



HM Government

# **What Works: evidence centres for social policy**

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# Our world leading ‘What Works’ approach will ensure evidence is at the heart of decision making

It is a fundamental principle of good public services that decisions are made on the basis of strong evidence and what we know works. Yet all too often evidence is not presented in a simple, relevant format that enables it to be used to its maximum potential by service providers, commissioners and policy makers.

In medicine, we do have a longstanding culture of using robust evidence to inform commissioning and clinical decisions. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) provides independent, authoritative and evidence-based guidance on the most effective ways to prevent, diagnose and treat disease and ill health, working with and being respected by professionals, academics and policy makers.

In launching the world’s first network of independent What Works centres, we are expanding this culture into other areas of social policy: crime reduction, active and independent ageing, early intervention, educational attainment and local economic growth.

When finances are tight it is even more important to ensure that we invest public resources wisely. Together, the What Works centres will cover areas with public spending of over £200 billion, helping to ensure that rigorous, high quality, independently assessed research shapes decision making at every level.

This Government believes that local practitioners and commissioners are the best people to make decisions for their service areas. What Works will ensure they have access to and understanding of this evidence base.

The centres, independent of Government, will collate published evidence on the effectiveness of interventions, assess these using a common ‘currency’, publish clear synthesis reports and share findings in an accessible way with practitioners and commissioners and policy makers. The What Works centres will also highlight where it is possible to further the evidence base.

The UK already produces some of the world’s best research and these centres will help to harness this, and the best international research, into our existing evidence generation and decision making processes. Our partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council

(ESRC) in developing this initiative is particularly welcome. The ESRC has a significant role in investing in the highest quality research and they will work closely with the What Works centres and our new What Works National Adviser to ensure that the highest standards of academic rigour are applied.

We wish the What Works network and centres every success and we look forward to seeing and using their research outputs in the forthcoming months.

**Rt Hon Danny Alexander MP**

Chief Secretary to Treasury

**Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP**

Minister for Government Policy

# Background to the What Works approach

This Government is committed to using high quality evidence to underpin decision making.

In July 2011 we made a commitment to investigate the creation of a 'NICE for social policy' in the Open Public Services White Paper<sup>1</sup>, reiterated in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Innovation and Research Strategy<sup>2</sup>. It was also a key action in the policy section of the Civil Service Reform Plan<sup>3</sup>:

*"an important element of this is a clear understanding of 'what works', building on evidence from policy in practice....In the same way that the Early Intervention Foundation will provide advice to commissioners on early years policy and NICE advises the NHS, the Cabinet Office will review the value of creating a similar institute that can test and trial approaches and assess what works in major social policy areas, so that commissioners in central or local government do not waste time and money on programmes that are unlikely to offer value for money."*

Over the last year we have been working with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Big Lottery Fund, Nesta and a wide range of partners in the public services, policy and academic arenas, to identify sectors of pressing social need and major public spending, where an evidence base exists but there is limited authoritative synthesis and communication of this evidence base<sup>4</sup>.

In a number of areas the demand has been clear that synthesised, well presented and disseminated evidence would be useful for:

- Local commissioners in informing their decisions on how best to spend public money;
- Public services providers in establishing how best to deliver public services and how to improve their service; and,
- Policy makers in coming to an informed view of what is and is not cost-effective in public services.

In different sectors the needs are slightly different. In crime reduction, for example, a key audience will be the new Police and Crime Commissioners, as well as Chief Constables and police officers. In respect of local economic growth, information on what works will support Local Enterprise Partnerships, Cities, local authorities and neighbourhoods.

This calls not for one centre of excellence spanning all these varied areas of social policy but for separate, independent, outward-facing organisations that are able to engage with their customer base and evidence communities and tailor their approach and communications to their needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office (2011) Open Public Services White Paper, available online:

<http://files.openpublicservices.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/OpenPublicServices-WhitePaper.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) Innovation and Research Strategy, December 2011, available online: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32450/11-1387-innovation-and-research-strategy-for-growth.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32450/11-1387-innovation-and-research-strategy-for-growth.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Office (2012) Civil Service Reform Plan, June 2012, available online:

<http://resources.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Civil-Service-Reform-Plan-acc-final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Nesta have produced a paper presenting the need for evidence: [www.nesta.org.uk/making\\_evidence\\_useful](http://www.nesta.org.uk/making_evidence_useful)

This paper outlines how we are establishing the world's first network of What Works centres covering a diverse range of social policy areas. Together these centres cover over £200 billion of public spending and will provide robust and high quality synthesis of the research evidence on the effectiveness of interventions in each field.

In the development of the new What Works centres, a number of successful models have been drawn upon, such as the Washington State Institute for Public Policy<sup>5</sup>. However this is the first time a national government has sought so visibly to put evidence at the heart of decision making.

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<sup>5</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, see [www.wsipp.wa.gov](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov)

# The What Works centres

Our world leading approach will see the creation of four new What Works centres, independent of Government, focussing on:

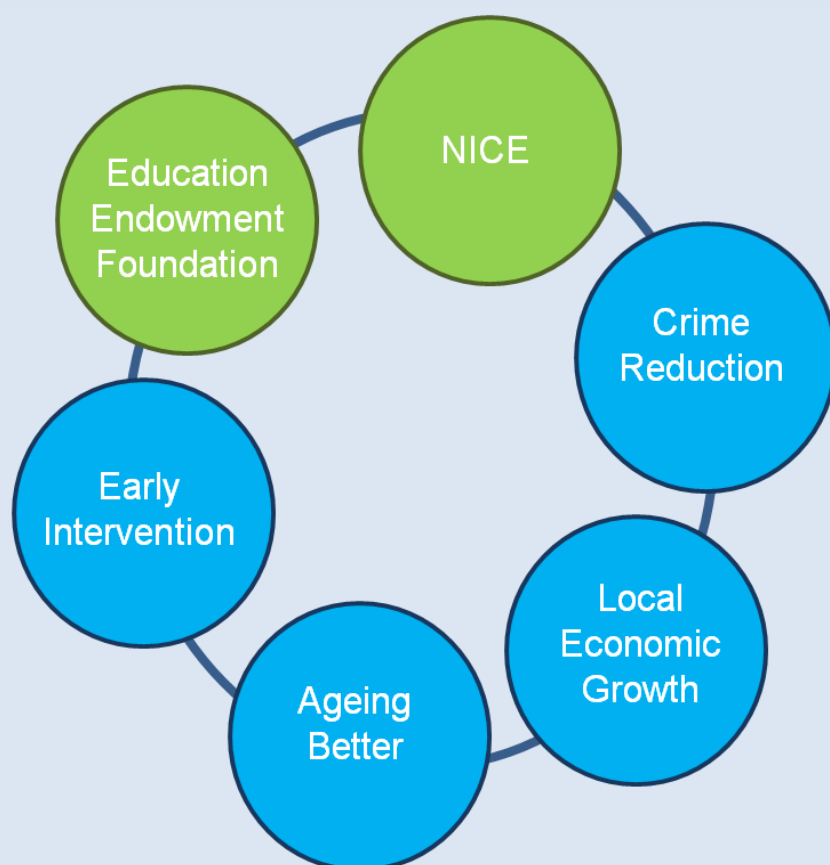
- **Crime reduction** –part of the new College of Policing
- **Local economic growth** – currently undergoing tender by the ESRC
- **Ageing better** – with further details to be announced by the Big Lottery Fund
- **Early intervention** – delivered by the Early Intervention Foundation

These new centres will be joined in a new What Works network by two established centres, both already leading the way in promoting evidence-based decision making within their sectors:

- the **National Institute for Clinical and Health Excellence (NICE)**; and,
- the **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)**

Further details on the individual centres, their scope and status are in Annex A.

## ‘What Works’ Network of Evidence Centres



## **What Works National Adviser**

Within Government, a civil servant will be appointed as National Advisor to engage with ministers and other stakeholder groups and promote high standards across the What Works network. They will sit within the Cabinet Office and report to the Minister for Government Policy and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The National Advisor will have two core functions: promoting social science and leading a strong independent What Works network; and providing an advisory role to ministers. The linkage between the two roles will ensure that the National Advisor will be able to advocate to Government for better use and generation of evidence and ensure a thriving network of independent, rigorous and evidence-led What Works centres.



# The role of the What Works centres

Based on the lessons from other successful initiatives, we have identified a small number of core functions that all What Works centres will undertake, to rigorous standards. Some centres will have a broader remit but each will at a minimum generate evidence synthesis, translate the evidence, facilitate evidence absorption and promote good evidence.

## Core functions of What Works centres

Each What Works centre will be **independent of Government**, with a **clear and relevant policy focus**.

Each will:

### ***Generate evidence synthesis***

1. Undertake **systematic assessment** of relevant evidence and produce a sound, accurate, **clear and actionable synthesis** of the global evidence base which:
  - i. Assesses and ranks interventions on the basis of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness;
  - ii. Shows where the interventions are applicable;
  - iii. Shows the relative cost of interventions;
  - iv. Shows the strength of evidence on an agreed scale.

### ***Translate the evidence***

2. Produce and apply a **common currency** for comparing the effectiveness of interventions.
3. Put the **needs and interests of users** at the heart of its work.

### ***Evidence absorption***

4. **Publish and disseminate findings** in a format that can be understood, interpreted and acted upon.

### ***Promote good evidence***

5. **Identify research and capability** gaps and work with partners to fill them.
6. **Advise those commissioning and undertaking innovative interventions** and research projects to ensure that their work can be evaluated effectively.

## **Generating evidence synthesis**

A core element of each What Works centre will be to gather and synthesise evidence on the effectiveness of interventions in each of their respective areas.

The UK consistently produces some of the world's most influential research. The core role of the What Works centres will not be to undertake primary research; rather, it will be to gather all existing research on relevant policy interventions, from the UK and internationally and to evaluate in a consistent way based on the quality of the evidence and the effectiveness and applicability of the interventions.

This synthesis should be action-orientated, so that commissioners, service providers and policy makers can make use of it in their decision making. It is also important that this synthesis is academically rigorous and our partnership with ESRC and the academic community will reinforce this.

## **Translating the evidence**

A key element of the success of organisations such as NICE<sup>6</sup> and the Washington State Institute has been the discipline of developing and applying a common currency, so that policy interventions can be compared on a common basis. Each What Works centre will be required to use its own 'currency', developed in partnership with their respective sectors.

## **Facilitating evidence absorption**

Outreach and presentation will be key roles for each of the What Works centres. It is important to ensure that evidence reaches the people who need it, and is presented in a powerful, easy to understand way. The Education Endowment Foundation has developed a user-friendly toolkit, giving school governors, teachers and head teachers easy access to information on interventions that may promote attainment.

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<sup>6</sup> NICE has developed the Quality-adjusted life years measurement (QALY) – see NICE (2013) Measuring effectiveness and cost effectiveness: the QALY, available online: <http://www.nice.org.uk/newsroom/features/measuringeffectivenessandcosteffectivenessstheqaly.jsp>

## Case study: Sutton Trust/Education Endowment Foundation

In education, the Sutton Trust / Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) recently published a Teaching and Learning Toolkit, developed by academics at University of Durham, which is a free and accessible summary of over 5,500 educational research studies for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

The Toolkit is freely available on the Sutton Trust / EEF website and has already been widely disseminated to head teachers across England.

In addition to the toolkit, the EEF is also testing innovative initiatives to improve pupil attainment for the most disadvantaged pupils across England. The projects are rigorously evaluated and currently involve over 275,000 pupils and 1,400 schools

Toolkit	Toolkit Info	Toolkit Filter	Pupil Premium Cal	Latest Updates	Downloads
About the Toolkit					
Using the Toolkit	Feedback	£ £ £ £ £	★★★★★	+8 months	
Pupil Premium Calculator	Meta-cognition and self-regulation	£ £ £ £ £	★★★★★	+8 months	
Videos and Case Studies	Peer tutoring	£ £ £ £ £	★★★★★	+6 months	
Approaches A-Z	Teaching assistants	£ £ £ £ £	★★★☆☆	0 months	
	Performance pay	£ £ £ £ £	★☆☆☆☆	0 months	
	Ability grouping	£ £ £ £ £	★★★☆☆	-1 month	

<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit>

### Promoting good evidence

Centres will advise commissioners on how to evaluate new programmes that can add to the evidence base. They will also identify where there are gaps or weaknesses in the evidence base and work with funders to encourage them to fill these gaps.

### Further information about What Works

For more details on the What Works initiative please consult the Cabinet Office website: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk)

# Annex A: Further information on the new What Works centres

## What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth

The What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth will analyse, synthesise and proactively disseminate the evidence base relating to interventions that promote local economic growth. The primary customers for the outputs of the centre will be decision makers and practitioners working in, and with, Local Economic Partnerships, cities and Local Authorities, who are responsible for the generation and use of evidence.

Further details of the Local Growth What Works centre are being announced by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The tendering process opens on 4 March 2013 and the deadline for applications closes on 25 April 2013, with a decision expected to be announced on 5 July.

The Centre will have core funding of £1m p.a. over an initial three year term, jointly funded by ESRC (50 per cent), BIS, and DCLG (both 25 per cent).

## What Works Centre for Ageing Better

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) is in the process of establishing a Centre for ageing better. BIG has been developing plans for this 'centre' in conjunction with groups of older people themselves, and other stakeholders including the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Department of Health (DH) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Further details about this centre will be announced by the Big Lottery Fund at the end of March 2013. The plan is for this Centre to become a member of the What Works network, recognising that it will be delivering the ambitions of What Works in ageing better as part of its remit.

## What Works Centre for Crime Reduction

The College of Policing will host a What Works Centre for Crime Reduction. The Centre's role will be to identify the best available evidence on approaches to reducing crime and potential savings. The College will work with academics, police and public bodies involved in community safety work to review the evidence base and get the results into the hands of decision makers, including Police and Crime Commissioners.

The College of Policing was launched on 4 February 2013 with Chief Constable Alex Marshall as Chief Executive. The College plans to tender with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for academic partners in What Works activity during Summer 2013.

The What Works Centre activity will be overseen by an independent academic member of the College Board, to be announced shortly. The Board also has an independent academic chair, Professor Shirley Pearce.

## What Works Centre for Early Intervention

On 5 February 2013, the Department for Education (DfE) and The Early Intervention Foundation Consortium signed a contract which will see the creation of an independent Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) – one of the key recommendations of Graham Allen's Early Intervention report.

The EIF will be the designated What Works centre for Early Intervention where they will collate, synthesise, rank and disseminate the evidence on what works in early intervention<sup>7</sup>.

The Foundation has received Government funding of £3.5m over two years and is being set up by a consortium of organisations which includes [4Children](#), the [Local Government Association](#) and [Achievement for All 3As](#). The organisations will support the new Foundation in its infancy before handing over responsibility to the Foundation's trustees and management once it is established as a charity in its own right in the summer.

For further information: [www.earlyinterventionfoundation.org.uk](http://www.earlyinterventionfoundation.org.uk).

## National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

In health the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) was established in 1999 and provides guidance to support decision-making regarding health. From 1 April 2013 it will do the same for social care. Its guidance is based on robust, rigorous evidence to inform health spending and clinical decisions. NICE recognise that having guidance based on robust evidence is beneficial to:

- Patients and carers Receive care in line with the best available evidence of clinical and cost-effectiveness; and,
- Healthcare professionals who can ensure care provided is based on the best evidence available.

## What Works Centre for Improving education outcomes for school-aged children

The Education Endowment Foundation is a charity set up in 2011 by the Sutton Trust as lead charity in partnership with Impetus Trust, with a Department for Education endowment of £125m. It is dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement.

The Sutton Trust-EEF Toolkit is an accessible summary of educational research which provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. It currently covers 30 topics and is based on work by Durham University. To access the Toolkit visit:

<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/>

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<sup>7</sup> Early Intervention: smart investment, massive savings

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-intervention-smart-investment-massive-savings>



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