university in Scotland, so she lived at home with her parents but went away on work placements in different parts of the country.

"I was away from home for a couple of three-month periods. It doesn't sound very long, but packing up my little Mini car and going up to the Highlands of Scotland, not knowing what I was going to, where I was going to be staying, what was going to be happening...all that was exciting for me."

After she qualified, Jo was quickly snapped up to do what she thought would be her dream job, working in residential childcare. But overstretched resources and a lack of support made the work unbearable. She recalls: "I thought, I'm going to be out there and I'm going to change the world. And then I got out there and it was dreadful."

When things started to take their toll on her health, Jo left her job and went to work for her dad and his building business for a time ("mixing up cement and doing stuff like that"). She decided to give social work another chance, taking up a more general role to begin with and then a position working with people who had offended.

"It was just brilliant. I loved the variety of it and multi-agency-working, trying to understand people's journeys and what got people there, and what you could do to try and get people out of that."

"I thought, I'm going to be out there and I'm going to change the world. And then I got out there and it was dreadful."

Jo met her husband, who also works in the justice system, through her job. She says that having this in common has helped them cope with the stresses and strains that can come with the work.

"We understand each other and we understand the complexities of the work, and the pressures. And we're so different, you know - he was a punk!"

After almost 20 years, Jo took a change of direction and now teaches social work at the university where she studied, a role which she also loves.

Reflecting on her life choices, Jo says that her drive to help people is something she got from her mum. She describes her as someone who always puts others first and "an absolute gem, one of the nicest people you could ever, ever meet." This family trait is evident in the decision Jo's parents took 50 years ago to let their daughter be part of our study, and in Jo's continued participation.

"I've said to them, I'm really glad that you signed me up for this because if it's of benefit to other people, then I'm all for it."

We've changed Jo's name to prevent identification.

CLAIRE

Claire's never been in any doubt about whether to continue with BCS70. For her, participating in the study has always been a given in spite of, and perhaps because of, the difficulties she's had to overcome in her life.

Claire recalls how, in her 30s, the BCS70 interviewer came to survey her at home while she was having treatment for cancer: "I had my bandana on at the time or something. I've got a vision of sitting in the room with the person who came." As she notes, the study needs to capture the reality of life, all of life.

For Claire, that life began in Buckinghamshire, where she was brought up by her mum, a single parent, and her grandparents. When she was four, her mum met the man she would later marry, and who would become Claire's dad. The family expanded when Claire's two half-sisters were born.

"I loved it. I just thought it was great, and I was like another little mum to them, and I had my dolls and I'd do the same to the girls as they were babies, and I helped my mum massively, you know, looking after them."

When she finished school, Claire postponed university and instead headed to France to travel and work. Her gap year stretched out to two. With her now finely honed French language skills, Claire returned home to the UK and completed a degree in business studies and economics.

Claire then initially went to work for a world-leading IT company. After a couple of years, she was after a change of direction and took up a role with a sports research agency, working her way up to director. Reflecting on her time in the agency, she says: "I think that's why I was always really keen to carry on with it [BCS70]. Because I know how hard it is to keep people on these surveys."

But the role was very demanding and Claire became run down and unwell.

"It was really hard work, long hours, weekends, because you're doing sporting events, and I think I made myself ill, because I'm a bit of a perfectionist and worked too hard. And I played too hard as well."

Claire decided she needed to slow things down. She left her job and moved to the Kent coast with her boyfriend, who she later married. Here she put her language skills to use in a new venture, setting up her own business teaching French to children at afterschool and lunchtime clubs.

"I think that's why I was always really keen to carry on with it [BCS70]. Because I know how hard it is to keep people on these surveys."

Over the next few years, Claire's business went from strength to strength until she had about 450 children enrolled on the classes and a team of teachers working for her. But her life then took a difficult turn when, as a new mum, she was diagnosed with cancer. During her illness her husband and sister made the decision to sell the business: "I wasn't in any state to know even that they'd done it, but it was the right thing to do."

After her recovery, Claire went back to giving French lessons for a time before deciding to study for a teaching qualification. She now teaches A-level economics at her local grammar school in Kent where she lives with her husband and her two children.

Having thought she would be unable to have more children, after her chemotherapy, Claire describes her surprise at discovering she was pregnant with her youngest, her "miracle child": "I'm very lucky that he came along."

JAMES

James remembers his mum encouraging him to take part in the study from an early age.

"My mum was always really keen for me to be involved. She explained what the study involved, and always made sure that I did all the surveys or health checks. She thought it was a good thing to be part of."

James soon realised that even in his small Gloucestershire school, he wasn't the only child born in that special week in April.

"There was another pupil in my class who was also part of the study when I was growing up. Over the years, we used to chat about it at school. And then later, I'd occasionally bump into them, and we'd say, are you still doing it? Yes, I am."

James recalls enjoying his childhood and can remember slowly gaining an interest and curiosity about the outside world as he approached his exams.

"At age 16, I was very interested in politics and wanted to work towards becoming a journalist at a big city newspaper. I think, looking back, growing up in a small town, I had quite itchy feet to discover new places, go to university or get a job."

James fulfilled his ambitions by studying politics and history at university, before training as a journalist. He spent his 20s as a reporter before moving into public relations. He then married his wife in his early 30s, and they started a family.

"We had a few more years in London as a family and then realised we'd had our big city fix. We decided to move back to Gloucestershire, so we could have more space, and our children could have the sort of upbringing we both enjoyed."

Now firmly ensconced in the Cotswold Hills for several years, James continues to work in public relations, and takes part in amateur theatre, a hobby he has enjoyed since his youth.

"I often read stories in the papers about the views of those born in 1970...and think, oh, so that's why they've been asking me these questions."

After five decades contributing to the study, James believes that it's been a very worthwhile endeavour, and feels proud to have been involved.

"I've always felt honoured to be part of it, and I've felt valued that someone is interested in what I think. I often read stories in the papers about the views of those born in 1970 towards various subjects, such as marriage, for example, and think, oh, so that's why they've been asking me these questions."

WHERE TO NEXT?

We're all set for the next survey, which will get underway in the summer. We're looking forward to picking up where we left off and finding out where you are in your lives, now that you're 50.

One of the most incredible things about BCS70, like other cohort studies, is that it becomes even more valuable with each new survey. The information you share each time we survey you gets added to what we already know about you. This enables us to make new connections between your pasts and your present experiences.

There will be three main elements to the Age 50 Survey – a paper questionnaire, an interview and an online questionnaire about your diet. We'll be in touch closer to the time with more details about what's involved and to invite you to take part. We hope you will!

Meanwhile, developments in the techniques scientists use to analyse data are increasing the opportunities to learn from the information you've already shared. For example, new statistical methods have been helping us to show cause and effect between two things, where before we could only show they were connected in some way.

By adding information from external, official records, including your NHS records, to the survey data with your consent, we can give researchers an even fuller picture of your lives.

All of this will lead to even more BCS70 discoveries in the future.



OUR IN-HOUSE DETECTIVES



It takes a team to run a study like BCS70. Alice Sullivan heads things up, and there are lots of us working behind the scenes to help make the study happen. It's a complex business and we have many different roles – from deciding which topics we need to talk to you about, to getting the survey results ready for researchers to analyse, and inspiring new generations of scientists to use the study in their work.

But the people you will probably have had the most contact with here at BCS70 HQ are our Cohort Maintenance Team. If you have ever had any questions about the study, this is who will have picked up the phone to you or answered your email.

One very important and big part of this team's job is looking after your contact details, keeping them safe and making sure they're up to date.

Over the years, you've moved home and sometimes countries, got married and changed your names, got your first mobile phones and set up your first email accounts.

We try to keep up with all these changes, but we may not be at the top of the list of people to let know when you move home, and that's understandable.

But because every one of you is so precious to BCS70, our team will do whatever they can to find you if we do lose touch. It's a bit like having our own in-house detectives. The internet and social media are really helpful when it comes to tracing people, and there are official records we can use too. Finding a study member we had lost is always a cause for celebration. That's how important you are to us.

"When we get a response to an email we shout it out, 'I got a response, yay! Found you!'. It makes a big difference, it feels personal, you know, because you've trawled through so much information to try and locate this person, so it does feel personal. I give a little 'whoop', maybe dance round the office."

Mary Ukah,
Cohort Maintenance Team



OUR COHORT FAMILY



In case you didn't know, BCS70 is one of a group of four studies we run here at the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, each one following a group of people of the same age. Together, our studies capture the experiences of people born as far apart as 1958 and 2002.

**1958
National Child Development Study**
Following over 17,000 people born in a single week in March 1958 in Great Britain

**1970
1970 British Cohort Study**
Following around 17,000 people born in a single week in April 1970 in Great Britain

**1989-90
Next Steps**
Following nearly 16,000 people in England born in 1989-90

**2000-02
Millennium Cohort Study**
Following around 19,000 people born in 2000-02 in the UK

Elsewhere, the Medical Research Council National Survey of Health and Development is the longest running of any British study of this kind. It keeps track of a cohort born in a single week in 1946.

Individually, each of these studies is incredibly valuable, giving us a window into the lives of a generation. As a group of studies, they help us understand how society has changed over time. Many researchers use information from BCS70 and other cohort studies together in this way, to see how your experiences compare to people born before and after you, and to find out what's different and why.



FIND OUT MORE ON THE WEBSITE



You'll find full reference information for each piece of research we've featured in this publication on the BCS70 website. Some of the research is available to read in full online.

We only had space on these pages to share a snapshot of the breadth of BCS70 research from the last 50 years. We hope the examples we've selected give you an insight into the many ways your information has been used.

To find out about other important BCS70 discoveries we didn't have room to include, and to keep up with the latest findings, please take a look at the study website:

bcs70.info

16,000+

Times BCS70 information has been downloaded by researchers in the last 10 years



In your words

"I've felt 'part of something' my entire life. Inclusion of my wife and children during some study years has brought them into feeling 'part of something' too."

THANK YOU



A huge thank you to all the study members who shared their memories, stories and reflections with us for this anniversary publication, including Claire, James, Jo and Mike. We wish we'd had space for more.

We'd also like to thank all the incredible people, too many to mention by name, who have worked on the study and contributed to its success in countless ways over the years. Many have helped us with this publication, for which we are especially grateful.

An enormous thank you to the Economic and Social Research Council who provide the core funding for BCS70 and who have enabled us to mark this anniversary in a special way. Thank you too to the UCL Institute of Education, home to BCS70 since 1998.

We're also grateful to all the other organisations and individuals who have supported the study financially at different times over the last 50 years.

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KEEP IN TOUCH

We hope you'll continue to take part in this amazing study for many more years to come. If you change your address, phone number or email address, please let us know so we can keep in touch.

You can contact us by:

☎ 0800 0355 761
(free from a UK landline)

✉ bcs70@ucl.ac.uk

🌐 bcs70.info

📘 Facebook:
fb.me/1970BritishCohortStudy

✉ FREEPOST RTCX-HBGC-CJSK
1970 British Cohort Study
UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL



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