



Accessibility and Equalities Unit research programme 2007-08

Introduction - Proposed research programme 2007-08

The AEU was established in April 2007 as part of the restructuring of DfT. It was drawn from the Mobility and Inclusion Unit (MIU) but has been refocused and repositioned to concentrate on cross modal accessibility issues.

Aims of AEU

The AEU is responsible for developing policy on cross modal accessibility issues, focusing on the transport needs of disadvantaged people, and DfT's Equality Duties. It leads on the Social Objectives Working Group responding to the Eddington Report by reviewing and developing proposals on meeting transport's social objectives in the short/medium and longer term.

The AEU supports, in particular, the Departmental Strategic Objective 4 "To enhance access to jobs, services and social networks, including for the most disadvantaged". We work to develop a policy framework and service delivery provision for public transport users, pedestrians and motorists that meet a range of individual needs and are accessible and safe.

The community transport and voluntary sector have a major role in enabling different groups to access key services and the Unit takes the lead in strengthening links between the DfT and these sectors.

Reducing transport crime is a key issue for these groups and we work to identify, evaluate and disseminate good crime reduction techniques and programmes.

By collecting evidence to improve understanding of the transport requirements and travel behaviour of different social groups, AEU supports the development of policies and programmes that cater to their different transport needs. Other evidence needs include assessing the impacts of policies on excluded and vulnerable groups and understanding the crime and fear of crime issues in the different transport modes.

AEU also supports the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) research programme. DPTAC is a statutory body set up under the Transport Act 1985 to advise the Government on transport policy as it affects the mobility of disabled people. DPTAC considers and identifies its own research and evidence needs and these are taken forward within the AEU budget.

Unit level evidence needs

The evidence needs are dictated by our aim to "improve accessibility and inclusion" and more detailed objectives:

- To implement the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005
- Promote social inclusion working with the voluntary sector and through our Equality Schemes
- To reduce crime and fear of crime around on and around the transport network
- Promote personal mobility options for older and disabled people

The revised research programme is intended to closely underpin Business Plan priorities and enable evaluation of previous policies and programmes. Examples include establishing baseline data on the use of public transport by disabled people and monitoring the level of fear of crime and perceptions of security on public transport. Particular priorities in the coming year include the review of the Blue Badge Scheme and improving the quantity, quality and consistency of driving assessments and advice given to older and disabled drivers.

There is a complex interaction between health and transport both in terms of access and impacts. In medium term, the AEU programme will be addressing health related mobility issues more including:-

- the relationship between age, health and disability and implications for transport delivery
- prognostic studies on disease and expectations for future mobility needs - potentially supporting a longitudinal survey by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- implications of specific conditions e.g strokes on personal mobility

AEU uses evidence to develop policy, better understand the needs of different social groups, test developing policy and monitor and evaluate progress of policy, programmes and service delivery.

Collaboration with stakeholders

The AEU is a cross cutting unit with a range of stakeholders drawn from lobby groups, transport planners and providers and other government departments. We also collaborate with other DfT research programmes. An example is provided by the research programme of the new Automobility Branch which was established to encourage the provision of high quality and convenient assessments and advice to enable increasing numbers of older and disabled people to use cars for longer, safely. The Automobility Stakeholders group, which includes DVLA - a key customer of these services - developed a two prong research programme aimed at better understanding customer needs and benchmarking standards on the provision of services.

A priority for the new Unit is to identify and fully understand the views and requirements of our stakeholders. We have commissioned the Central Office of Information (COI) to undertake a stakeholder mapping and engagement project. This will help identify key (existing and potential new) stakeholders based on AEU's key strategic priorities to ensure resources are appropriately focused. When complete we will consider how best to ensure their evidence needs are adequately included in our strategy.

Project officers are responsible for identifying potential collaborators during the drafting of project specification. Given the cross cutting nature of the Unit's role, we normally develop steering groups for each project comprising a mix of stakeholders from other government departments (OGDs) transport providers and the voluntary sector. For example the Secure Stations Scheme steering group drew from the Home Office, BTP, Train Operating Companies and the British Parking association.

Teams within the Unit also have links to research projects funded externally including some European Union projects.

Communications

AEU uses some regular dissemination mechanisms to communicate research experience to the wider community and best practice to transport planners and providers. These include posting research results or summaries onto the DfT website (DPTAC results are posted on the DPTAC website) and using the Research Management Database.

Communication is considered through the life of the research project and stakeholder members of the project Steering Group are expected to play a key role in developing the dissemination strategy, suggesting appropriate channels of communication and acting as advocates.

Much of AEU research is focussed on the needs of different social groups and consequently the format, style and "language" needs to be carefully considered and chosen.

Some research has been communicated in a range of ways suitable to the user. For example the results of research work on the relationship between young people and bus drivers was disseminated through a training and awareness day for bus drivers hosted by individual bus companies.

Research Management

The Unit's evidence needs are drawn from discussions with a range of external stakeholder groups including Automobility, Secure Stations Group, Women's Transport Network and DPTAC. These are prioritised at meetings of the Unit's Management Team and progress is monitored in that forum.

Once individual research projects have been identified and approved the nominated project officer becomes responsible for delivering the project's outcome. This includes specification design, communication, management and evaluation of the tender process and the subsequent contract. Support is available from colleagues, sources on the DfT's internal website such as the Evidence and Research Quality Framework, the procurement manual and SRE guidance on social research and policy evaluation.

Since resource constraints and knowledge gaps require the use of external consultants to deliver the majority of projects to meet the Unit's evidence needs identifying appropriate, high quality contractors is vital to the success of the Unit's programme. This issue has been raised as a key challenge in specific areas of social research.

During the coming year, AEU will be considering use of the new Research and Technical Consultancy Frameworks. Where appropriate, this arrangement will permit more effective commissioning of work though the Unit will also procure evidence and research work outwith these Frameworks where that offers

best value for money (vfm).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluating the usefulness and robustness of the evidence generated by a particular project is often a difficult task, due to a variety of reasons e.g. the time scales involved in inputting evidence into policy outputs. Where appropriate, teams within the Unit commission external experts to perform peer review of outputs to evaluate their effectiveness. Most projects are progressed by a steering group drawn from experts in the field, representational groups and practitioners to provide reality checks and dissemination advice. Project officers are responsible for identifying in consultation with their teams what level of evaluation is appropriate for a particular project.

Technology and Innovation and Futures

Most of AEU research addresses user needs rather than technical solutions but issues around technology and innovation have emerged in some of our vehicle engineering and crime reduction projects. In the main we adopt standards and practices e.g. lighting standards already in use and certified by practitioners such as the Home Office / police forces.

However one of our major current projects, reviewing options for reform of the Blue Badge Scheme, will be considering technological solutions. We will be examining the use of new technologies for identification, utilization, compliance and enforcement including;

- Centralized database information
- Other recognition technologies
- Personal data and activation technologies (e.g. using mobile phone technology)

Annex A - Finance

	2007/08 £k	2008/09 £k	Notes
Committed spend	787,141		Contracted spend
Projected spend	1,047,141		Contracted and Carried Forward
Budget	1,500,000		
Headroom	452,859		Budget less Projected Spend
New proposals	335,000		
Balance	+117,859		Negative figure - Over programmed Positive figure - Under programmed

Annex B Skills

Appropriate and timely identification of the Unit's evidence needs and successful delivery of routes to meet these needs depends on the skills and knowledge of the Unit's team members. These include strategic and analytical expertise, programme and project management skills and specific professional skills.

At a strategic level these specialist skills and knowledge are essential in identifying and prioritising evidence needs and maintaining effective communication with key customers and stakeholders. Once an evidence need has been identified, these skills are vital to the effective specification of the team's research requirements. They are also key to an individual's ability to challenge and test potential contractors, negotiate contracts, manage contracts, assess outputs throughout the course of contracts and for example, make appropriate use of interim findings. In order to fulfil the role of intelligent customer project officers require an underlying professional knowledge of the methodology of the research in question (economic modelling, social research, engineering etc) in addition to well-developed project management skills.