INTRODUCTION

The Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) provides advice and training to support the development of health impact assessment (HIA) throughout Wales. In this regard WHIASU has continued to build on progress made over previous years by providing bespoke training sessions and supporting both rapid assessments and more comprehensive HIAs during the year. The impressive list of HIAs is highlighted on the WHIASU website (www.whiasu.wales.nhs.uk) and many of the reports can be directly downloaded.

During the last 12 months advice, guidance and support continue to be provided to local authorities (LA’s), Local Health Boards (LHBs), Communities First partnerships, voluntary sector organisations, and members of the public. Some local authorities such as Anglesey have gone beyond conducting ad hoc HIAs and are in the process of institutionalising or embedding impact assessment, including health impact assessments, in the organisational processes and systems. The Unit’s ability to deliver this successfully and effectively has been enhanced by the appointment to the team of a new HIA Development Officer, Nick Hacking, based with Public Health Wales in Cardiff, South Wales.

Given the cross-sectoral nature of HIA its development depends on good partnership working and WHIASU continues to liaise with its strategic partners on national and local levels. WHIASU has supported the Wales National Transport Plan HIA and at a local level with a broad range of stakeholders and organisations. Developments in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), open cast mining applications, land use and transport planning on a national, and local level, also provide opportunities for working with our partners in identifying the most effective use and positioning of HIA within local authorities, especially within the identified planning processes and domains.

Health impact assessment provides an opportunity to involve the public in identifying how particular policies, programmes, projects and other developments may impact on their health and wellbeing. In addition members of the public and residents’ groups have seen HIA as an opportunity to ensure that decision-makers take their views into account. WHIASU continues to provide advice, guidance and support to community groups who wish to make use of HIA. In some cases residents have requested support in conducting their own HIAs. In these cases WHIASU has
assisted in identifying relevant research, local experts, collecting new data and appraising and synthesising evidence. Communities First partnerships have also provided an ideal vehicle for developing HIA in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Wales.

WHIASU has continued to have a strong presence both inside and outside Wales. Internationally, conference and invited seminar papers have been presented in the United States, Ghana and The Netherlands. In addition, support has been provided for the World Health Organisation with a study on ‘HIA within the extractive industries, the international HIA Gateway website and the Department of Health in England in the development of a competency framework for HIA practitioners. The Unit has provided information and case studies to Units in Australia and Canada. At a national level, capacity building and HIA development with practitioners, consultants and academics from Wales culminated in a second Sharing HIA Best Practice workshop in December 2009 in Cardiff. This will now be an annual event and is part of WHIASU’s wider work programme. In 2009 WHIASU held two training courses in partnership with the West Midlands Public Health Observatory (WMPHO). A one day course introductory course was held in Birmingham in July 2009 and a three day more comprehensive HIA course was held in Gregynog, mid-Wales in September. Both were highly successful with cross sectorial participation - public health, planning and a number of attendees from the private sector keen to learn more about HIA.
Key Achievements

National and International Liaison

The 10th International HIA conference was held for the first time outside of the UK or Ireland in Rotterdam, The Netherlands on the 14th-16th October 2009. WHIASU contributed to shaping the conference as a member of the international scientific advisory group.

Liz Green and Chloe Chadderton presented papers and a poster at the conference on the topics of ‘The Welsh experience of HIA in transport planning’ and research on the impacts of open cast mining. Eva Elliott chaired a session entitled ‘The Value of Health’. As well as a broad and stimulating programme, with a range of high profile international speakers, workshops and a training programme were provided prior to the conference. Liz Green led the introductory training session ‘How to do a rapid HIA’. Attendance at the conference was truly international with people representing countries from as far as Australia, Malaysia, Ghana, Thailand, Canada and the USA as well as from Europe.

Wales is increasingly seen as an international centre of HIA expertise and the Unit shares its experience with others. International collaboration has taken many forms including:

- Providing guidance and information to the School of Public Health and Preventative Medicine, Monash University;
- Sharing best practice and providing information and support to the South West Essex Community Services Team on developing and completing HIA’s;
- Partnering the West Midlands Public Health Observatory in running 2 HIA training sessions and courses in 2009 and planning for two more in 2010;
- Supporting a WHO study on ‘HIA in Extractive Industries’ by providing information on examples from Wales and preparing a case study;
- Supporting the Department of Health in developing a HIA competency framework for practitioners.

Liz Green attended the International Association of Impact Assessments Conference in Accra, Ghana in May and gave two presentations - on the ‘Welsh experience of incorporating HIA into Transport Planning’ and another on ‘Adding value to planning’. Liz Green also exchanged information with the WHO European Health and Environment Officer and the Thai delegation.

Liz Green has provided resources, information and advice to the Public Health Officer at the Department of Planning in Ontario, Canada with regard to the work that Wales has been undertaking to incorporate health into the planning process.

Advice, guidance and support to Welsh Assembly Government

WHIASU has responded to many requests for information and assistance from divisions within the Welsh Assembly Government. This has included providing information on health impacts, and HIA in relation to:

- Waste Management;
- Road Improvement Schemes;
• Housing;
• Renewable Energy;
• Strategic Environmental Assessment;
• Opencast mining.

WHIASU has also provided advice, guidance and practical support with Welsh Assembly commissioned comprehensive HIAs including:

• National Transport Plan (ongoing);
• Wales Climate Change Strategy;
• Wales Nuclear Strategy (ongoing).

Partnership Working

The Unit has continued to work with Public Health Wales and members of the local public health teams throughout North and South Wales in a number of different ways at a local level, such as:

• Undertaking two HIA masterclass sessions for public health staff on the Public Health ‘Top Up Trainee’ scheme;
• A training session with Torfaen Public Health Team;
• Joint facilitation of Project BRAND HIA in Rhyl, Denbighshire;
• Providing support and advice to Denbighshire Principal Health Practitioner in completing the North Wales Coastal Regeneration Plan HIA;
• Joint facilitation of the HIA of the Pre-deposit Local Development Plan in Blaenau Gwent;
• Providing advice and guidance on an HIA of Newport Community Nutrition Plan;
• Provision of an HIA training session in partnership with Public Health Wales for transport planners;
• Provision of HIA training to a member of Cardiff Public Health Team;
• Advice and guidance to Pembrokeshire Public Health Team about boosting the use of health and HIA in the Local Development Plan;
• Advice and guidance to Swansea and Bridgend Public Health Teams about boosting the use of health and HIA in the Local Development Plan;
• Advice and guidance to Vale of Glamorgan Public Health Team about boosting the use of health and HIA in the Local Development Plan.

HIA: Local policy and strategy development

Embedding HIA and ‘health’ in an organisation is complex and lengthy. One reason for this is the proliferation of impact assessment tools and processes all of which are relevant to health in some way. As a response some organisations have chosen to develop integrated tools as rationalising ways of understanding the potential impact of their decisions whilst keeping an understanding of health as part of this process. The Unit has already assisted in the development of local HIA screening tools reflecting local Health Social Care and Well Being Strategies, as in Caerphilly, Anglesey and Gwynedd.

WHIASU has also been increasingly called upon to assist in the development, and testing, of integrated tools in relation to ‘health’ on a local level. During the last
year, WHIASU has provided support with testing local HIA tools, completed numerous rapid HIAs, and undertaken training sessions to test/evaluate these integration tools.

The Unit has continued to provide advice and guidance to local authorities - including the Route to Health Improvement (which aims to develop a co-ordinated approach to health) spearhead authorities. Examples of the work supported include:

- Supporting Denbighshire County Council to incorporate health into WAG’s Sustainable Development Integration Tool which has been used for local area Regeneration Plans;
- Helping Wrexham County Borough Council with Extra Care Housing Schemes for Older People;
- Support for Denbighshire County Council’s Review of its Housing Renewal Area Plan with a HIA;
- Supporting Cardiff County Council’s Healthy Cities application and planning for future use of HIA within the local authority;
- Supporting Cardiff County Council’s approaches to incorporating HIA into its Local Development Plan;
- Support for Blaenau Gwent County Council with the HIA on the Pre-Deposit Local Development Plan;
- Advice and guidance for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council’s Housing Department which plans to use HIA to evaluate a range of housing grants;
- Advice and guidance for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Planning Department on incorporating health and HIA into its Local Development Plan.

Capacity building is essential to the sustainability of HIA and a valuable way for people to learn is through a ‘learning by doing’ approach. Capacity building activities have included not just training but by the completion of rapid appraisals, such as:

- Project BRAND, Denbighshire;
- Pre-Deposit of the Local Development Plan, Blaenau Gwent;
- Housing Renewal Area Plan, Denbighshire;
- Wrexham Hub and Spoke Accommodation Scheme for Older People;
- Provided advice and guidance on undertaking a rapid HIA of a proposed Local Area Partnership Agreement for Physical Activity in Gwynedd.

With the setting up of a new public health delivery system in Wales there is a real opportunity to review and assess where HIA fits into wider systems for public health in Wales. The work of WHIASU will be managed by Public Health Wales and the next 12 months will look for better clarity as to how HIA may be supported in all sectors throughout Wales. In addition we will be developing, with relevant stakeholders, protocols to provide better understanding of how the increasing number of commercial HIAs should be commissioned, supported and quality assessed.
Communities First and Community HIA

Community participation is an essential part of any HIA undertaken and this is particularly the case in HIAs that are conducted by Communities First partnerships. There are a growing number of opportunities to develop the use of HIA at a local community level, and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Activity and partnerships actively engaged during this period has included:

- An in-depth HIA was commissioned by the Communities First Partnership in Splott, Cardiff, over concerns of local residents over the potential health impacts of incineration;
- An in-depth HIA was commissioned by the Communities First Partnership in Six Bells, Abertillery, to evaluate future community-led regeneration plans.

Local communities have continued to be engaged with HIA, and WHIASU has received requests for advice about HIAs from members of the public living in Merythr Tydfil, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot and Flintshire. It is anticipated that in the future WHIASU will continue to develop strong relationships with Communities First partnerships across Wales and work in partnership with them to build capacity for HIA.

HIA and Planning: Land Use Planning

Welsh Assembly Government has led by example with the draft Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement 02/2006 on incorporating consideration of any health and wellbeing implications into the planning process in Wales. At a national level, WHIASU provided support with the National Transport Plan HIA and provided input into the Wales Climate Change Strategy in conjunction with Public Health Wales.

There have also been examples of activity at a local level to encourage the participation of planning departments in cross-sector training and rapid appraisal workshops.

WHIASU has made direct contact with the following planning departments during the last year:

- Blaenau Gwent County Council - Pre-Drop Deposit Local Development Plan;
- Cardiff Council - training and capacity building, Local Development Plan;
- Conwy County Borough Council - Llandudno Junction Regeneration Plan;
- Denbighshire County Council - Housing Renewal Area Plan;
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council - training and capacity building, Local Development Plan;
- Wrexham County Borough Council - Sustainable Development Officer and using HIA in SEA.

The value of HIA is increasingly being recognised in local planning departments. This was helped by a number of Welsh Assembly Government announcements and documents. One clear indication of the support for HIA beyond the health sector was the issuing of the One Wales document in 2008 which included HIA as a mandatory process for opencast mining applications. This was supported further
with the publication in January 2009 of the Welsh Technical Advice Note (TAN) for Coal and Minerals which recommends that HIA’s be undertaken in these planning applications. WHIASU has been involved in advising local people and consultants in the following developments during the last year;

- Proposed Coal Recovery/Land Remediation Scheme, Hirwaun, (Tower Colliery) RCT
- Proposed Coal Recovery/Land Reclamation Scheme, Varteg Hill, Blaenavon.
- Proposed Coal Recovery/Land Remediation Scheme, Rhydycar, Merthyr Tydfil

Finally, in June 2009 the HIA Review Package for Development Projects for Local Authorities was published by Ben Cave Associates. This aims to give local authorities across the UK a better understanding as to the content of a good quality HIA report from consultants. WHIASU was a member the Steering Group for the development of this package and have actively used it in quality assuring HIA reports.

**HIA and Planning: Transport Planning**

Publication of the Welsh Transport Assessment Guidance (WelTAG) in June 2008 by Welsh Assembly Government has generated activity and interest in HIA by the Welsh transport sector. This guidance identifies that HIA must be used as a part of WelTAG so that health and wellbeing is considered in all new road build or road improvement schemes in Wales. It lists WHIASU as a vital resource for consultants who work on these schemes. It identifies that transport planners consider the wider determinants of health of these projects and not just environmental or biophysical health impacts. Since its publication the Unit has received many requests for support, training and advice and has worked on the following schemes since 2007:

- A494/A483 Road Improvement Scheme, Newtown, mid Wales
- A470 Bontnewydd Road Improvement Scheme, Caernarfon, Gwynedd
- A470 Built Wells Transportation Scheme, Powys
- Wrexham Industrial Estate Access Road Scheme, Wrexham

WHIASU provided a training session in November 2009 with Welsh Assembly Government Transport Planning Unit (TPU) which included the Head of the TPU, the lead for the National Transport Plan and Project managers and engineers of some of the schemes. Much of this work is ongoing.

**Sharing Best Practice: International**

Requests for information and guidance have been received from various organisations, academic institutions and voluntary and community groups who wish to gain from the knowledge and expertise which the Unit has developed. The most notable of these includes:

- **Public Health Officer at the Department of Planning in Ontario, Canada** with regard to the work that Wales has been undertaking to incorporate health into the planning process.
• University of Albany, New York. Advice given and information and resources sent to re undertaking a HIA on a community project and potential ways forward.

• Department of Health in England. Supporting the development of a competency framework for HIA Practitioners in the UK

• University of Roskilde, Denmark. Information provided on activity in Wales with regard to Health and EIA in the context of local strategy policy, planning and community activity.

• Member of the Steering Group for the International HIA Gateway website.

• WHO study on ‘HIA within the Extractive Industries’. Provided information and case studies on HIA work undertaken in Wales.

WHIASU also continues to be represented on the scientific advisory committee of the International HIA conference which will take place in Spain in April 2011.

Sharing Best Practice: Wales

Supporting the development of HIA by learning from experience led to a **HIA Best Practice Sharing workshop for Wales** being held on December 4th 2009 at Cardiff University. Over 30 practitioners attended including local authority representatives, private consultants, academic practitioners and local public health practitioners. The workshop was aimed at those who have an interest in or are practitioners of HIA in Wales and was incredibly fruitful with lively debate and discussion. Jeff Spear from the Planning Division at WAG presented on ‘Current policy developments in health and planning in Wales’, Liz Green spoke about ‘The use of HIA within Transport Planning in Wales’ and Eva Elliott and Heather Rothwell from Cardiff University discussed completed research on the ‘Health Impacts of the Recession’.

There was an ‘Open Forum’ sharing of practice discussion session in which 3 breakout groups discussed the themes of HIA and capacity building at a local level; HIA within the Planning Framework and the use of the media within this; Community Involvement in HIA. All information and papers produced from the day have been published on the WHIASU website and disseminated via HIA networks along with all the presentations and summary notes from the session. A similar workshop is planned during 2010.

Events and Conferences

WHIASU was invited to speak at a number of important national and international events in the past 12 months. These include:


• ‘HIA in Land use Planning in Wales’, Environment, Health and Wellbeing Conference, Staffordshire University, October 2009

• ‘HIA in Transport Planning in Wales’ UK Public Health Association Conference, Bournemouth, March 2010
‘Opencast mining and its impacts on health and wellbeing’ International HIA Conference, Rotterdam (poster presentation)

Completed research:

The impact of the recession on health

The current global financial crisis is likely to impact on health and well being at individual and population levels in a number of ways that are not as yet clearly understood. One way in which governments, public services and employers can protect the health of their citizens or employees is by learning from the experiences of previous recessions. By doing this future decisions on the delivery of public services and for supporting the economy will be informed by some insight as to what those health impacts could be. However it is also important to recognise that each economic crisis has its own character and interacts within a particular policy and socioeconomic context. This review aimed to capture the learning from research on previous recessions whilst placing the finding in the context of Wales today.

In order to do this we used three methods to collect data:

- **A systematic review** of the literature on what is known about the effects of recession and well as the effectiveness of measures to respond to it in relation to health
- **Case studies** with front line workers and/or managers of services relevant to the determinants of health during economic downturns and their likely effects in two local authority areas.
- **A policy dialogue**, with national and local stakeholders, to discuss emerging findings and issues to provide the review with a context to refine conclusions and recommendations

It should be emphasised that this was not a comprehensive study, which would require more time and resources than was available, but it provides a starting point from which policy makers, practitioners and researchers can start deliberation on actions for the future.

It provides a set of evidence informed recommendations for policy and practice which includes suggestions as to what population groups may be particularly vulnerable to the recession; the need to pool resources and join up solutions particularly in areas where support service infrastructure is likely to be weak; the need for active labour market programmes which provide support, build self esteem and make us or forge supportive social/community networks and (as well as job search support) and for these to include an evaluation of their health impact; for support strategies to be developed in workplaces to support employees who may be anxious about their job status; and for the potential health impact of future spending decisions as a result of reduced public spending to be taken into consideration. In addition services for vulnerable young people, families under stress and people with mild to moderate mental health problems should be protected.

**Opencast mining and its impacts on health and wellbeing**

Opencast mine sites have long formed part of the landscape of the UK, and in particular South Wales due to the plentiful supply of rich coal seams. In the UK as a
whole it is estimated that there are currently approximately 30 opencast applications in the pipeline, with the exact number in Wales not known at the present time. The One Wales document outlined that any proposed opencast development in Wales should be subject to a health impact assessment which should include an element of community involvement. WHIASU have been involved in several Health Impact Assessments relating to opencast mining in South Wales, most notably at Ffos-y-Fran and Margam. In both these cases a literature review was undertaken as part of the comprehensive HIA process. However, this review of literature was primarily related to the specific context or community in question and there is no comprehensive review of literature relating to opencast mining and health impacts in general. This research has produced a best practice guidance document containing advice on carrying out an HIA on an opencast proposal and presenting the findings of a comprehensive literature review in a usable format for those wishing to undertake an HIA. This work, now complete, will be available on the WHIASU website, will be published as a printed document over the coming months and is due to be presented at several conferences over the coming year.

Ongoing research:

**Impact Assessment as a lever for health improvement**

A study investigating the links between HIA and other impact assessments is currently underway. Health impact assessment is not the only mechanism to incorporate health into decision making and there are opportunities to ensure that health is considered in existing impact assessments and appraisals. However, the current picture is confused and clarification as to how HIA can be positioned alongside other impact assessments would help to direct resources efficiently and effectively. A key aim of the research would be to identify how, when and by whom can the integration of health considerations in policy and planning best be achieved.

This research comprises three stages; stage 1 reviewing the literature on impact assessments and the creation of a matrix to understand these (including descriptions, reflections and a checklist), to identify at what point HIA could be triggered or introduced, and an analysis of the use of integrated impact assessment tools in Wales, the UK and internationally. Stage 2 comprises a series of expert interviews to discuss themes identified in stage 1, with Stage 3 comprising of a policy workshop presenting the draft report to stakeholders. WHIASU aims to complete this work by mid 2010.

Outcomes of the research include:

- A route map through the impact assessments showing the circumstances when each impact assessment would be most appropriate and best utilised

- A guide clarifying approaches available to organisations and community groups in Wales. This document would include an Impact Assessment Matrix showing the differences and similarities between approaches/tools. The document would also contain a policy context, the underlying principles across impact assessments, use of evidence and barriers and enablers as well as support available in Wales. The document would also ensure the most effective inclusion of health in new integrated tools, as well as other impact assessments.
Publications


Public Information and Dissemination

The WHIASU website is a valuable resource, not just for practitioners in Wales but much further a field. It is a window into HIA development and the work of the Unit, and therefore provides an opportunity to be seen as a model for HIA development internationally. The Website will be developed further in 2010 including rebranding the site with the new WHIASU and Public Health Wales logos and a new ‘HIA and Planning’ section.

WHIASU News updates are published quarterly on the website alongside much new information, case study reports of completed HIAs in Wales and news of HIA conferences and events. The second WHIASU Annual Report was published bilingually in August 2009 and a communications strategy was drafted in conjunction with the Public Health Wales. Information has regularly been disseminated via the WHIASU e-contacts network. The table below demonstrates a significant increase in the usage of the website: www.whiasu.wales.nhs.uk - which shows for the first time the number of hits exceeded half a million.

Web statistics for 2008-9:

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Hits: A ‘hit’ constitutes each individual who accessed the site.
Visits: A ‘visit’ constitutes the number of hits who visited the site for a duration of 10 minutes or longer.

Many of the HIA’s mentioned within this report are available on the WHIASU website.

Conclusion and Future Activity

In conclusion, WHIASU continues to build on past achievements and has already made substantial progress. However, whilst capacity is building within some organisations, many still need support with undertaking rapid appraisals and assistance with more comprehensive HIAs.

HIA has to develop alongside a growing recognition that health is integral to good public service development both within and outside the NHS. Key areas of development have been a fresh focus on HIA in planning and in improving the ways in which HIA provides a mechanism for engaging with the public. However the development of HIA needs to be underpinned by good partnership with a clear understanding that it operates most effectively as a whole systems approach. It also needs to be informed by relevant and robust research and evaluation. WHIASU embodies a partnership between the academic, policy and practice worlds. We therefore have an opportunity to both have an impact of the lives of people living in Wales as well as developing an international reputation for knowledge and understanding in HIA and about health and society more generally.

The 2010-11 work programme includes:

- Discussion and dissemination of research findings on the potential health impacts of opencast mining developments including a paper at the IUPHE Conference in Geneva in July 2010;
- Continuing research work on using impact assessment as a lever for health improvement;
- Input by WHIASU into the 11th International HIA Conference, to be held in Spain in spring 2010. WHIASU is a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee and will also will lead and design the basic HIA training pre-conference session;
- The continued successful partnership with the West Midlands Public Health Observatory in developing and delivery one and three day training courses in England and Wales.

The formation of a Unified Public Health System and a new Public Health Strategic Framework also provides new opportunities to place health at the heart of all policies and public services development. We look forward to reporting how WHIASU can contribute to a new era in public health improvement and equity in Wales.