



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Local worklessness policy analysis case studies

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Summary

There is an increasing emphasis on localisation and the delivery of services through local and multi agency partnerships; this report investigates the issues around undertaking policy analysis at the local level

The study is based on a case study approach providing insights into experience and practice of local partnerships and bodies in three areas: Greater Manchester, Lewisham and Cornwall.

This research provides local case study insights into:

- the extent to which analysis is undertaken at the local level to assess local worklessness interventions;
- whether and how local policy analysis is used to inform current and future interventions;
- the range of 'good practice' in local worklessness analysis;
- barriers to conducting analysis;
- the nature, scope and efficacy of existing arrangements to share local analysis; and
- local partners' appetite for a 'framework' for the analysis of local worklessness interventions and for dissemination of findings.

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Executive summary

This research provides local case study insights into:

- the extent to which analysis is undertaken at the local level to assess local worklessness interventions;
- whether and how local policy analysis is used to inform current and future interventions;
- the range of 'good practice' in local worklessness analysis;
- barriers to conducting analysis;
- the nature, scope and efficacy of existing arrangements to share local analysis; and
- local partners' appetite for a 'framework' for the analysis of local worklessness interventions and for dissemination of findings.

Background

Typically, evidence gathering of policy impact has been commissioned centrally. It has been appropriately resourced (financially and in terms of expertise) and results have been placed in the public domain.

Recently, the emphasis of policy has shifted to reflect the notion that although a national problem, worklessness is local in character and solutions to tackle it are best developed at local level. The fragmentation of local provision with multiple funding pots presents budgetary and other challenges for analysis, learning and evidence-based decision making from locally implemented policies.

Study methodology

This study of local worklessness policy analysis and dissemination practice is based on a case study approach providing insights into experience and practice of local partnerships and bodies in three areas: Greater Manchester, Lewisham and Cornwall. These areas were selected to reflect experience of implementing local initiatives to tackle worklessness in a range of local contexts in terms of rural and urban areas, and differing partnership arrangements and policy context.

Initial contact was made with a key individual in each of the three areas, who then identified other possible contacts for web-based survey and/or expert interviews. Interviewees included individuals responsible for design, implementation, and analysis/dissemination of local worklessness policy. In each area between three and six in-depth expert interviews were conducted with individuals with a strategic role in relation to local policy initiatives. Additionally, an electronic survey yielded 44 responses (across the three areas) from individuals with operational roles. Six interviews were also conducted with such individuals. Further interviews were conducted with external experts who had experience of conducting local worklessness policy analysis and evaluation.

Findings: analysing local worklessness policies

Analysis is important in understanding how a policy was implemented, the effects it had, for whom, how and why. Assessment and analysis needs to be built in to the design and implementation of a policy from the earliest stage. It can focus on process and/or impact.

Analysis of process is often undertaken using a qualitative approach and is likely to be particularly useful to those with operational responsibilities for informing current and future practice. Analysis of impact is more likely to lend itself to a quantitative approach and is of particular interest to those local actors in strategic roles.

The local case studies revealed a general interest in assessment and analysis (in principle) in order to:

- test innovative ideas;
- improve project/programme delivery;
- meet accountability requirements;
- check value for money; and
- develop future programmes.

From a strategic perspective analysis tended to be most useful when it focused on outcomes and whether the objectives of the intervention were met. However, individuals in strategic roles reported not commissioning as much analysis as they might like.

Whether local policy analysis was undertaken was determined by the mix of internal and external drivers at play in particular local circumstances. The most important external driver was a requirement to undertake analysis as a condition of funding arrangements. In such circumstances the imposition of particular analysis methods by commissioners across local areas has the advantage of ensuring comparability through using a consistent method. Yet for service delivery organisations this may impose a burden on them in terms of being required to report in different ways for different funding streams. From an operational perspective, analysis was most useful when it could inform current and future practice. A key internal driver for analysis was to drive up organisational performance, but when organisations were required to undertake analysis (as mandated through external drivers) without clear understanding of the purpose and the benefits, it was clear that there was little buy-in to the process.

Lack of resources (financial and expertise) were common reasons for not undertaking as much local policy analysis as respondents would have liked. For small projects and interventions in a fragmented delivery landscape effective analysis can take a large slice of the available budget and sometimes there is reluctance to divert the resource away from operations. Issues with implementing local policy analysis were also apparent, such as the interconnected nature of projects which made it difficult to ascertain what interventions were responsible for particular outcomes.

Some individuals with an operational perspective suggested that university students or community champions could play a role in local policy analysis. From a strategic perspective, there was value in association with national evaluations of local initiatives through exposure to new ideas, access to expertise and sharing of practice.

Findings: sharing ‘good practice’ from analysis of local worklessness policies

Motivations for sharing ‘good practice’ included the desire to enhance awareness of the outcomes of local worklessness policies and what is possible in terms of analysis, consequently driving up demand, interest and expertise. Good practice examples may be sought by organisations to avoid instituting something which did not work elsewhere. Some organisations saw sharing as a way of promoting their own activities, and through doing so making connections with other stakeholders and potential collaborators for future funding bids.

Sharing of practice occurred at formal and informal levels. Interviews revealed a preference for face-to-face sharing of information, requiring internal and external resources. If this is to occur, other than on an informal ad hoc basis, it may require facilitation from an individual or a group of service providers.

Barriers cited to sharing and learning from good practice included lack of resources, weaknesses in the information provided, uncertainty about the quality of the analysis, and issues regarding the transferability of practice between different areas. However, while these concerns might apply to the results of local analysis, they need not apply to sharing practice in methodologies.

The case study evidence suggests that the types of information which organisations are willing to share may be changing; they are becoming more selective about what they will make public and this could be, in part, attributable to the competitive funding context. Organisations are, on the whole, more willing to receive information than to distribute it.

Reflections and recommendations

There is a demand for analysis of good practice. It was not the case that people were not interested or did not see the value of local worklessness policy analysis.

There are challenges with improving analysis at the local level. Certain recommendations could improve the current situation.

It is important to make clear to those who are collecting the information, what it is for, and how it will be used, so that a greater level of understanding can be fostered. Feedback is important so that the process feels like a joint endeavour, rather than an imposition.

Building in ring-fenced resource for carrying out analysis would help. Expectations about local worklessness policy analysis would need to reflect the amount of resource available.

There is a need to build up analytical expertise, so that the technical aspects are understood.

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The case studies and expert interviews suggest that most of those involved are interested in ways to improve practice. Various good practice resources currently exist, but uptake of these resources is patchy. A framework may provide guidance on this and, therefore, the idea of a framework may be given qualified support. The qualification relates to the nature of a framework. Possible options here include:

- 1 a tool that brings together what is already known about 'what works' (from sub-national, national and international evidence); and
- 2 a tool that helps those undertaking local worklessness policy analysis to move up the Maryland Scale of standards of evidence.

The case studies indicate greater support for option 1 than for option 2. To maximise the utility of option 1 it would be necessary to update and promote the tool on an ongoing basis. Organisations such as the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) could play an important dissemination role, with input and support from analysts from relevant national government departments. Some interviewees with a strategic focus, who were interested in policy impact, would welcome technical support from national government statisticians/analysts. This support could be delivered via short-term loans of analysts to local authorities/other local partners, their involvement in action learning sets, and via telephone/email.

Different levels of analytical experience, expertise and capacity at local level suggest that either different frameworks may be needed for different users, or that a facility may be required for different users to engage in different ways, and at different levels, with the same framework. The case studies suggest that appropriateness and adaptability are important underlying principles for any framework. It was felt that any framework should be advisory rather than mandatory. There was agreement that a framework should not set up a particular analytical technique/methodology as 'the only way' or the 'perfect way', such that all other practice is seen as second rate or worthless.

Developing a framework for analysis is only the first step. If a framework is to have a real impact on improving local worklessness policy analysis and sharing good practice across a range of settings it must be accessible and its use consistently and widely promoted.

1 Introduction

In the context of policy and delivery shifts emphasising a locally tailored and responsive approach to tackling worklessness, a key question is how can learning from locally implemented provision be utilised and shared to enable continual improvement of policies? Case study research from three local areas provides insights into current practice in local worklessness policy analysis and associated barriers to disseminating learning, and how the situation might be improved.

1.1 Policy and delivery shifts in tackling local worklessness and their implications

Over recent years there have been important policy and delivery shifts (see Appendix A for further details on key policies in England) reflecting the view that while worklessness is a problem at a national level, the reasons for it vary between local areas and hence, solutions are best developed locally. Before 2010 the Labour Government implemented policies and strategies to promote multi-agency working and local decision making to tackle worklessness and promote local economic development at local and sub-regional levels (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2006; HM Treasury, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2007). In England Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), the City Strategy initiative and Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) promoted local and sub-regional partnership working across policy domains. Through initiatives such as the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) (DCLG and DWP, 2007) and the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) some local authorities received greater local powers, coupled with discretionary funding associated with the decentralisation and devolution of funding streams, to tackle worklessness at local level. Other policy developments, such as the Total Place initiative (HM Treasury and DCLG, 2010), focused on how public money was spent locally.

In 2010 the Coalition Government announced the discontinuation of WNF and FJF, so reducing local discretionary funding specifically to tackle worklessness, but through localism the broad policy direction concerning the transference of power and responsibility to local actors (HM Government, 2010) was continued. While the Work Programme (WP) model (HM Treasury, 2010; DWP, 2011a) is based on payment by results and on competition (as opposed to co-operation) between providers, other initiatives, such as the DWP Worklessness Co-design pilot, Community Budgets and City Deals have emphasised the devolution of powers away from Westminster to partnerships at a more local level, in the belief that real localism goes beyond devolution of funding and functions to local areas and rather lies in shaping policies around individuals in their local context (DWP, 2011b). A feature of all of these initiatives is the emphasis on improving individual outcomes through redesigning flexible provision, reducing duplication and waste and saving public money¹.

So what do these developments mean for worklessness policy analysis and dissemination at local level? Part of the rationale for individualisation and localism is that support needs

¹ This highlights the need for partners to work on issues such as data sharing and to improve evaluation methodologies (e.g. through development of cost benefit frameworks and measures of social return on investment (SROI)).

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to be tailored to individuals in specific local contexts. There is a danger of fragmentation of provision, especially when devolved and/or discretionary funding is involved. The risk is that that best practice, analysis and learning from locally implemented provision is not easily shared beyond the local area to enable continual improvement of policies. This might lead to inefficient use of resources as shortcomings in policy in one local area are replicated elsewhere or by other agencies in the same area, or successes are not copied, such that optimal policy transfer is not achieved.

In a centralised system of delivery of worklessness programmes, analysis of policy impacts tends to be commissioned by central government and may involve relatively large-scale statistical analyses comparing treatment with control groups. Usually, the results of such analysis are then placed in the public domain. While some individuals with a strategic or operational concern with projects involving tackling local worklessness may be either unaware of, or choose not to access such analyses in order to inform policy formulation and delivery, the key issue is that in nearly all cases the reports are available and publicly accessible.

The trend towards a more tailored and responsive approach to tackling worklessness, involving delivery of worklessness programmes at a local level with devolved funding, as opposed to implementation by central government, means that such sophisticated analytical techniques of the types used to evaluate national programmes may not be appropriate, given issues of scale and the smaller numbers of clients and of areas involved. Yet it remains important to evaluate the success, or otherwise, of policy, and some local areas have implemented innovative techniques to gauge the success or failure of their interventions. Sharing successful methodologies and techniques beyond the local area should enable the improvement of local provision and ensure that best practice is implemented more widely.

1.2 Objectives

In the context of the policy and delivery shifts outlined above, how could DWP and partners enable local authorities and partnerships to advance the localism agenda through building a robust evidence base about the efficacy of interventions to tackle local worklessness? This question is addressed by:

- identifying whether analysis is conducted at local level to assess the success or impact of local worklessness interventions;
- identifying whether and how such analysis (and other external research) is used to inform the development of current and future policy;
- identifying the range of practice, and good practice, in the analysis of local worklessness policy, both in terms of processes and methodologies;
- identifying barriers to conducting analysis at local level;
- exploring the nature, reach and efficacy of currently existing mechanisms to share local analyses/information;
- assessing the appetite at local level for, and the feasibility of, implementing a framework for local worklessness policy analysis and for continual dissemination of analysis and assessment, and to formulate recommendations accordingly. ('Framework' is the term used here to denote guidance on the relative robustness of different kinds of evidence for measurement of the success of policy and guidance on how to interpret the efficacy of the evidence available.)

1.3 Methodology

A local case study approach was used to gain in-depth insights into experience and practice of analysing local worklessness policy from three local areas with differing characteristics (see Appendix B for further details):

- **Greater Manchester:** ten local authorities with a strong tradition of working together, a rich shared evidence base and experience of several relevant initiatives including the City Strategy initiative, MAAs, Total Place, Community Budget and City Deal.
- **Lewisham:** in south-east London is part of the wider London labour market, and has a strong tradition of local partnership working and involvement in a range of national initiatives concerned with tackling worklessness.
- **Cornwall:** an area with a more dispersed population scattered across small towns and rural areas in receipt of substantial funding from European sources, where overt emphasis is placed on co-ordination of resources and organisations to achieve better outcomes.

The case studies involved documentary review and interviews supplemented by a Web-based survey of individuals involved strategically and/or operationally with local worklessness interventions and associated analysis and dissemination activities (see Appendix C).

At national level this was supplemented with a selective review of good practice examples/guides/frameworks/dissemination mechanisms for local worklessness/employment policy analysis and dissemination, and wider consultation involving expert interviews with individuals with experience in conducting external analysis and evaluations of local worklessness initiatives/programmes.

1.4 Scope and structure of the report

The remainder of this report sets out the findings from the local study as follows:

- Chapter 2 is concerned with analysis of 'good practice' in local worklessness policy. It reviews current practice in local analysis, views on what constitutes good practice in analysis, the impacts of good analysis, barriers to local analysis, and views on the support available for local analysis.
- Chapter 3 addresses the issue of sharing good practice in local worklessness policy and analysis. It discusses current practice in sharing and dissemination, views on what constitutes good practice in sharing and dissemination, the impacts of sharing, barriers to sharing and dissemination, and views on how dissemination of good practice in local worklessness policy analysis may be supported.
- Chapter 4 presents reflections and recommendations. First, drawing on a synthesis of the findings from the local case studies, an assessment is made of whether and what improvements could be made to facilitate and improve local worklessness policy analysis, and associated dissemination of practice. Then the role and possible nature of a framework for analysis of local worklessness policy is considered.

2 Analysing ‘good practice’

Analysis may take different forms according to the types of question to be addressed and the purpose of the exercise. The methodologies for local worklessness policy analysis will depend on whether the focus is on impact and/or process.

Specific reasons for conducting local worklessness policy analysis include:

- to test innovative ideas;
- to improve project/programme delivery;
- to meet accountability requirements;
- to check value for money; and
- to develop future programmes.

The case studies revealed that generally respondents were positive about ‘appropriate’ analysis. In order for analysis to be conducted, motivation to do so is required, and this may result from both external (e.g. a requirement of commissioners) and internal drivers (e.g. the drive to improve service provision). The balance of types of drivers may vary between individuals coming from a strategic, as opposed to an operational, perspective.

Analysis requires proper resources; absences of financial resources and skills were frequently cited as key barriers impeding analysis. Many of these barriers are not specific to local worklessness policy analysis, but generic issues relating to analysis more generally.

There was agreement that tracking of customers was desirable, but may be expensive. Often short-term measures of success were considered and this tended to sideline attempts to analyse sustainability. Monitoring may end at the point of job entry, even though from a policy analysis perspective there is interest in what happens after this point.

Individuals and organisations with an operational perspective value analysis which can assist with future service delivery. Often it was felt that a focus on statistical analysis provided little help in this regard and, therefore, requests for information (with little or no return) were considered burdensome.

Local worklessness policy analysis is most helpful when things which did not work can be explored in an open and frank manner. ‘Independent’ or external analysts may feel pressure to report only successful elements and self-assessors may be wary of reporting what might be considered negative. Consideration should be given as to how more open approaches can be fostered.

2.1 Approaches to analysis

Analysis and evaluation is about the systematic application of research procedures for assessing the conceptualisation, design, implementation and utility of programmes. It is an objective process of understanding how a policy or other intervention was implemented, what effects it had, for whom, how and why (HM Treasury, 2011). Key concepts are summarised in Table 2.1 (further details are presented in Appendices D, E and F).

Table 2.1 Key concepts

Concept	Description
Policy cycle	Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback (ROAMEF) (HM Treasury, 2003)
Theory of change/ logic models	Help to frame design of analysis, by describing the relationship between a policy intervention’s inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes
Client journey/ employability pathway	A series of stages through which an individual passes from initial outreach, through employability support, to in-work support
Analysis methods	Include systematic reviews of existing evidence, action research, case studies, qualitative interviews and/or focus groups, cost effectiveness, cost benefit analysis (CBA) and social return on investment (SROI)
Formative/process evaluation	Action-oriented – aims to understand how a policy has been implemented or delivered – in order to identify factors that have helped or hindered its effectiveness
Summative/impact evaluation	Conclusion-oriented – aims to understand the impact of a specified policy on a specific group of people, how the impact compares to the objectives; it also relates to effectiveness and value
Randomised control trial (RCT)	Provides a strong measure of policy impact by randomly assigning similar individuals to a ‘treatment’ group (subject to a policy intervention) and a ‘control’ group (not subject to the policy intervention)
Standards of evidence and the Maryland Scale	Measure the robustness of policy assessment/evaluation methods; on the Maryland Scale Level 1 represents the lowest standard and Level 5 (represents the highest standard); (see Appendices E and F for further details).

2.2 Local worklessness policy analysis – current practice

2.2.1 The rationale for intervention and appraising options

Interviewees with a strategic role in formulating policy indicated that policy intervention was driven by:

- the availability of funding and the rules of various funding streams; and
- mapping and gap analysis showing the nature and location of unmet need.

In appraising options for intervention most interviewees were guided by previous experience of ‘what worked’ (and what did not) in their local area. Where they lacked such experience they might turn to other local areas for guidance. Some learned from analysis of national policy and more particularly, where they felt they lacked experience from previous interventions locally, sought to learn from projects in other local areas.

For some interviewees the foremost emphasis was on policy innovation:

‘There’s a limit to how much you can pick up on what else is going on ... We try and pioneer things without looking at other things going ... We did recognise and still recognise that the only way to really be effective is to do things differently, because we’ve been throwing money at this problem for years and years and it’s still, to be honest, the same as ever, so to keep on doing the same thing is not the way to solve it and we think we’ve found some good things that do work and we’ve tried to build on those.’

(Strategic perspective)

2.2.2 How widespread is analysis?

Strategic perspectives

All interviewees with a strategic role mentioned undertaking or commissioning analysis of local worklessness policy, although not always as much as they would have liked. Respondents were generally very positive about analysis, although some indicated that since no strong analysis culture was in place analysis was patchy.

Operational perspectives

Respondents with an operational focus indicated that analysis was reasonably widespread, but was not consistently conducted across all projects or necessarily formalised and institutionalised as operational practice. A substantial minority of survey respondents had not been involved in analysis of a project in their organisation; most commonly, analysis had not been undertaken during the time the respondent had been employed by the organisation, even though in most of these cases, the respondents had been employed for a significant period.

Expert perspectives

Despite noting examples of embedding of 'good practice', the experts interviewed described analysis as ad hoc, perhaps reflecting resource constraints (both financial and in terms of skills) on what could be achieved. Some highlighted a tendency to equate basic monitoring with analysis and/or evaluation, suggesting that this tended to inflate the amount of analysis reported as being undertaken. The relative lack of analysis was not necessarily deliberate, but rather was a blind spot:

'I don't think it's a deliberate thing, it's almost a blind spot. People don't say, "Let's not bother..." it's just it's not a priority. Getting it done, getting the training organised, getting the staffing in [is where they concentrate their efforts].'

(Expert perspective)

2.2.3 Why analyse local worklessness policy interventions?

Strategic perspectives

Interviewees with a strategic focus mentioned two main reasons for policy analysis:

- improving project/programme delivery; and
- informing the development of future interventions.

Other reasons mentioned by some interviewees were identifying factors that have helped or hindered the effectiveness of an intervention, ascertaining whether/how an intervention worked for one or more particular groups of clients, and checking value for money.

Several interviewees also mentioned a current shift towards increasing interest in measuring cost (both in terms of cost effectiveness and CBA). In Greater Manchester and Lewisham, national initiatives with a local focus, such as Total Place, Co-design pilots and Community Budgets, were key drivers of greater focus on, and prominence given to, where money is being spent, cost issues and in the promotion of CBA methodologies. In Greater Manchester, especially, there was strong 'buy-in' for the application of such methodologies at senior

strategic level. This reflected prevailing financial constraints and the increasing need for those responsible for policy to be able to defend their decisions with reference to objective evidence:

'It's about being that bit more savvy about how you use the resources that are available locally, particularly when there's not much money around to put into new schemes, new initiatives.'

(Strategic perspective)

Operational perspectives

For organisations with an operational focus, the motivations for analysis of local worklessness policy can be externally imposed, most commonly as a requirement from commissioners, or can arise from an internal drive to, for example, improve service provision. In the majority of cases, it was a combination of internal and external drivers that resulted in analysis being conducted.

Internal drivers predominated as the key motivation for analysis of operational organisations' worklessness projects/programmes. The most common reason cited was that analysis can help improve future service provision. The focus of analysis could be on improving client experiences, ensuring that activities were meeting the wider aims of the organisation or informing future practice. When there was a clear internal drive for analysis practices tended to be institutionalised and applied fairly consistently across all the projects undertaken by the organisation:

[The organisation] have a commitment to ensuring the delivery of their services reflects the needs and views of the people they support and actively involve both people they support and their families in the development and delivery of programmes ... It is imperative that feedback and evaluation takes place to keep delivery relevant, accessible and appropriate for the people we support.'

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

When an organisation was unable to understand the benefit of analysis to the organisation itself, which most commonly occurred when analysis was driven by external demands, there was little institutional commitment or buy-in. In such circumstances analysis was a tokenistic, form-filling exercise, which placed an administrative burden on the organisation, sometimes to the extent that this detracted from their service delivery activities.

External drivers of analysis were almost entirely related in some way to funding – as either:

- a requirement of the commissioners of a particular policy initiative – when in most cases the methods to be used were also specified, resulting in consistency of methods across all the projects funded by a particular commissioner, but often leading to inconsistencies in practice within a service-delivery organisation with several projects with different commissioners; or because of
- a need to demonstrate previous successful activity to achieve further funding.

Often there was interplay between internal and external drivers for analysis. For example, in Cornwall, funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and other locally-focused initiatives provided both the impetus and resources for local worklessness policy analysis, and this, combined with the drive by Cornwall Works (see Appendix B) and others to provide some co-ordination of activity and ensure service delivery organisations understood the benefits of

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analysis and were equipped to undertake it, created an environment where analysis was both expected and valued. In Lewisham and Greater Manchester, while regional and sub-regional organisations promoted analysis, a lack of external funding presented an important barrier.

2.2.4 What methods are used for local worklessness policy analysis?

Strategic perspectives

Interviewees with a commissioning/strategic remit recognised the need for a portfolio of methodologies. They placed more emphasis on CBA and SROI than did those with an operational perspective. In Greater Manchester there had been investment in developing CBA methodologies and in central support to roll them out across the sub-region. There was also interest in complementing the fiscally-based CBA tool with social evaluation to provide a fuller picture. The advocates of CBA and SROI emphasised that these tools were only part of the picture; they recognised the role of qualitative approaches in gaining greater understanding of barriers to employment in particular contexts.

There was a general consensus that tracking of clients of interventions was important (especially given an increasing focus on cost effectiveness of interventions), but challenging and expensive. Resource constraints often equated to a lack of tracking, at least beyond short-term outcomes. This could mean that there were gaps in the evidence base when seeking to argue the merits of delivery via a local worklessness project vis-à-vis large scale national delivery where more evidence was available. In the case of a local intervention where there was a requirement to record movement into jobs but not to track sustainability, resource constraint meant that the data for the latter was not collected:

'The bottom line showed that we were very competitive against some of the more mainstream provision. That is quite an important piece of evidence to argue ... [that] local provision isn't necessarily more expensive. Our one weakness in that argument is because of the project size and because of the funding attached, we weren't able to do sustainable tracking, so we know how many people went into work, what we don't know is how many of those people are still in work a year later.'

(Strategic perspective)

While interviewees recognised that external assessment of local worklessness projects was valuable, some had not used external assessors – primarily on the basis that they wanted to see the money spent on the project beneficiaries rather than on external assessment. Instead they had relied on self-assessment by contractor organisations, complemented by regular monitoring and visits to the projects concerned and some central analyses of value for money. Reflecting on the objectivity of self-assessment one interviewee noted:

'People were very honest I would say, I am thinking of one project where there were aspects which we were concerned about and they had highlighted them and put them in their evaluation. We had a good relationship with our deliverers and it did reflect our experience and our understanding of project weaknesses and strengths ... it wasn't that we got back [X] glowing reports on how well everyone had done, they were reflective and honest in their areas for development and what had worked and what hadn't.'

(Strategic perspective)

Investment in relationship building with contractors was important in enabling such honesty.

Expert perspectives

Experts corroborated the strategic perspectives. They highlighted the need for different methods – quantitative and qualitative, cost-based and non-cost-based – in different contexts, and the danger inherent in stating or implying that one approach is superior to others:

‘There’s a danger that people equate evidence with a particular methodology and ... there are lots of ways of generating and orchestrating evidence ... and I think sometimes leaping to the method is the wrong approach.’

(Expert perspective)

They saw a role for both internal and external assessment, but emphasised the role of external assessment in providing independent credibility; this was regarded as particularly important to support requests for future funding.

Operational perspectives

The majority of the organisations with an operational focus used a range of methods to analyse local worklessness policy. For some, this meant using a range of methods for analysis of a single project, while for others, different methods were used depending on their applicability to the project and the requirements of particular commissioners.

Client-focused methods, involving completion of assessment forms at various stages of project delivery, were most commonly used by organisations with an operational focus. This reflected a predominant concern with process improvement.

A substantial minority of organisations also used interviews with staff involved in the project and other partners to supplement other assessment methods:

‘The evaluation involves the 360 degree process incorporating stakeholders such as commissioners, referrers, clients, staff, etc. Questionnaires were sent out to all clients who had accessed our service in the previous 12 months. Focus groups were held across the county to ensure a range of different feedback. The findings are used for future improvements within our service, marketing, and developing our social return on investment.’

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

Some organisations used statistical monitoring for local worklessness policy analysis. This largely involved measurement of outputs and/or outcomes against various targets. Much of the negative perception of policy analysis expressed by service delivery organisations related to the exclusive use of this type of methodology. Statistical output-/outcome-focused analysis placed a burden on the organisation collecting the data while providing them with little information they could use to inform subsequent practice. This type of statistical data was regarded as giving a binary ‘success and failure’ picture of the work of the organisation, lacking the detail and context required to identify real successes and failures. This frustration reflects a lack of dialogue between service deliverers and commissioners requesting such information. One expert suggested that there was a need to encourage such a dialogue, with the posing of questions such as: ‘*why do you ask for statistics on employment?*’, ‘*why do you need to know?*’, etc, and so help drive up demand for relevant analysis.

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There was strong support for the use of external contractors, as a way of achieving a more impartial assessment of a local policy intervention and associated activities. However, there were concerns about the cost of this, leading some advocates of the use of external contractors to adopt in-house assessment only. There were also concerns about the extent to which such external contractors would be familiar with the specificities of the local area in which the organisation was working.

2.2.5 The impacts of 'good' local worklessness policy analysis

Strategic perspectives

Several interviewees indicated that good analysis was becoming increasingly important for them as commissioners in the context of shrinking budgets and also for service delivery organisations given the shift away from grant-based to outcome-based funding.

It was at the sub-regional scale and in the context of Community Budgets and City Deal that the (potential) impacts of good analysis were seen as having particular reach. Here there was a clear appetite for quantification and specifically in developing and using CBA and other analytical tools that were recognised as 'credible' and 'reliable' by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other central government departments, in order to measure the impact of policy through cost savings, and ultimately gaining return on investments and so reward.

Operational perspectives

From an operational perspective, the clearest impact of analysis focusing on what worked well and what did not was in the role it played in informing future service delivery.

There were various ways in which analysis had informed subsequent service delivery. For example, one organisation identified a problem in the way in which a course was delivered:

'All of our sessions include clients providing a feedback form identifying any personal benefits, enjoyment and value plus any personal feedback to improve the course. Our courses are being continually tweaked, resulting from this process. An example would be the feedback from the majority of one course as we went from practical problem solving and teamwork activities to a more lecture based learning format. The group requested a mixture of learning techniques as they enjoyed the group interaction and felt it helped them improve in the classroom.'

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

Improvements to services as a result of client feedback were seen by organisations to improve client ownership of the project and encourage participation. Similarly, ongoing analysis of multi-partner projects was seen as a way of bringing the various partners together, ensuring that all those involved were aware of what each individual project was doing, and creating a commonality of focus and purpose.

Some service deliverers used local worklessness policy analysis to support their case in applying for future funding. One organisation noted that their analysis had enabled them to identify gaps in provision, while another noted that they had learnt more about potential partners for future funding bids through engaging with them in a multi-organisation project which had clear, on-going analysis activity.

2.2.6 Overview

A range of analysis methods are used. There is a clear appetite for use of qualitative methods, amongst both individuals with strategic and operational perspectives, alongside quantitative ones. A distinction is apparent between those with a strategic remit who are interested in analysis of both impact and process, and those with an operational remit whose foremost concern is with analysis of process. Reflecting their greater interest in analysis of impact, those individuals with a strategic remit are the most likely to be interested in value for money, CBA and associated methods.

2.3 Barriers to local worklessness policy analysis

There are several potential barriers to local worklessness policy analysis, although the extent to which these are inherently local, as opposed to barriers to analysis per se, is questionable. Three main types of barriers were identified in the case studies:

- lack of resources including:
 - a lack of understanding/appreciation of the benefits of analysis and/or of capacity or capability to undertake analysis;
 - time; and
 - financial resources;
- issues associated with implementing analysis: these include a ‘disconnect’ (at least in some instances) between commissioners and contractors in information collection requirements and how that information was utilised in analysis;
- issues related to the wider policy context and funding climate.

Strategic perspectives

Lack of resources: One interviewee indicated that a minority of service providers were insufficiently focused on costs and benefits in analysis because they had not moved away from the mentality associated with grant funding, typified by:

“Here’s a grant, come back in two years’ time, or a year’s time and ask for some more and we’ll give you some more” – [you could do this] without really evaluating how effective what was being done and also if it all worked together and integrated together.’

(Strategic perspective)

The implication was that the move from grant-based funding to a payment by results model required a fuller appreciation of, and expertise in, local worklessness policy analysis. Where there was an appreciation of the benefits of analysis, interviewees from local government highlighted reduced capacity and resource as a key barrier. Local authority cost savings and staff cutbacks meant some internal expertise was lost, necessitating a need to buy in external capability, but budget reductions meant that purchasing such capability was difficult or impossible:

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'The problem is that resource is reducing as people have had local authority cuts ... budgets and staffing is squeezed ... we might be losing some of their expertise, so [there is] more of a need for someone to do that for you, as we are very aware we are reducing in our capacity left, right and centre in this field.'

(Strategic perspective)

Expert perspectives

Lack of resources: One expert highlighted that staffing and time constraints meant that what gets done is what needs to be done for funders (i.e. monitoring) and analysis becomes a luxury – particularly in small organisations without a dedicated analyst:

'... they stop at the monitoring, because that's the 'have to' and anything else is sort of 'nice if you've got the time', but they feel they haven't.'

(Expert perspective)

Issues in implementing analysis: Experts commented on:

- the short-term focus of many assessments; and
- the interconnected nature of many local partnership projects and their co-dependence.

Short-term funding and associated pressure to disseminate 'good news stories' as early as possible, tended to militate against a focus on long-term outcomes. The longer-term cost-effectiveness of some interventions was not measured and/or appreciated. A relatively expensive training intervention leading to placements of unemployed clients in skilled jobs in a shortage occupation might seem expensive when measured in the short-term, but might yield sustainable well-paid jobs in the longer-term. A short-term focus means that these longer-term outcomes are not considered, whereas a cheaper intervention yielding a lower 'cost per job' figure in the short-term might appear more advantageous, even though employment might not be sustained in the longer-term. This is a generic rather than a locally-specific issue.

The interconnected nature of many local partnership projects and their co-dependence also posed barriers to analysis. In this situation analysis might focus only on one element. A more 'joined-up' analysis might mean a more nuanced assessment, overall, of outcomes, since it would minimise potential double-counting of jobs in one or more elements of the employability pathway. Moreover, in a local partnership context the fragmentation of funding can pose issues for cost calculations since it can be difficult to get a clear understanding of 'who is paying for what'. Isolating the impact of interventions in such a context can also be difficult. The challenge of interconnectedness is not unique to local worklessness policy analysis, but may be more obvious locally than nationally.

Issues related to the wider policy and funding climate: A generic issue, but one that has particular relevance in a constrained funding climate, is that expectations of policy analysis should be proportionate to the funding available. Although not unique to local policy analysis, this challenge is particularly pertinent locally, given that the budgets for funding are smaller than they are at national level.

Operational perspectives

Lack of resources: Cost was cited as the biggest disincentive to effective analysis. A particular issue was the lack of dedicated funding specifically for analysis.

‘Cost and staff time are the main barriers – if external funders provided ring-fenced funding for this activity it would ensure they take place.’

(Operational perspective, Lewisham)

In the absence of specific ring-fenced funding, analysis could draw resources away from service-delivery activities, jeopardising the aims of the project as a whole.

When commissioners provided resources to cover the cost of analysis, this might mean the imposition of specified methods on the service provider organisation. Motivations of commissioners did not always match the requirements of the service delivery organisation. Some commissioners were very focused on the collection of statistics on outcomes and this was all they would fund an organisation to collect, while service delivery organisations were interested typically in conducting more in-depth analysis of their own practices.

Commissioner-led analysis also meant that when a service delivery organisation had multiple commissioners the organisation would be faced with different requirements for different projects, leading to a lack of continuity and organisational learning in local policy analysis, as well as a lack of comparability across projects which inhibited the identification of general good practice and the implementation of this good practice across projects. For smaller delivery organisations in particular, it also tended to thwart investment (in both monetary and financial terms) in their own organisation-specific systems to support analysis.

Issues in implementing analysis: These related primarily to a lack of understanding why analysis was taking place, why particular methods were being employed, and, in light of these issues, what the benefits to the service delivery organisation were of engaging in such a process. Service delivery organisations noted being asked to use methods that they considered to be inappropriate, not collecting data that they could use to improve their services and collecting data but not seeing any results or receiving any feedback from the commissioner.

Issues related to the wider policy context and funding climate: There were concerns that the identification of ‘not so good’ practice and negative findings more generally, might adversely affect an organisation’s future funding:

‘Closed attitudes; worry and anxiety about how negative evaluation may be perceived for future funding; lack of objectivity and subjectivity ... who knows who and a lack of openness of process; evaluation can read anything you wish it to read if you don’t have a commitment to really understand how things can be optimised for future delivery.’

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

Politics

This fear of the impact of negative assessment was seen as potentially hindering objective analysis is indicative of more general issues raised across the case studies about the politics of analysis. A recurring concern was whether and how ‘less good’ and ‘negative’ evidence is reported. One expert referred to this as:

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'The post-political politics of partnership – where it's kind of impolite at best and positively not done at worst, to actually ever say that it didn't work.'

(Expert perspective)

There was a feeling that it was not in the interests of either the service delivery organisation or the commissioner to identify areas where the project could have been more successful, particularly if the overall aims of the project had been met. Likewise, it might not be in the interests of a policy analyst to provide a negative assessment:

'When you are the commissioner of the evaluation, clearly the people doing the evaluation sometimes come up with the answers they think you want ... Well you're paying them so they're not going to want to say something too negative.'

(Stakeholder perspective)

The potential role that the local politics of local partnerships could play in thwarting full openness of internally conducted analysis led one interviewee to suggest that there might be merit in going beyond the local area to seek external assessors.

2.4 Supporting local worklessness policy analysis

Six main issues emerged in relation to supporting local policy analysis:

- resources;
- opportunities for learning;
- developing expertise;
- use of 'appropriate' methods;
- clarity of objectives;
- who could support analysis?

Strategic perspectives

Resources: Given spending cuts and loss of staff with expertise in analysis there was a lack of resources available. This meant that it was necessary to become 'smarter' about supporting and facilitating analysis.

Some commissioners tried to make small-scale funding available to support analysis. This was a strategy utilised in Cornwall.

There was some interest from all areas in utilising university students to assist with analysis², ideally as part of their course work. Utilisation of Community Champions to support local worklessness policy analysis was also identified as a way of addressing resource constraints:

² In all local areas (interest in) the use of university students was mentioned without specific prompting on this topic. Note that Project Oracle (outlined in Appendix E) is using students to build capacity in local policy analysis.

[Community Champions] was bubbling around and starting before the budget cuts, but it's certainly taken off since then, because you have to work with what you've got ... And if you've got some good will in your local community and you've got a bit of social capital there you really have to build on that and that's great, because you can't afford to pay staff to do all of that.'

(Strategic perspective)

For the most part, Community Champions are likely to be best placed to assist with analysis of process – including interviewing clients of interventions. They are unlikely to be a solution for supporting more technical aspects of analysis of impact.

Opportunities for learning – the value of association with national policy analysis:

Some interviewees from Greater Manchester and Lewisham emphasised the value of being associated with national evaluations of local initiatives in terms of exposure to methods and tools that could be used in local policy analysis. Participation in Total Place, Co-design and Community Budget initiatives was valued in terms of support:

'It has given us more access to information and that has really helped but also there [is] more expertise in terms of evaluation and analysis at Government ... So having that access to someone to ask questions, having guidelines and someone at the end of the phone [has been valuable].'

(Strategic perspective)

Developing expertise: Related to participation in national evaluations of local initiatives, the development of expertise in CBA and opportunities for sharing and cascading such expertise at sub-regional level to support local evaluation was highlighted in Greater Manchester. But while advice and guidance on specific techniques might be welcomed, there were mixed views about whether guidance on conducting local worklessness policy analysis would be helpful.

Who could provide support?: The most appropriate body or organisation to provide support for local analysis was very dependent on the type of support the organisations considered to be most useful in helping them to develop good practice. Universities and other specialists were mentioned by organisations seeking to gain expertise and as organisations that could conduct impartial analysis. Local authorities were also mentioned as sources of support, although infrequently. DWP/central government was mentioned as a valued source of support amongst those with a strategic focus who had been associated with national programmes. In these instances exposure to new ideas, expertise and specific technical support was valued highly.

Operational perspectives

Resources: More funding, and funding specifically for analysis, was identified as a key way to support local worklessness policy analysis.

'More external funding for external evaluation [is needed] to allow longer more thorough engagement with organisations, to allow for proper staff input to the process as well as statistical analysis.'

(Operational perspective, Lewisham)

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Resources were also needed to enable analysis of information that had been collected:

'We have a good database system in place ... it is manpower and time that are most needed'

(Operational perspective, Lewisham)

Use of 'appropriate' methods for local worklessness policy analysis: A key concern was that methods should be 'appropriate'. When they considered methods to be 'appropriate', service-delivery organisations were able to benefit more from analysis, resulting in greater buy-in. When methods were considered to be 'inappropriate', analysis tended to be regarded as a burden and a waste of time. Greater consultation by commissioners with service provider organisations about the methods used might enable them to use the same methods across several projects, building up expertise in local worklessness policy analysis in the organisation and allowing greater comparability across projects.

Involvement in design of policy analysis was also seen as a way of ensuring that the information provided was contextualised and included the kind of detail that might be missed by externally imposed analysis. This included more information about the particular issues faced by different groups of clients and on service delivery in particular local areas:

'In Cornwall we get fed up with having 'urban centric' solutions and working practices imposed upon us!'

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

Some organisations suggested that there could be greater support for using a range of analysis methods. This support could entail raising awareness of different types of methods and how information generated might be used. Some organisations emphasised the utility of guidance about using qualitative methods to provide evidence about the 'softer' outcomes of worklessness projects, rather than just 'bean counting'.

Other specific methodological advice cited as being of interest included information on gathering and recording data, guidance on constructing questionnaires and transferring this information into a database or other usable format, and advice on developing an in-house database.

More general advice on how to undertake local worklessness policy analysis, including information on monitoring, was sought by some respondents, who also emphasised the importance of standardisation across projects. There was a proposal for a checklist or pro-forma that could be used by organisations to ensure they were collecting the requisite data and engaging in general good practice principles:

'Maybe a template for an evaluation that could be adapted where necessary plus an analysis tool that is simple to use.'

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

Clarity of objectives: A common plea was for commissioners to be clear at the outset of a project about why they wanted data collection and analysis. This needed to be planned and communicated, so that organisations were able to collect information throughout the life of the project:

[Guidance on evidence] should be within the project commissioning process at the outset, rather than provided afterwards. This is particularly the case for large scale worklessness projects where endless tweaking of datasets adds cost.'

(Organisational perspective, Lewisham)

Who could provide support?: In general, and especially amongst smaller organisations, central government was hardly mentioned as a source of support. This may reflect an expectation that central government would endorse a 'one size fits all' approach that respondents might not deem 'appropriate' for local circumstances, including local resource constraints.

A small majority of service providers surveyed were unable to identify anyone who might provide them with support. This suggests that some had not considered this question before and had not sought support. Others might have considered looking for support but had not known where to look, or might have searched for support but had been unsuccessful in finding it. Overall, this suggests that there is an unmet need for signposting to possible sources of support.

3 Sharing 'good practice'

Sharing information from local worklessness policy analysis was common, but becoming less so. Organisations typically preferred to receive, rather than proffer information; they were becoming more guarded about the types of information they were willing to share.

Motivations for sharing 'good practice' included:

- altruism;
- to enhance awareness of what is possible in terms of local worklessness policy analysis, and consequently drive up demand, interest and expertise;
- promoting the organisation's own activities, and through doing so make connections with other stakeholders.

Motivations for seeking good practice from other organisations included:

- avoiding doing something which was found not to work elsewhere;
- preventing excessive competition between organisations through making appropriate funding bids and avoiding duplication of services;
- identifying potential partners by reviewing material from local worklessness policy analysis.

Key barriers to sharing good practice were:

- resource issues, including a lack of money, staff and time;
- increased reluctance to share information due to the competitive funding climate.

A key barrier to learning was the quality of local worklessness policy analysis, including a lack of contextual evidence about the intervention itself or the evaluation method. Standardisation in analysis and dissemination may be helpful to address this issue.

3.1 Approaches to sharing and dissemination

There are a range of different approaches to sharing and disseminating local worklessness policy analysis. These are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Dissemination methods

Approach	Description
Face-to-face meetings	On a one-to-one or one-to-several basis these allow dissemination of findings on an informal basis; such meetings may allow participants to be relatively candid in reporting findings and in asking questions of specific relevance to their own circumstances/plans
Workshops	Bringing individuals together locally or nationally to learn about specific methodologies, projects and findings from local worklessness policy analysis
Inquiry/study visits	Allow host areas/projects to report on experiences and practices to groups of visitors with similar/specific interests, and for both informal and formal discussion; such visits represent peripatetic learning and may help hosts to reflect on their practice, with individuals interested to learn from them about their experiences and also to elucidate key learning points for transferring practice elsewhere
Action learning sets	Bringing together individuals in time-limited 'sets' with established ground rules ¹ to meet regularly with others to explore together current real world issues and challenges and to decide what action to take; typically they are concerned with providing a support and challenge function
Learning networks	Involve individuals with common concerns coming together on a formal and/or informal basis to share experiences; typically they might bring together individuals working on the same initiative in different areas and at formal meetings 'experts' may be invited to make presentations on specific issues of common interest, while on a more informal basis members of learning networks might contact each other to seek advice, share practice, etc.
Online forums	Provide an opportunity for individuals to post news, details of events, reports on local policy analysis, etc, and/or to seek advice regarding specific issues
Online directories/repositories	These may provide information on specific projects, activities, etc; they may be useful in providing contact details for individuals seeking information on specific issues; a key challenge is keeping online directories up-to-date

¹ Such rules may include confidentiality.

3.2 Sharing and dissemination – current practice

3.2.1 Who currently disseminates good practice?

Strategic perspectives

There was a general willingness to promote sharing of practice, but activity was variable. The most obvious and formalised example of sharing and promotion of practice was amongst those with technical expertise in cost benefit analysis (CBA) in Greater Manchester. Here, individuals were active in awareness raising about CBA amongst a wide range of strategic stakeholders and also in providing technical training on the CBA tool itself. In the former instance, the emphasis was on the CBA outputs and how they might be used to assist in commissioning. In the latter instance, the focus was on guiding individuals who would be conducting CBA through the technical process, using examples and exercises on laptop computers, supplemented by further support.

More generally, a great deal of dissemination activity was taking place, but much of this activity was on an informal and ad hoc basis.

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Operational perspectives

A small minority of organisations with an operational focus surveyed or interviewed had not sought to share any good practice from their local worklessness policy analysis; a lack of opportunity was cited as the most common reason for not having done so. However, organisations were becoming increasingly careful about the types of information they were willing to share given the competitive funding environment. While there are some clear benefits to organisations from widely disseminating good practice through positive networking – showing that they have been successful and demonstrating expertise in particular areas – it is less clear what benefits an organisation would derive from sharing mistakes that had been made.

3.2.2 Why disseminate and seek out good practice?

Strategic perspectives

There were three key motivations for disseminating good practice:

- to enhance awareness of what is possible in local worklessness policy analysis, and so help to drive up demand for, and interest and expertise in, conducting analysis;
- to promote the activity of the organisation and its work;
- to facilitate connections with other interested stakeholders, particularly those the organisation might work with or share information with in the future. Local partnership working provided a further impetus to sharing information and practice in a context of co-operation.

Operational perspectives

In contrast to the drivers for analysing local worklessness policy, where both internal and external drivers interacted to promote activity, dissemination of good practice by service delivery organisations was driven mainly by internal motivations arising from the organisations themselves – for instance, to show potential partners and funders that they were a successful organisation. To a large extent, this appears to reflect the relative absence of external drivers for these types of activity, except when undertaken on a reactive basis when other organisations approached them to share practice.

The exceptions to this were the dissemination of good practice in multi-agency local partnership projects where sharing amongst all the local partners was integral to project plans. Whereas working together in local partnerships tended to promote information sharing and dissemination, working as a sub-contractor in a competitive environment was not conducive to sharing.

A majority of case study service delivery organisations with an operational focus reported that they looked for examples of good practice from within their own organisation and from other organisations if they were starting a new project:

'It is always worthwhile to look at good practice. It saves a significant amount of time if any pitfalls or we are aware of any potential issues prior to starting a new project. Also good practice can be developed upon so it is great to have a starting point.'

(Operational perspective, Greater Manchester)

A key reason for seeking to learn from the activities of other worklessness projects was to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. This was not focused exclusively on learning good practice or avoiding mistakes, it was also seen as a way to avoid excessive competition between organisations for finite resources and clients. This helped organisations to make appropriate funding bids and to find organisations with relevant experience which could become partners.

Avoiding the mistakes other organisations had made was mentioned somewhat more frequently than learning about what worked, although the ability to learn from others diminishes in a context in which there is a tendency to 'take' rather than 'give and take' in information sharing arenas.

3.2.3 Methods used for sharing and identifying practice examples

To some extent methods used for sharing and identifying practice examples are dependent on the context and on the specific objectives of those individuals seeking to share and/or to learn. This implies that there is a need for a suite of mechanisms to facilitate sharing and dissemination:

[You cannot rely] on just one mechanism for engagement and just because you've got a Community of Practice or an online dissemination tool, doesn't mean that everyone is going to use it.'

(Expert perspective)

Strategic perspectives

Various methods were used for identifying and sharing practice, including online forums and directories, repositories, communities of practice, good practice guides and guidance notes in the public domain. There was some dispute about the feasibility and desirability of central validation of material posted electronically on sites other than the organisation's own website in the context of budgetary constraints, but experts tended to feel that a lack of central validation limited the usefulness of the material posted. Case study respondents felt that there was scope to make greater use of online sites for 'worked examples' of the application of particular methodologies for local worklessness policy analysis.

Learning networks and action learning sets were viewed positively. The former were valuable in bringing together individuals facing similar issues and sharing experience of different solutions/approaches. The latter were beneficial in focusing more formally on specific topics. They tended to be valued as a forum for exchange in a way that is collaborative, open and equal. They provided an opportunity to learn from experience elsewhere, and to bring local learning back to the set.

There was also a good deal of informal activity amongst networks and between individuals.

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Operational perspectives on sharing good practice

Face-to-face dissemination was the preference of most organisations because it promoted discussion and interaction, allowing participants to ask specific questions to further their understanding. Organisations that were well networked experienced more opportunities and consequently were more likely to share their good practice examples. This was particularly apparent in Cornwall.

'There's an expression that Cornwall is a bit like a big village and actually it's quite true. Word does spread very quickly.'

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

Organising and attending face-to-face meetings was seen as taking some effort, indicating that those involved were interested in finding out more and were engaged with the subject. Organisations believed that information shared face-to-face was more likely to be retained and acted upon, whereas other methods of communication were more easily ignored. Face-to-face meetings also allowed those seeking information to assess the person providing the information, to provide clues about how true a picture they were presenting of their organisation's practice, as well as determining whether the individual might be someone they would like to work with in the future.

In descending order of preference, other methods mentioned as suitable for sharing 'good practice' were: formal workshops; learning networks; action learning sets; online forums; online directories; and job sharing/secondments. Some organisations used a variety of methods to ensure as great a reach as possible.

Operational perspectives on identifying good practice

The most common method used by service provider organisations was speculative searches of the internet. This was seen as a starting point that would enable individuals to make personal contact with other organisations from whom they hoped to learn.

Networking was again important in sharing good practice, with local networks mentioned more frequently than national ones. Direct approaches and meetings with partners, funders, representatives from the local authority and other local statutory organisations were also identified as potential sources of practice information that were dependent on face-to-face contact and the establishment of networks.

'You can't rule out the human element in all of this, you have to get a sense of people feeling that they're connected, not just through the internet ... A lot of learning and best practice isn't formalised in any way, it's picking up the 'phone and having a chat and having a coffee with someone round the corner, those kind of personal relationships, dynamic, that you rely on to make those things happen.'

(Expert perspective)

Reviews of documentary evidence in the form of reports or information from websites of statutory bodies working at the local, national or European level were used less frequently than face-to-face meetings to gain information, but were mentioned by a significant minority of organisations.

On-line sharing methods were favoured by very few respondents, partly because of the difficulty, in comparison with face-to-face methods, of having detailed conversations and asking questions. Organisations in Cornwall were the most likely to comment positively on

online and other remote methods, perhaps reflecting the impact the geography of Cornwall has on opportunities for different dissemination methods. Travel costs and time involved in attending face-to-face meetings played a role in determining the suitability of various dissemination methods, as in large urban areas, and particularly in London, the possibility of travel to face-to-face meetings is greater.

'Actual face-to-face contact works best, then relevant questions can be asked and dealt with at that time. However, due to travel costs, etc, (particularly for small voluntary organisations) an on-line forum would be better than not sharing good practice.'

(Operational perspective, Greater Manchester)

The majority of organisations would use a range of methods to identify good practice, depending on the type of information they were looking for and the nature of the project:

'My organisation has a business intelligence tool, we would also look at local authority websites, the DWP website and the websites of our competitors. We are also part of a disability consortium with other national providers and have open dialogue with them.'

(Operational perspective, Lewisham)

3.2.4 Overview

There is interest in sharing practice, although currently much activity is opportunistic. There is a mix of motivations for sharing. Some organisations are driven by a desire to promote the organisation, and others by a broader desire to disseminate good practice. In general, local partnership working tends to stimulate sharing of practice, whereas a more competitive environment does not.

3.3 Barriers to sharing and dissemination

3.3.1 Barriers to sharing own good practice

Strategic perspectives

There were two main barriers to sharing their own good practice:

- **confidentiality:** in some instances some of the data used and/or presented in local worklessness policy analysis was deemed confidential by one or more stakeholders and consequently findings were not to be released into the public domain;
- **organisational politics:** here the issue was about an unwillingness to disseminate practice that might not be perceived as 'good'.

Operational perspectives

Approximately a third of the case study organisations had experienced barriers to sharing good practice. The main barriers cited were:

- **challenges in the maintenance of networks:** the predominant use of face-to-face methods meant that relationships were often formed at the individual, rather than the organisation, level. Consequently, problems arose when staff members left the organisation. Furthermore, spending cuts had led to the downsizing or closure of some organisations;

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- **lack of resources:** dissemination was rarely funded as part of a project or programme of work, leaving service delivery organisations to bear the cost of such activities;
- **competition:** several service delivery organisations experienced an uneasy tension between co-operation and competition. They wanted to be helpful and share information and 'good practice' examples, but were fearful of the impact of doing so:

'This is a difficult situation as voluntary organisations are now in competition with each other to retain and provide local services and sharing good practice is not something we or others can afford to do if we are to be in a position to tender for services and maintain some 'unique selling points.'

(Operational perspective, Lewisham)

'These barriers are down to the cuts – the new barrier is agencies not sharing practice as they need to hold onto their evidence in order to secure the reducing pot of funding available.'

(Operational perspective, Cornwall)

3.3.2 Barriers to identifying and using good practice examples of others

Strategic perspectives

- **Gaps and weaknesses in information:** One set of issues raised related to a lack of contextual information about the intervention and/or limitations in methods. A second set of issues related to a lack of consistency in approaches to local worklessness policy analysis, making informed comparison between different interventions difficult or impossible:

'You end up not really not make a valid comparison between one approach and another because the way the evaluator has collected the data is completely different or one area hasn't done a proper evaluation or, for example, they will post: "this intervention achieved X number of job out-comes but [there is] no focus on additionality, so it may be half these people may have been on other programmes already and [it is] nothing to do with that intervention whether they got a job or not, but that hasn't been looked into at all as part of the evaluation and detracts from how valid the best practice example is ... As there is a lot of turnover in organisations, you ring up to find a bit more and someone has moved on or don't have that information anymore and it can make things difficult.'

(Stakeholder perspective)

- **Building up a body of evidence:** Case study interviewees noted that the examples of local worklessness policy analysis that were promoted and about which information was available, were related to current policies and fashions. Several interviewees bemoaned a tendency for analysis from previous administrations to be 'buried', even though methodologies and learning points remained valid.

Operational perspectives

- **Not knowing where to find information:** Although the majority of organisations were very or quite confident that they would be able to find the information they wanted, almost a third were not very or not at all confident.
- **Accessibility of information:** Could be an issue, either due to location or format. When information was incomplete, lacking in detail or in a non-standard format that made it difficult to interpret, organisations seeking to learn from it would spend excessive time trying to identify usable information, at a cost to the organisation.

3.4 Supporting sharing of good practice

Strategic perspectives

Online communities of interest, directories/repositories, good practice guides, learning networks and action learning sets provided support for sharing of practice. DWP analysts were also identified as providing support – especially for those with involvement in national initiatives.

Operational perspectives

The majority of organisations with an operational focus were unable to suggest anyone who could support them in disseminating good practice or learning from the practice of other organisations. In general, guidance on how to conduct local worklessness policy analysis was much more likely to be sought, and to be mentioned as lacking, than guidance on sharing good practice.

The preference for face-to-face activities, which require some degree of organisation and drive from those involved, suggests that both internal and external resources are necessary to effectively share good practice. First, the organisations themselves must see the benefits both of sharing their own practice and seeking good practice from other organisations, and have the resources and commitment to do this. Secondly, there is a clear need for some kind of facilitation, either from an individual or group of service providers who are willing to take responsibility for organising forums for information sharing, or from an external body whose remit includes such activity.

4 Reflections and recommendations

This review has focused on three case study areas which are in many ways at, or towards, the forefront of local worklessness policy analysis and have particular advantages in disseminating 'good practice'. In Greater Manchester resources have been invested centrally in developing expertise in analysis methods; Lewisham has particular geographical advantages and a history of engagement with national initiatives; and Cornwall, as a result of having additional European Social Fund (ESF) funding, has had more resources for supporting local worklessness policy analysis and sharing good practice. The case studies revealed that:

- there is a demand for local worklessness policy analysis. It was not the case that people were not interested or did not see the value of analysis;
- some people lack an understanding of different methodologies and types of policy analysis. This hinders their ability to move beyond their current situation and make incremental improvements to their practice. A framework to which analysts and others concerned with local worklessness policy analysis may refer for guidance may be helpful in enhancing understanding and practice;
- time and money are recurring issues for organisations wanting to develop and implement good practice. The existence of a framework would not necessarily enable organisations to overcome this. Without adequate resources, it would not be possible to implement the kind of local worklessness policy analysis a framework would identify as being good practice;
- although there is an appetite for local worklessness policy analysis, different individuals and organisations have different requirements and consequently envisage different types of support as helpful. Reconciling these different viewpoints and needs while still developing one or more frameworks which have real utility is a key challenge;
- various good practice resources currently exist, but uptake of these resources is patchy. Developing one or more frameworks to guide analysis is only the first step. If a framework is to have a real impact on improving policy analysis and sharing good practice across a range of settings, it must be accessible and its use consistently and widely promoted.

4.1 Reflections

There is an appetite for local worklessness policy analysis and such activity is being undertaken, although its nature and purpose is variable. Amongst those with an operational focus the primary interest is to inform service delivery. Commissioners and those with a strategic focus have an interest in analysing process but are concerned also with analysing impact. In the context of resource constraints and policy developments, there is a growing interest in understanding the relative costs of interventions. However, there is little indication that, to date, commissioners have had sufficiently robust evidence to make decisions about policy interventions on the grounds solely of whether such interventions save money.

There are challenges to improving local worklessness policy analysis, but there are also opportunities for enhancing current practice. Three key issues are:

- **Making clear who analysis is for:** One of the main findings from the case studies is that in many instances there is some disconnect in what different parties are seeking from local worklessness policy analysis. In several instances there was a lack of understanding on the part of service providers about why they were asked to collect certain information and how that information was then used. Better dialogue between commissioners and service providers surrounding information requests could produce more of a sense of joint endeavour, rather than a feeling of imposition. It is important to focus attention on what information collected is used for, and whether and how such information could be made usable by others to improve practice.
- **Resources:** Who pays for local worklessness policy analysis and the amount of resources available determines the nature of analysis undertaken. The case studies showed that when resources were tight, commissioners and service providers felt that there was an onus to use all, or as much as possible of available resources, on provision for clients. Building in explicit resources for analysis at the outset of any intervention would mean that some funding would be available for such activity. However, a particular challenge for local worklessness policy analysis is that a small proportion of a small amount of funding would not enable any sophisticated analyses. Hence, expectations regarding analysis need to be 'appropriate' given the level of funding available.
- **Expertise in local worklessness policy analysis:** Public spending cuts and reductions in staff in some organisations meant that some of the analytical expertise on which it had been possible to draw in former times had been lost. Many of the commissioners and individuals with a strategic perspective interviewed in the case studies felt that they had reasonable knowledge of key principles of analysis, albeit not always the technical expertise to implement particular methods. In the case of individuals with an operational focus, a general formal understanding of the distinction between outputs and outcomes was less evident and the difference between monitoring and broader policy analysis was not always understood. Where respondents were aware of, and concerned about, gaps in their knowledge, there may be scope to develop their skills, if the resources to do so can be found. For those who are unaware and/or unconcerned about their lack of knowledge it is difficult to implement change. The case studies reveal a need to enhance understanding of how different types of data collection and recording can feed into local worklessness policy analysis. More widely, there is some appetite for building up expertise in analysis at local level, in order that assessments can be made of which methods are most appropriate in what contexts.

Contextual issues and localism: Policy assessment, evaluation, and dissemination of good practice in policy analysis do not occur in a vacuum: the role of the wider funding and policy climate in inhibiting or promoting these activities cannot be ignored. Localism on the one hand, and a desire to drive up standards of policy analysis in a context of constrained financial resources on the other, pose tensions here.

The case studies revealed some contradictory concerns that on the one hand standardisation in local worklessness policy analysis might result in a loss of insights into local nuances, but on the other hand frustration that different commissioners imposed different information collection requirements so limiting opportunities to learn across interventions because of a lack of comparability in information collected and analysis undertaken. However, some experts felt that there was scope for developing a toolkit

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comprising a portfolio of methodologies, analysis and learning; this would not mean telling people what they have to do, but rather equipping them to deal with local policy analysis in the context of the localism agenda. Expert opinions varied in detail in terms of the onus that should be placed on direction regarding local worklessness policy analysis, although there was consensus that such activity needed to be undertaken. It was generally agreed that there had been a shift away from a directive approach. Some considered that this posed problems for attempts to promote local worklessness policy analysis:

'I have seen central government becoming less and less interested in telling people what to do. They have said "well we don't want to try and enforce this with local projects", so even when they have funded various things they have said "we shouldn't be telling people what to do" and I think that is problematic.'

(Expert perspective)

The majority opinion was that the appropriate approach might be to provide guidance, but not to impose.

Many of the challenges to local worklessness policy analysis and to sharing findings from such analysis are generic issues for policy analysis and information sharing more generally. However, some challenges may be more pertinent locally than nationally. These challenges are summarised in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 and the degree to which they are locally specific is noted. Together the information presented provides an overview of the particularity of the challenges to effective local worklessness policy analysis.

Table 4.1 Challenges to local worklessness policy analysis

Challenge	Nationally or locally specific	Comments
Service delivery organisations' personnel may lack expertise to conduct policy analysis and time to acquire such expertise	Perhaps more local than national	This may relate to scale and also to less resource being available at local level
Competing organisational priorities (e.g. a foremost concern with service delivery)	More local than national	This may affect motivations for local worklessness policy analysis. More of a local problem if it is assumed that local policy analysis comes from the 'bottom up'; whereas analyses of national policy can be imposed 'top down' and may have more resource
How to present bad news	National and local	Even 'independent' reports sometimes struggle to deal with this issue effectively
Fear of negative findings can compromise objective policy analysis.	Perhaps more local than national	Interventions tend to be target driven at both levels. This may inhibit exploration of wider issues if these targets have been met, on the basis that what is the point of trying to find issues which could have been done better if the overall objectives of the policy intervention have been met?

Continued

Table 4.1 Continued

Challenge	Nationally or locally specific	Comments
Lack of resources especially in context of fragmented delivery – small-scale project budgets can be seriously eaten into if analysis is undertaken	Definitely more local than national	A set proportion of an overall budget devoted to policy analysis does not allow much work to be undertaken when the budget is small
Policy analysis must inform processes and policies if it is to be considered useful – not just a statistical outcome-based measure. (This perspective is also linked to strategic or operational remit)	More local than national	Local policy analysis may be more likely to be about learning about process issues, whereas national policy analysis may be more likely to include impact, reflecting different concerns of commissioners
Grant-based funding mentality and need to move away from monitoring to broader analysis	Likely to be more of an issue locally than nationally	Local operations are more likely to be concerned with fulfilling contractual requirements
Funding cycles and pressure to disseminate good news stories early means a lack of focus on long-term outcomes	Local and national, but perhaps more of an issue locally	Short-termism is an inherent problem, but with local projects often likely to be of shorter duration, there is perhaps more of an imperative to demonstrate ‘success’
Interconnected nature of interventions, so who or what is responsible for outcomes?	Perhaps same locally and nationally	This comes more into view locally when concern may be with local interventions operating in a context where national interventions are likely to dominate
Small scale interventions – some (statistical) analytical techniques may not be appropriate	More local than national	Impact studies using statistical methods are more appropriate at national level with larger sample sizes
Identifying counterfactual	Same locally and nationally	The question of what would have happened in the absence of policy intervention is relevant at both levels
Specific measurable outcomes	Same locally and nationally	Identifying clear and attributable outcomes is a difficulty for national and local policy analysis

Table 4.2 Challenges to sharing information

Challenge	Nationally or locally specific	Comments
Competitive funding environment	Perhaps more of an issue locally than nationally	Ways and means of achieving good practice may be more closely guarded at the local level
Some organisations are happier to receive than to give	Same nationally and locally	Imbalance in sharing is difficult to overcome
Lack of appropriate forums for information exchange	Same nationally and locally	The issue of where and how to share information applies at both scales
Deficiencies in accessibility and usability of reports and information	Same nationally and locally	How to present information succinctly and accessibly is an issue at both scales

4.2 The role of a local worklessness policy analysis framework

The discussion above sets out the context for one or more frameworks for local worklessness policy analysis. 'Framework' is the term used here to denote guidance on the relative robustness of different kinds of evidence and on how to interpret the efficacy of the evaluation evidence available.

The case studies suggest that there would be a qualified welcome for support from national government (and others) in improving policy analysis and in deriving and making better use of evidence. Most people were interested in ways in which they can improve their practice, albeit for some this is confined to analysis to inform process improvement. There is increased interest on various policy agendas about analysis of impact and there is some desire to improve practice in this area. However, whether a framework would be welcomed would depend on:

- the nature of that framework;
- whether organisations are mandated (either directly or indirectly) to use it; and
- whether it is more than simply a piece of good practice advice.

Imposing inappropriate methods that organisations do not see the point of causes resentment and reduces commitment to the principles of local worklessness policy analysis more generally.

There were some variations in views as to whether DWP (or other parts of national government) would be the most appropriate body to provide guidance and support. However, some interviewees with a strategic perspective were very keen that a framework might provide them with the opportunity to have their analysis 'kite marked' by DWP as being robust, feeling that this would add weight in negotiations with central government on the localism agenda more generally.

Some interviewees suggested that provision of support for data sharing was their foremost priority, since this presented a problem for them. Support is available for this through Jobcentre Plus local data sharing champions and others, but it seems that awareness of this is partial.

In terms of support on analysis and evaluation from national government, the types of support that would be welcomed varied according to the knowledge, interests, capacity and precise nature of individual and organisational remits. Types of support mentioned in the case studies included:

- **financial resources:** for evaluation activities generally, and to implement tracking systems for ongoing monitoring;
- **advice on collection and recording of data:** how to enhance the quality and potential value of evidence, given funding limitations and existing expertise;
- **advice on interpreting evidence:** what questions to ask when interpreting evidence that is available; and
- **examples of 'good practice' in analysis and evaluation:** reflecting the real world resource constraints and challenges facing different organisations/local areas.

The case study findings also revealed a number of underlying principles for any framework:

- **appropriateness and adaptability:** a framework should be appropriate and adaptable to the intervention/organisation/area in question;
- **advisory:** a framework should be advisory, rather than mandatory; and
- **'good enough' is fine:** a framework should not set up a particular analytical technique/ methodology as 'the only way' or the 'perfect way', so that all other practice is seen as second rate or worthless.

However, some interviewees saw the greatest value of a framework being in encouraging standardisation, so as to facilitate interpretation of 'what works'. For example, one interviewee saw the value of a framework as resting on enhancing comparability:

'If people started with the same questions being asked as part of their evaluation, then it would be helpful ... Just being very clear what the costs were and what the benefits were and therefore cost per outcome, things like that ... If everybody measured the same outcomes then you can compare it.'

(Stakeholder interview)

However, such standardisation would contradict a framework that was 'advisory' and 'adaptable', so illustrating the inherent tensions in meeting different needs and desires.

4.3 The nature and impact of a framework

4.3.1 What a framework might constitute

There are various possible options here. These include:

- 1 a tool that brings together what is already known about what works (from sub-national, national and international evidence); and
- 2 a tool that helps those undertaking local worklessness policy analysis to move up the Maryland Scale.

These options broadly align with the aims set out in the Civil Service Reform Plan (HM Government, 2012) to promote the value of a clear understanding of what works in policy implementation, building on robust evidence from policy in practice.

The case studies suggest that interest in option 1 is likely to be more widespread than in option 2. The challenge for option 1 would be to continually promote, and update the framework. Dissemination by organisations such as the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) at conferences, with input and support from analysts from relevant national government departments, would be important here.

The case studies and expert interviews revealed different needs, expectations and opinions of what a framework might constitute. This reflects different levels of analytical experience and expertise, and also different levels of resource (in terms of organisational capacity).

This suggests a need for either different types of frameworks for different users, or a facility for different users to engage in different ways, and at different levels, with the same framework. An option, then, is for any framework to be menu-based and contain a range of different information to suit different needs, such that users might skip certain aspects and concentrate on those elements that they considered most appropriate to their needs.

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The Project Oracle approach (see Appendix F) is of direct relevance here: it aims to have multiple benefits for a range of different audiences (i.e. service providers, beneficiaries, commissioners and those responsible for formulation of policy). Although a primary focus of Project Oracle is on promoting standards of evidence, associated evaluation guidance (Greater London Authority, 2011) sets out key evaluation concepts and provides links to key sources. Given that Project Oracle is running, it is recommended that review and assessment of the experience of Project Oracle to date would be useful to inform the setting up of any framework. Although Project Oracle does not focus on worklessness, the underlying principles are applicable to evaluation of local worklessness projects.

Reflecting the likely more limited appeal of option 2 than option 1, the experts interviewed were adamant that a focus on promoting experimental design and Randomised Control Trials, which are at the highest level of the Maryland Scale standards of evidence (see Appendix E) was not the way forward. Rather a suggested structure was as follows:

- start with the question: ‘*Why evaluate?*’ and then outline concepts of theory of change, logic models, outputs and outcomes; then
- move to consideration of:
 - key research/evaluation questions; and
 - what methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) might be appropriate for answering them – emphasising the role of quantitative and qualitative methods and of seeking feedback from providers and beneficiaries; then
- emphasise the need for sustained engagement/tracking to gather information on outcomes – both in the short- and the longer-term; and then
- introduce the need to record cost and spend data; in order to
- measure cost effectiveness; and
- introduce the concepts of:
 - cost benefit analysis (CBA); and
 - social return on investment (SROI); and then
- experimental design.

In this model the presentation of standards of evidence would come at the end of the process.

Arguably, many of the issues outlined above have been covered by existing ‘how to’ and ‘good practice’ guides. Nevertheless, they have a clear place within a framework providing guidance on standards of evidence and interpretation of results from interventions.

The case studies highlighted that some interviewees with a strategic focus valued and/or would welcome technical input from national government statisticians/analysts in supporting local worklessness policy analysis. Use of action learning sets involving participants from several local areas, focusing on specific analytical issues shared by all, and with inputs from statisticians/analysts from relevant departments (e.g. DWP and DCLG). Another possible way forward for consideration would be for national government to loan out analysts for short periods to local authorities’ economic development/regeneration/chief executive’s departments (or to other local partners) to make the case for the value of policy analysis and to provide some technical support, while at the same time gaining an appreciation of

the challenges that are faced at the local scale in conducting local policy analysis. In the absence of such support, the experts interviewed highlighted the role of access to worked examples to support policy analysis, perhaps supplemented by technical assistance (via phone or face-to-face) for the implementation of more sophisticated quantitative approaches.

There was also a desire amongst some of the individuals with strategic and operational perspectives for access to a repository of good practice examples. As in the case of Project Oracle, standards of evidence can play a role here in providing a guide to the robustness of the available evidence. In the context of localism, there was a demand for information on the context in which the intervention operated in order to help users to fully appreciate the environment within which outcomes were achieved.

4.3.2 Possible impacts

The possible impacts of a framework depend on the nature of that framework and its uptake.

The case studies suggest that if 'good enough' practice is made to seem to be inappropriate/unworthy because it does not meet the highest standards, uptake and interest is likely to be low. Likewise, if the framework is too prescriptive and/or does not acknowledge that different methodologies have a role to play in local worklessness policy analysis, uptake may be limited. In the context of limited resources for analysis, this is likely to be a difficult balance to achieve. There is a danger that if one type of information/analysis is prioritised in the framework, that will be the only type of information that is collected/the only type of analysis that is undertaken; the findings from the case studies show that many service delivery organisations only do what is required of them under the terms of their contracts. Hence, users need to see the value for themselves in adopting guidance from a framework. The role of commissioners in driving up demand for rigour in analysis and evaluation is likely to be important here.

More positively, a framework could help all of those involved in local worklessness policy analysis to consider what methods they use, the questions that they need to ask and the data that they need to collect to improve their practice and move up a scale of standards of evidence.

Appendix A

Details of selected policy initiatives

Table A.1 Labour Government initiatives (pre-May 2010)

City Strategy initiative	This initiative, which ran from 2007 to 2011, aimed to empower local partnerships in 15 pathfinder areas to come together and align funding streams and activities to tackle problems of high worklessness.
Multi Area Agreements (MAAs)	MAAs allowed groups of local authorities to agree collective targets for issues of local economic development and the possibility of devolving power and resources to groups of local authorities to enable and support economic growth at sub-regional level.
Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF)	The WNF brought together the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the DWP Deprived Areas Fund into a single local fund at local authority area level in selected areas with high levels of worklessness.
Future Jobs Fund (FJF)	The FJF was set up following the Houghton Review (Houghton <i>et al.</i> , 2009). It was designed to provide periods of temporary employment, mainly for young people who had been out of work for six months or longer and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.
Total Place initiative	The Total Place initiative was introduced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2009 as a pilot programme in 13 local areas to test new approaches to efficient use of resources and service improvement. Each local area concentrated on a particular theme, although mostly not related directly to worklessness. An intended outcome of the project was to explore ways in which business, voluntary and public sector bodies could work together to provide a wide range of public services under one roof.

Table A.2 Coalition Government initiatives (post-May 2010)

Work Programme (WP)	Operating from summer 2011 to replace previous provision for long-term unemployed and inactive people, the WP aims to produce a locally sensitive service but on a new model. It is being delivered in contract package areas across Great Britain, with two or three prime providers being responsible for the delivery in each area, working in partnership with sub-contractors in their supply chains in an attempt to capture the strengths of the third sector.
DWP Worklessness Co-design pilot	The DWP Worklessness Co-design pilot was launched in June 2010 in five local authorities in England, with the aim of Jobcentre Plus working with local authorities to develop solutions to tackle worklessness. In the co-design pilots the DWP committed to working in partnership with local organisations where this could develop the best outcomes for individuals. The co-design pilot sought to bring partnerships together, including groups who had previously not considered their efforts to be part of the worklessness agenda. Partners worked together to align products and services, and to design flexible provision.
Community Budgets	Community Budgets were introduced by DCLG in 2010. The underlying idea is that councils, boroughs or neighbourhoods team up with all public services in their area to combine resources into a single locally co-ordinated ‘pool and save’ pot with greater local control of improved services for local people. Initially focusing on ‘troubled families’, the Community Budget concept is of wider applicability. Four ‘whole place’ Community Budget pilot areas were announced at the end of 2011, together with some neighbourhood pilots.
City Deals	City Deals are designed to empower cities to deliver economic growth and success. Covering key growth drivers such as jobs, skills, economic development, business support and infrastructure, they provide enhanced powers and resources to cities. The Government has made clear that new powers and resources must be accompanied by strengthened governance and accountability (Marlow, 2012).

Appendix B

Methodology

The methodology for this study was shaped in accordance with the resources available. It was not possible within the limitations of resource constraints to undertake a comprehensive exploration and systematic review of the experience and practice of local partnerships in analysing and disseminating experience of local interventions to address worklessness. Hence, a local case study approach was deemed most appropriate to gain in-depth insights into experience and practice from selected local areas. This was supplemented with a wider review and consultation at national level. The latter was not a systematic review, but rather drew on knowledge of the researchers and key informants from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and from individuals with experience in conducting policy analysis, including external evaluations of local worklessness initiatives/programmes.

At the outset a selective review of currently available 'good practice' examples/guides/frameworks/dissemination mechanisms for local worklessness/employment policy analysis and dissemination was conducted. Examples of the types of material reviewed include a series of 'how to' guides for tackling worklessness³ and for evaluation purposes⁴ developed for local authorities and their partners by the Local Government Improvement and Development,⁵ data sharing guidance developed by the DWP (2010) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (Office for Public Management, 2011), reports on previous initiatives such as Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) (Johnstone *et al.*, 2010) and Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) (Russell, 2010), the evaluation of the City Strategy initiative (see Green and Adam, 2011) and the work of the City Strategy Learning Network, and communities of practice (such as the Worklessness Learning Forum⁶, etc). Syntheses of findings from evaluations of local worklessness projects (e.g. Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2010) and specific local assessments/evaluations of worklessness interventions/programmes were identified also. The main focus of the review was on the UK. The purpose of the review was to help inform the nature and type of local policy analysis and dissemination activities being undertaken, so as to provide some broader context for more focused case studies.⁷

Alongside the reviews there was a process of consultation with key experts with experience of local worklessness policy analysis and associated dissemination activities. Individuals from local authority research organisations were also consulted. Eight experts were consulted at this stage to seek examples and perspectives on 'good practice' in local worklessness policy analysis. A summary of the scope of the study was sent to each of the experts prior to the consultation and the key questions used as an aide memoire to guide the discussion are presented in Appendix C.

³ See <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=8589911> (accessed 13 July 2012).

⁴ See <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/27272328> (accessed 13 July 2012).

⁵ Previously the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) and the Local Government Association (LGA) as separate entities.

⁶ See <http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/comm/landing-home.do?id=2221758>

⁷ The review is not an output in its own right.

Three local case study areas for more focused examination were selected to reflect a range of local contexts (with regard to geographical spread and coverage of both urban and rural areas) and partnership arrangements. It was important that in all local case study areas there was sufficient experience of implementing local worklessness policy initiatives in order that key contacts could make an informed assessment of current and previous practice and provide suggested further contacts to provide additional insights into analysis and dissemination practices. This means that local areas with: (1) limited experience of implementing local worklessness initiatives; and/or (2) lacking a history of local partnership working; and/or (3) with a history of a relative lack of funding for local worklessness interventions, were excluded from the list of potential candidates. In turn, this means that insights from such areas are missing.

The three local areas selected were:

- **Greater Manchester:** Greater Manchester comprises ten local authorities⁸ in north-west England. There is a strong tradition of working across the local authorities in Greater Manchester and a rich shared evidence base. The Manchester Independent Economic Review (MIER) published in 2009,⁹ including specific research on skills and the labour market,¹⁰ was designed to inform and raise the level of debate regarding the economic future of the Manchester City Region and to underpin policy choices regarding future priorities for strategic investment. New Economy¹¹ works with public sector organisations, businesses and universities across Greater Manchester to develop economic intelligence, help create jobs and improve skills, save money and increase efficiencies and increase investment and enterprise. As such, it provides a resource and pool of specialist expertise, including on evaluation, cost benefit analysis (CBA)¹² and other policy analysis methods for partners across Greater Manchester. Greater Manchester was part of the City Strategy initiative and there was also an MAA. Greater Manchester local authorities were involved in Total Place and under the Community Budget banner it is working to use local evidence to decide how best to address issues such as unemployment, low skills and dependency through early intervention, and so produce greater efficiency and public spending savings which can be invested elsewhere in Greater Manchester. In 2011 Greater Manchester became a combined local authority, receiving more local powers from Whitehall to work on issues such as economic development, and further powers were set out in a City Deal agreed in 2012.
- **Lewisham:** a south-east London borough with an ethnically diverse population, a high proportion of lone parents and relatively high rankings on successive indices of multiple deprivation. It is part of a wider London labour market. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has a strong tradition of local partnership work on tackling worklessness, as illustrated by Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets relating to increasing sustained employment and skill levels and tackling worklessness, and through local projects

⁸ Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan.

⁹ See <http://www.manchester-review.org.uk/>

¹⁰ See <http://www.manchester-review.org.uk/projects/view/?id=722>

¹¹ See http://neweconomymanchester.com/stories/820-what_is_new_economy

¹² See http://neweconomymanchester.com/stories/1336-evaluation_and_costbenefit_analysis

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offering a range of outreach, training and other support, including through WNF projects.¹³ Resources have been devoted to mapping worklessness across the borough. Lewisham has been represented in a range of national initiatives with combatting worklessness as a key concern, including the New Deal for Communities initiative and Total Place.¹⁴ It was also one of the Co-design pilots. One distinctive feature of research under the latter initiatives was in-depth qualitative and ethnographic research designed to understand the way in which individuals interact with different service providers and their experiences,¹⁵ in order to suggest improvements to service provision.

- **Cornwall:** an area with a more dispersed population scattered across small towns and rural areas in the far south-west of England. Cornwall's economy is characterised by small employers, low wages, high levels of part-time employment and seasonal working – reflecting the importance of the tourist industry to the local economy. A distinctive feature of the strategy to reduce worklessness in Cornwall is the way in which the Cornwall Works hub,¹⁶ an overarching brand established by Jobcentre Plus and Cornwall Council with European Social Fund (ESF) Convergence support,¹⁷ brings together local projects and programmes designed to tackle worklessness and help people into training and employment. The rationale underlying Cornwall Works is that in order to make a sustained difference in tackling worklessness there needs to be better co-ordination of resources and a change in the way organisations work together to achieve outcomes for individuals and communities. Hence, Cornwall Works is not a delivery vehicle itself, but rather brings together projects, organisations and agencies, and provides additional resources to promote and enable collaborative working across organisations and projects. In this way it aims to adopt a preventative and interactive approach, moving from disconnected projects to more integrated programmes of activity, with a clear understanding of how partners can have an impact, and with mainstream provision as core and fully embedded.

In each of the three local case study areas the research was introduced to a key contact. The key contacts identified and provided links to documentation on key local worklessness policy interventions (these included projects focused on skills development, training, job matching, etc.). This enabled a documentary review to be undertaken. Through key contacts and a web-based survey further potential interviewees were identified. These included individuals concerned with design of policy, individuals concerned with operational implementation of local worklessness policies and those concerned with analysis and dissemination). In each local case study area a minimum of three, and a maximum of six, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals with a strategic role in formulating, commissioning and/or with

¹³ For example, see <http://www.lewishamstrategicpartnership.org.uk/docs/Tackling%20Worklessness%20in%20Lewisham%20no.%202%20on%20add%20list.pdf> and <http://www.lewishamstrategicpartnership.org.uk/docs/Tackling%20Worklessness%20follow%20up%20report%20to%20LSP%20Board.%202%20on%20add%20list.pdf>

¹⁴ One of four key themes was Worklessness and Unemployment.

¹⁵ See http://embed.policyreview.tv/media/documents/SG125_ROBIN_CLARKE.pdf

¹⁶ See <http://www.cornwallworks.org.uk/cornwall-works/about-cornwall-works.html>

¹⁷ As the only ESF Convergence area in England, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has a higher level of funding per head of population than most other parts of the country, and has greater scope to support economic development and higher level skills development as well as tackling disadvantage, unemployment and under-employment.

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responsibility for local worklessness policy analysis. The aide memoire used to guide these interviews is presented in Appendix C. In addition, an electronic survey (see Appendix C) elicited responses on practices from 44 individuals with an operational focus across the three local areas and a further six interviews were conducted with such individuals.

The final stage of the methodology involved collating, assessing and synthesising the findings from the documentary reviews and local case studies and associated implications.

Appendix C

Interview guides

Aide memoire guiding consultation with key experts

- 1 (How) Do local areas and partnerships analyse and evaluate local worklessness policy?
- 2 Do local areas draw on external research to inform policy development/implementation/analysis/evaluation?
- 3 What are the features of 'best practice' analysis currently undertaken?
- 4 What are the barriers to conducting ('good practice') analysis of local worklessness policy?
- 5 Would it be feasible to implement a framework for the local worklessness policy analysis?
- 6 How might a system for the dissemination of 'good practice'/lessons learned in analysing/evaluating local worklessness policy be best implemented?
- 7 What impact would such a system have on the policy development?

Questionnaire for individuals with strategic overview of local worklessness policy, local employment and welfare to work services – including those with a responsibility for commissioning services (e.g. local authorities, partnership co-ordinators, etc)

Individual details (these details are being collected for internal purposes – it is not the intention to name individuals in the report nor to attribute comments to named individuals, although case study areas will be identified)

Name

Email

Job title

Organisation

A Introduction

- 1 What is your role in regard to local worklessness policy, employment and welfare to work services¹⁸?
- 2 What sorts of locally determined welfare to work services are operating in your area?
 - (a) currently
 - (b) in the recent past

B Local evidence – analysis, assessment and evaluation

- 3 (How) do you use analysis/evidence from previous evaluations when conceiving an idea for a project?
 - (a) do you draw on evidence of need/gaps in current provision?
 - (b) evidence of success (or otherwise) of previous initiatives?
 - Can you give any examples?

¹⁸ By *welfare to work services* we mean services that are designed to combat worklessness – including skills development, work experience, job search, other initiatives.

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- 4 How important is policy analysis/evaluation for:
- (a) you (as a commissioner/manager) of local worklessness policy/welfare to work services?
 - (b) providers of local worklessness policy/welfare to work services?
- Why do you say this?
- 5 If local policy analysis/evaluation is used:
- (a) at what stages is it built into the decision making cycle – e.g. ex ante (at the outset)/formative (i.e. to inform the project/intervention as it is in progress)/ex post (i.e. afterwards)?
 - (b) is use of policy analysis/evaluation consistent across policies/initiatives commissioned? – why?/why not?
 - (c) who are the ‘clients’ for policy analysis/evaluation?
 - (d) what methods/techniques/processes are used at different stages of the decision making cycle?
 - (e) how appropriate and robust are they?
- 6 If local policy analysis/evaluation is not undertaken at different stages of the decision-making cycle (i.e. ex ante/formative/ex post) why is this?
- prompts:
- (a) not thought to add value
 - (b) barriers to local policy analysis/assessment/evaluation – probe for what are most common and why
 - (c) other
- If barriers identified in 6(b):
- 7 How could barriers to local policy analysis be best addressed by?
- (a) you (as a commissioner/manager) of local employment/welfare to work services?
 - (b) providers of local worklessness policy/welfare to work services
 - (c) in some other way
 - (d) they cannot be addressed (e.g. methodological problems/problems are too small to be worth funding an evaluation)
 - (e) national government

C Collating and disseminating ‘best practice’ in addressing worklessness at local level

8 How do:

- (a) you (as a commissioner/manager) of welfare to work services
- (b) providers of welfare to work services

seek to capture ‘best’ practice/‘less good’ practice currently – both locally and beyond the local area?

9 How does learning about ‘best’ practice/‘less good practice’ take place:

- (a) between commissioners/managers?
- (b) between commissioners/managers and providers?
- (c) between providers?

10 Are there ways in which dissemination of ‘best’ practice/‘less good’ practice could be better achieved?

prompts:

- (a) what are these?
- (b) how/why do you think they would work?

11 What is your experience of/views on the role of the following mechanisms for learning and disseminating ‘best’ practice/‘lessons learned’ in analysing/evaluating local worklessness policy and welfare to work programmes?

prompts:

- (a) learning networks/action learning sets?
- (b) hosted workshops
- (c) face-to-face meetings
- (d) a local/regional/national knowledge repository

prompts:

- reasons for preferences
- constraints on each

D A framework for analysis of local employment programmes and welfare to work services

- 12 Is there any support from national government that might help you to make better use of evidence and evaluation locally? (e.g. 'best' practice examples, peer review/support from analysts, support with counterfactuals, support with cost-benefit analysis/other methodologies, access to data, methodological support, etc).

By *Framework*, we mean guidance on the relative robustness of different kinds of evidence for measurement of the success of a project/intervention and guidance on how to interpret the efficacy (i.e. worth) of the evaluation evidence available.

- 13 Do you see a role for a framework for the analysis of practice of local worklessness programmes/welfare to work services and associated dissemination of practice?
- (a) would you welcome this?
 - (b) do you think providers would welcome this?
 - (c) what would you like such a framework to incorporate? (probe: guidance on implementing specific methodologies and interpretation of results; key questions/issues to consider in evaluation; ideal types of monitoring information (including outputs, outcomes, costs, etc; other information)
- 14 Do you think such a framework would have any impact on policy development?
– Why do you say this?

Questionnaire for individuals with operational responsibility for local worklessness policy, employment and welfare to work services

Individual details (these details are being collected for internal purposes – it is not the intention to name individuals in the report nor to attribute comments to named individuals, although case study areas will be identified)

Your name

Your email

Your role/job title

Organisation

How long have you worked at this organisation?

Local authority area in which you are based

A The organisation

- 1 What kind of services do you provide aimed at getting people into work? (e.g. engaging workless people (including particular sub-groups – e.g. lone parents), skills development, job clubs, job search skills, CV preparation, etc.)

B Analysis, assessment and evaluation

- 2 Have you ever been involved with analysis/assessment/evaluation of one of your worklessness projects to determine good practice?

If yes:

- (a) why was analysis/assessment/evaluation undertaken?
- (b) what did this analysis/assessment/evaluation involve?
- (c) who was it done by? (in-house/research contractors)
- (d) What do you think could help improve analysis/assessment/evaluation?

If no:

- (d) why do you think analysis/assessment/evaluation has not been undertaken?

- 3 What is the impact of policy analysis/assessment/evaluation? Can you give any specific examples?

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C Drawing on and sharing good practice

- 4 If you were starting a new project to tackle local worklessness/improve employability ...
- (a) Would you look for examples of 'best' practice from projects that have been carried out before? Why/why not?
 - (b) Would these be from within your own organisation or elsewhere?
 - (c) Can you give examples of when you have done this?
- 5 If you wanted to find information about similar types of project, would you know where to find this information? If yes, where?
- 6 Do you know of any initiatives specifically aimed at capturing and sharing practice from local projects?
- If yes, what are they?
- 7 Have you ever sought to share 'good practice' from your own projects with other organisations?
- If yes, how have you done this?
- If no, why not?
- 8 What do you think are the best methods for sharing 'good practice', and why? (e.g. face-to-face, workshops, action learning sets, online forums, online directories, learning networks, other).

D Barriers and support

- 9 Are there any barriers you have experienced to carrying out analysis/assessments/evaluations to identify good practice?
- What support could be offered to overcome them?
 - Who could provide this support?
- 10 Are there any barriers you have experienced to sharing practice?
- What support could be offered to overcome them?
 - Who could provide this support?
- 11 Do you think it would be useful for you to have guidance on (i) how to ensure that evidence collected on the success of a project/intervention is as robust as possible;
- (ii) how you can assess/evaluate 'good' (and 'less good') practice in your local worklessness projects?

If yes:

(a) What kinds of things would be particularly helpful?

If no:

(b) Why do you think it would not be useful?

E Examples of 'good practice'

- 12 Are there any projects run by your organisation alone or in partnership with other organisations that you think represent particularly good examples of how to analyse/assess/evaluate a local worklessness/employability project?
- 13 Are there analyses/evaluations that you know of that could have been improved to be more useful to you? What was missing/could have been improved?

Appendix D

Evaluation methodologies

Policy cycles

- **Rationale** – is concerned with establishing whether there is a clearly identified need and that any proposed intervention is likely to be worth the cost.
- **Objectives** – setting out the desired outcomes and aims of the intervention in order to identify the full range of options that may be available to deliver them.
- **Appraisal** – relates to the identification of the most appropriate solution from a range of options prior to implementation.
- **Monitoring** – involves systematic collection and recording of activity and performance against planned targets and evidencing spend and outputs delivered at the implementation stage.
- **Evaluation** – is concerned with assessment of policy effectiveness and efficiency during and after implementation. It seeks to measure outcomes and impacts in order to assess whether anticipated benefits have been realised.
- **Feedback** – involves the presentation of lessons, conclusions and recommendations to decision makers and key stakeholders, in order that they can help inform assessment of current and future activity/proposed interventions.

Although the acronym ROAMEF and the presentation of the phases above in a stepwise fashion imply a sequential relationship, in practice there are interdependencies and feedback loops between the various elements.

Theory of change and logic models

These describe the relationship between interventions':

- **inputs** – the resources (monetary and other) used to deliver the intervention/policy;
- **activities** – what is delivered to the recipient of the intervention;
- **outputs** – the number of completed deliverables associated with the intervention (e.g. the number of training courses delivered, the number of referrals to other providers, etc); and
- **outcomes** (short- and long-term) – of the policy (e.g. qualifications achieved, reductions in worklessness/recipients moving into employment, enhanced well-being, etc.).

They help clarify the rationale for a policy intervention and why an activity is being done, how it differs from what went before and what results are being sought. They assist in focusing attention on what outcomes are being sought and how they might be measured.

The client journey/employability pathway

The underlying notion here is that an individual's journey from worklessness into sustainable employment can be divided into a number of stages:

Table D.1 Stages in the client journey/employability pathway

Client journey	Employability pathway
Engagement	Outreach and engagement
Assessment	Information, diagnosis and signposting
Employability support	Pre-employment support
Placement into work or work experience	Transition into work
In-work support and retention	Retention
	Skill building and progression

Source: from Gizzard and Newman (2009); Hirst (2011).

Although an individual's progress from worklessness to sustainable employment may be less linear in practice than these stages imply, as read down the page, and although the important role of the employer in the process is downplayed, the categorisation of stages provides a basis to codify types of support/policy interventions (Hirst, 2011).

The wider effects of interventions

The wider effects of an intervention (either positive or negative) might not be at the forefront of policy assessment/evaluation, but they can be incorporated. Examples of wider effects which are negative include:

- **displacement** – positive outcomes of the policy intervention are offset by a negative outcome of the same intervention elsewhere;
- **substitution** – the effects of an intervention on a particular individual, group or area are realised at the expense of other individuals, groups or areas;
- **deadweight** – the intervention supports outcomes which would have occurred anyway.

Evaluation methods

The wider effects of an intervention (either positive or negative) might not be at the forefront of policy assessment/evaluation, but they can be incorporated. Examples of wider effects which are negative include:

- **reviewing the existing evidence** – at local level it is unlikely that a systematic review will be undertaken to inform a particular policy intervention, but evidence from meta-evaluations and individual case studies can help inform the design and operation of interventions;
- **action research** – interactive and iterative research which is used to influence the development of policy as it is implemented;

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- **case studies** – an in-depth investigation of an individual/individuals who are policy clients and/or of a step/event in a client journey in policy delivery. Case studies might use a range of methods (ethnographic, qualitative and/or quantitative) and provide rich information to contribute to a process evaluation;
- **qualitative interviews and/or focus groups** – may be used to elicit information about attitudes, opinions and experience of individuals involved in a policy in order to help understand their decisions and actions, and so help understand processes;
- **cost effectiveness** – relates outcomes to costs (i.e. the cost of placing an intervention client into employment);
- **cost benefit analysis (CBA)** – using quantifiable information on the costs (of inputs) and benefits (particularly in terms of improving individual clients' prospects (directly and indirectly) and savings to the public purse) of a policy intervention allows an assessment to be made of the value for money of that intervention. (A key issue here is the timescale over which calculations are made, as the balance of costs and benefits may be different at different points in time.);
- **social return on investment (SROI)** – an analytic tool for measuring and accounting (in monetary terms) for a broader concept of value, incorporating social, economic and other costs and benefits, especially by focusing on outcomes that matter for those individuals involved in the intervention.

Impact

Whatever methods are used in evaluation, pre-conditions for evaluation of impact include that the target population of clients is identifiable, that the intervention is identifiable and that the outcome is clear, specific and measurable. Another crucial question is what would have happened in the absence of the intervention – i.e. the counterfactual. Establishing the counterfactual is not easy, since by definition it cannot be observed.

The randomised control trial (RCT) has been identified as providing the strongest measure of policy impact. Here the allocation of individuals to receive the policy intervention is determined by a random mechanism (e.g. by lottery). This is more difficult to achieve in practice than in theory, for ethical¹⁹ and operational reasons.

¹⁹ There are important ethical issues surrounding the application and selection of 'treatment' and 'control' groups, since the result is that intervention (which may be deemed advantageous by the client) is applied to one individual but not to another whom in all other respects might be the same.

Appendix E

Quality/evidence standards

Table E.1 The Maryland Scale

Level	Description of standard
1	Observed correlation between an intervention and outcomes at a single point in time. A study that only measured the impact of the service using a questionnaire at the end of the intervention would fall into this level.
2	Temporal sequence between the intervention and the outcome clearly observed; or the presence of a comparison group that cannot be demonstrated to be comparable. A study that measured the outcomes of people who used a service before it was set up and after it finished would fit into this level.
3	A comparison between two or more comparable units of analysis, one with and one without the intervention. A matched-area design using two locations in the UK would fit into this category if the individuals in the research and the areas themselves were comparable.
4	Comparison between multiple units with and without the intervention, controlling for other factors or using comparison units that evidence only minor differences. A method such as propensity score matching, that used statistical techniques to ensure that the programme and comparison groups were similar would fall into this category.
5	Random assignment and analysis of comparable units to intervention and control groups. A well conducted randomised controlled trial (RCT) fits into this category.

Source: DCLG analysts (internal communication).

Table E.2 Project Oracle Evaluation Standards Framework

Level	Description of standard
1	The logic model or theory of change is clearly set out (there are clear criteria for a target population, outcomes, processes and referrals). The project shows the beginnings of a strategy for evaluating the intervention, and has clear documentation about what participants receive as a benefit of the intervention.
2	The theory for the project is well developed as are its materials and procedures. There is good evidence emerging from the project, with some understanding of the outcomes attributable to the project.
3	In addition to the above there are coaching arrangements and a statement of for 'whom and under what conditions' the project works. The evaluation reflects the use of a comparison group; ideally it is a randomised control trial, with at least one long-term follow-up of the outcomes.
4	In addition to the above, there are technical documents, detailed resources requirements and a statement of the evidence to support the causal mechanisms that underlie the change in outcomes. There are at least two rigorous evaluations, at least one of which is independent. They should reflect the assessment of equality and dosage of impact (i.e. whether the intervention affects all users equally, and if doing more of the intervention improves outcomes).
5	In addition to the above, there is technical information and support on how to deliver at scale. It is clear what multi-agency support is required, how quality can be assured, and what resources are needed to ensure sustainability. There are multiple independent evaluations and a robust cost benefit analysis.

Source: Project Oracle.

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These evaluation standards were initially designed for youth intervention projects in London, especially those under the auspices of the Greater London Authority. However, these standards of evidence are more widely applicable, and are intended as a platform for driving up consistency and quality in evaluations.

Appendix F

Project Oracle

Project Oracle works with those who run or fund projects aimed at improving children's and young people's lives to help them understand and evidence that their projects really work. It does this through raising practitioner and funder awareness of the complexity of their work, their unwritten assumptions and the wider implications of their work on the individuals and communities they serve. Ultimately it is about understanding and sharing what really works so that lives can be improved (Ilic and Puttick, 2012).

Project Oracle is for anyone who co-ordinates, invests in, or is interested in programmes and projects aimed at improving children and young people's lives.

It aims to offer a common language and a set of minimum standards for evidencing work. The underlying rationale is that there is a need for a shared understanding of what makes good evidence. This will then enable partners to work together to deliver it in the interest of getting better results for children and young people, sparing them from deprivation, harm and crime.

The aim of Project Oracle is to help all of the individuals listed above to get better at explaining what they do, what makes it work, and demonstrating that it really works to funders and peers (see Figure F.1).

Project Oracle has published practitioner guidance to support this aim (Greater London Authority, 2011). This guidance provides an introduction to various evaluation concepts and principles (with examples and web links to further resources), including:

- a theory of change;
- a logic model;
- outcomes-based evaluation;
- indicators;
- comparison groups; and
- randomised control trial (RCT).

It also has an Oracle self-assessment facility designed to provide an indication of where a project is at in terms of demonstrating evidence – according to the standards of evidence set out in Table 2.3.²⁰ Project Oracle then has a commitment to work with projects that have both an interest in, and commitment to, improving their evidence base - either for their own benefit or for the benefit of their funders.

²⁰ Hence, the self-assessment tool includes questions such as: (i) State the problem you are trying to solve? (ii) What is the long-term goal that you are working towards? (iii) What are the measurable outcomes set for your project that contribute to these goals? (iv) What are the outcomes that you can claim for your project? (v) What are the activities/interventions undertaken on your project to deliver these outcomes? (vi) How are the outcomes being measured?

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