CONTENTS

Epitome 1
Background 2
Engaging with the Research ‘Community’ 3
Balancing Long-Term and Short-Term Needs 3
Pensions and Ageing Society Research Programme 5
Working Age Research Programme 6
National Jobcentre Plus Research Programme 7
Strategy Directorate Research Programme 8
Evaluating our research programmes 9
The Department Chief Scientific Adviser 9

1. **Epitome**

1.1 The Department for Work and Pensions was created in 2001 and inherited strong traditions of evidence-based policy making from its predecessor departments. Its performance in this area has been rated as ‘strong’ in repeated capability reviews, and retains the full support of Ministers, the Departmental Board and the Executive Team.

1.2 The Department does not support traditional science, engineering and mathematics, and so technology, as they are not relevant to our work. We commission and support a variety of work by researchers to:-

- Underpin new policy;
- Monitor trends and existing policies (including by long-term surveys);
- Survey the literature and developments abroad.

1.3 We commission research\(^1\) through a single central framework agreement, but from a variety of functional sites where researchers are embedded into policy teams. We employ social researchers, economists, statisticians and operational researchers specifically to bring their professional perspective to the above processes, and to lead our research programme. We therefore support their professional development, covering the maintenance and development of their skills. Each group works to its appropriate professional standards; for example, social researchers are part of the Government Social Research Service and observe the GSR Code. Professional groups routinely

---

\(^1\) ‘Research’ is used here to mean evidence collected by researchers for the purposes indicated. In some cases, this will be data collection and analysis, or literature reviews rather than ‘research’ as defined by the Frascati Manual. Conversely, some such background work may be procured by administrative units outside the formal research programme.
work across administrative boundaries to ensure that there is a coherent overall DWP research programme which also reflects more local priorities.

1.4 The type and amount of our research reflects the policies Ministers set for the Department, traditionally after Spending Reviews have set the policy agenda.

2. **Background**

2.1 Since it was formed DWP has had a research budget reflecting the importance placed by the Department and Treasury officials on building and maintaining a sound evidence base. This stability has allowed us to balance short-term and one-off projects whilst investing appropriately in longer-term projects which provide better value for money over time, and unique additions to our evidence base.

2.2 Externally commissioned research projects are let through the DWP Social and Economic Research Framework. It is intended to ensure that we have high quality, consistent processes in place to let and manage research contracts, and to minimise the administrative burden on all involved. The Framework was re-let in July 2009 and consists of 89 organisations designed to meet the external research requirements of the Department. It is managed by a small team of Procurement Professionals who ensure all commissioning complies with DWP and European regulations. Roughly £20m of work is commissioned over the framework annually.

2.3 Within DWP, we divide the bulk of our research into three programmes: the Pensions and Ageing Society Research Programme; the Jobcentre Plus Research Programme; and the Working Age Research Programme. There is a smaller cross-cutting Strategy Unit programme. Further details on these programmes are provided below. The division is for administrative convenience. In particular circumstances, work from one research programme will involve colleagues from other policy areas.

2.4 At a high level the externally funded DWP research process can be described as follows:

- As part of the annual budgeting round a sum of money is allocated to the research programmes, though usually set in advance as part of the process of responding to a Spending Review settlement;
- Priorities for the year ahead (informed by discussions with Ministers, senior officials) are determined and a research programme is established, with flexibility for changes during the year;
- The Working Age Research Programme described below is published and external researchers have the opportunity to comment on it; this will also apply to the Pensions and Ageing Society Research Programme;
- The research is then commissioned - using our contract framework;
- The programme is reviewed during the year and potentially some work is not started or delayed, and new research commenced if circumstances have changed;
Memorandum from the Department for Work and Pensions to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on its inquiry ‘Setting science and technology research funding priorities’

3. Engaging with the research ‘community’

3.1 As well as commissioning and publishing the formal research discussed elsewhere, we also seek to engage with the wider research community. We:

- Organise welfare and policy analysis seminars at LSE;
- Sometimes organise seminars around particular items of research and, by doing this, help to ensure that our work is part of the wider agenda. For example the recent Pensions and the Macro-economy seminar (based on some research DWP had commissioned) involved external academic researchers. A series of seminars have brought stakeholders together to consider findings from evaluating ‘Pathways to Work’.

3.2 External researchers seeking funding from the Economic and Social Research Council sometimes approach the department to discuss their research before applying. This helps them identify how their research can have policy relevance. Robert Laslett (Chief Economist - Pensions) sits on the ESRC’s Research Grants Board.

3.3 The Social Research Head of Profession leads regular meetings with ESRC, and we use ESRC Case Studentships. DWP is a corporate member of the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) which provides another route by which DWP researchers can engage on a quasi-formal basis with researchers.

4. Balancing Long-Term and Short-Term Needs

4.1 We support a number of longer-term initiatives including :-

- **British Social Attitudes Survey**: The survey provides strategic insight into the changes in public attitudes that are relevant to the Department.

- **The Family Resources Survey (FRS)**: The Family Resources Survey collects information on the incomes and circumstances of private households in the United Kingdom. It has been running since October 1992. Whilst it was designed with our needs specifically in mind, it contains information of interest to researchers and analysts from a wide range of disciplines in both the public and private sectors.

- **Millennium Cohort Study**: This is a major investigation of the influence of early circumstances on health over the life course. The aim is to provide evidence for major policy initiatives.

- **The General Household Survey (GHS)**: This is an inter-departmental multi-purpose continuous survey (by the ONS) collecting information on a range of topics from people living in private households in Great Britain.

- **The Wealth and Assets Survey**: A vital source of statistics about how households in Great Britain are managing economically. Key areas of the questionnaire focus on borrowing, savings, household assets, and
saving plans for retirement. Data produced will be used to inform government policy on a range of issues, including pension provision.

- **The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing**: It provides data on the implications of labour market history for health and financial circumstances in later life.

These surveys play a vital role in filling the data and knowledge gap identified by a number of organisations. For example, the FRS and British Household Panel Survey are analysed to yield the Households Below Average Income Dataset. We make survey data widely available to inform research and analytical work carried out by Universities as well as organisations such as the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

4.2 We lead a funding consortium of other government departments, the ESRC and the MRC, to establish an Institute to examine Subjective Wellbeing and Public Policy, which will be advertised shortly. We are party to discussing replacing Families and Children Survey by the ESRC ‘Understanding Society’ survey, and will be part funding it.

5. **Pensions and Ageing Society Research Programme**

5.1 The Pensions and Ageing Society Research Programme aims to:

- Inform a wide range of pension reform policy areas;
- Fill knowledge gaps; and
- Support evidence based policy on pensions and the ageing society.

5.2 In 2009/10, the agreed budget for the Pensions and Ageing Society research programme was £5.8m and covered four broad workstreams:

- Workplace pension reforms (including automatic enrolment and personal accounts)
- Independence in later life
- Pension provision and savings behaviour
- Pension Reform Communications and Information

5.3 A sizeable part of this research budget funds a number of large-scale surveys sponsored or co-sponsored by DWP, with other government departments or the research councils, particularly the Wealth and Assets Survey and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. The remainder of the research budget is spent on research more directly related to current policy issues.

5.4 **Process for Pensions and Ageing Society Research Programme**

The current procedure for agreeing this annual external research programme is:

- Analysts and research managers consider pension policy areas, the policy context, the existing evidence and the evidence gaps;
- The results feed into discussions with policy colleagues within DWP, other government departments, external stakeholders on further research needed to inform policy development;
- Project bids are drawn up and prioritised in the discussions, taking into account resource issues and the need to ensure that the
programme considers issues relating to gender, disability, race and ethnicity, where relevant (individual project specifications also include the need to cover such dimensions where relevant);

- Ministers are consulted, with a review of the previous year's programme, and their opinions incorporated into the research programme;
- A Research Steering Group, consisting of appropriate policy, analyst and finance representatives reviews and agrees any project proposals and the research budget bid which will is submitted to Ministers for approval, after clearance by Directors;
- Ministers are consulted and asked to approve the final research programme.

5.5 The research programme is reviewed quarterly when project priorities are considered, along with a formal mid-year review of the overall programme and the budget position. Following the mid-year review Ministers are consulted over anything which needs their approval. In between these times, other emerging priorities are reviewed on an ongoing basis in light of the policy and budgetary priorities at the time.

5.6 Research projects are approved after scrutiny by project managers, Divisional Managers and the Finance, Planning and Performance Division. They are then carefully managed by expert analysts and further quality assurance is supported through appropriate and thorough consultation practices.

6. **Working Age Research Programme**

6.1 This programme supports:

- Policy development;
- Monitoring and analysis of progressing policies, and policy-relevant developments in the wider economy and society;
- Strategic and cross-cutting research which provides an underpinning evidence base for making strategic decisions. For example:-
  - Our Families and Children Longitudinal Study covers working age families with children but includes information about savings so that we can understand better the implications for income in later life;
- Policy and Programme Evaluations, for example how well do programmes like the New Deals and Employment Zones work and can they be improved?
- Expert advice can be commissioned from national or international experts;
- Evidence Reviews, important to synthesise evidence on particular topics; we increasingly use "Systematic" reviews (using robust review methods). This includes meeting the research needs of our one scientific advisory committee, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, for literature reviews on areas the Council intends to consider.
Memorandum from the Department for Work and Pensions to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on its inquiry ‘Setting science and technology research funding priorities’

- Good practice guidance to ensure that researchers across DWP and government have access to good, practical information about best practice in their discipline.

As most projects are developed in close consultation with policy and/or operational colleagues, their results are always linked to advice on using them to formulate and evaluate policies. For example, we assess the impact of our policies and undertake process evaluations to understand how they are delivered and to inform future delivery (e.g. Employment Retention Allowance, Pathways to Work and New Deal for Lone Parents).

6.2 The spend in 2009/10 is about £10m.

6.3 Process for working age research programme
- We set overarching priorities for the year ahead annually, based on discussions with Ministers and senior officials from across the Department.
- In the autumn of each year the lead analyst in each major policy area\(^2\) will work with individual research managers and policy experts to develop a proposal for a programme of research for their area for the coming year.
- In developing research proposals, social research professionals take account of the wider context to the policy questions to be answered as well as what is currently known, whether from Departmental or external sources.
- We encourage strong links between Government Departments: DWP researchers concerned with childcare and employment issues regularly meet their counterparts in DCSF to discuss projects of mutual interest, for example. This ensures we identify opportunities to work together and do not duplicate.
- Research proposals may include joint development or financing if appropriate (for example as has been the case for the Families and Children Study).
- Potential analysis of administrative databases will be examined before developing proposals to fill the gap through externally commissioned research.
- Once proposals have been received, a group of senior officials (the Working Age Research Group), led by the Chief Analyst for Working Age policy groups and including stakeholders from across the Department, reviews the proposals and decides which projects should be given financial authority to proceed.
- Each proposal is peer reviewed for quality, methodology and overlaps internally before being considered by the Working Age Research Group. The prioritisation takes account of a number of factors, including:
  \(\text{o}\) The expected strategic and policy priorities during the year ahead;

\(^2\) These policy areas are in the main closely related to our Departmental Strategic Objectives and cross-Government Public Service Agreements
Memorandum from the Department for Work and Pensions to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on its inquiry ‘Setting science and technology research funding priorities’

- Significant gaps in the evidence base which will limit our capacity to take policy and operational decisions (over different planning horizons);
- The kind of evidence needed in the identified policy priority areas;
- Whether the evidence base could be strengthened through effective use of internal or existing resources (in house analysis of existing data, particularly administrative data; existing external research syntheses etc).

Although this process provides a solid framework for the year ahead, we recognise that new priorities will emerge during each year. For example, no-one predicted the severity and strength of the economic downturn that was starting to take hold as we planned our research programme for this year last Autumn, and we have made adjustments to existing projects and commissioned new ones in response. We ensure that there is an allowance within the budget for priority projects to start in-year authorised by the Working Age Research Group, who can also can commission a complete review mid-year should it be needed.

7. **National Jobcentre Plus Research Programme**

7.1 The Jobcentre Plus research programme aims to investigate key operational and strategic issues for Jobcentre Plus and provide evidence to support decision-making and continuous improvement in our service delivery.

7.2 It is focused on the Jobcentre Plus Priorities including:
- Delivering services more efficiently and effectively
- Delivery of performance
- Transforming our services.

7.3 To underpin the business priorities, the annual programme consists of a range of externally commissioned projects. These provide timely and robust evidence about key strategic and delivery issues and give the business an overview about how it is progressing against its priorities. The 2009/2010 programme focuses on research into customer needs.

7.4 The total budget for the 2009/10 programme is £1.3 Million.

7.5 **Process for the Jobcentre Plus Research Programme**

New areas for research are identified throughout the business year. But, each November, the Strategy Research Team of our Performance Measurement Analysis Division begins to develop a formal national research programme for Jobcentre Plus.

Senior Jobcentre Plus Leaders and social researchers are asked to submit expressions of interest detailing their thoughts on key areas where research should be conducted. New requests for research are then assessed against the overall business priorities for the year and a recommendation for the annual research programme is presented to the Jobcentre Plus Executive.
Board who has final approval of the programme. Once final approval has been granted a submission is sent to Ministers for information.

Standing research projects in the National Programme include the National Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey, which provides the national measure of customer satisfaction across all Jobcentre Plus regions. Around ninety per cent of the Jobcentre Plus Strategy Research Team resource is committed to delivering the annual National Research Programme. The remaining ten per cent is committed to deliver ad hoc in year requests for research (subject to resource and funding constraints).

8. **Strategy Directorate Research Programme**

8.1 We aim to respond to Ministerial research needs flexibly (as issues arise or gaps are identified), as well as addressing longer term identified strategic concerns. These can arise directly from Ministers or senior management, but also from ongoing discussions between Strategy Unit and SoS, often initiated by submissions outlining research suggestions.

8.2 The decision to fund research follows the wider process outlined by the Department. This includes peer review of the research work specification and proposal, as well as final Ministerial authorisation. The quality of the outputs is also assured through peer review, often within the formal arrangement of steering groups.

8.3 Due to the reactive and short term nature of the research, it is not often possible to anticipate it, and so publish the research program in advance of the work being conducted. Research outputs are published in line with the Departmental publications framework. They have allowed us to develop and build upon the Department’s evidence base by:

- Providing insight into areas of central concern as well as ones which might otherwise not have been explored;
- Focusing on overarching or cross-cutting issues that were not the remit of any team, but were important to the Department.
- Publishing a number of informative reports and ad-hoc reviews, some of which address key criticisms levelled at Departmental policy.
- Providing the Department’s contribution to major national research projects.

8.4 Examples of relevant research include:

- **People’s Priorities in the Benefit System**: The research examined how the public perceive the DWP should spend its non-pension budget;
- **Citizens’ Burdens**: The aim of the research is to identify the types of burdens / problems encountered by citizens when making a claim to Jobseekers Allowance;
- **Scoping Study for Longitudinal Destinations Survey**: The aim of the scoping study is to identify any information and analysis needs not met by existing data in understanding benefit destinations;
- **Impact of the Financial Incentives in Welfare Systems on Family Structure**: The review examined both national and international
evidence on the influence of financial incentives in the welfare system on family structure.

8.5 The annual research budget for 2009/10 is £1.3m.

9. **Evaluating our research programmes**

9.1 One of the aspects of the capability reviews of Government Departments is an evaluation of the capability of a department in making strategic choices based on evidence. DWP is one of only 3 of the 17 Departments assessed who were awarded this rating, and the quality and investment in our research played a major part in that.

9.2 In 2008, the Department commissioned a review of its external research programme in both Pensions and Working Age Groups. The resulting report - to be published in due course – focused on how well the Department uses, manages and prioritises its external research. The report will highlight a number of recommendations for consideration for the future.

10. **The Department Chief Scientific Adviser**

10.1 Dr Bill Gunnyeon acts as the link between DWP and its analysts, the Executive Team and the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser. Given that there is no programme of research into science, engineering and mathematics, he holds no research budget comparable to those described in this paper.