

Considerations around Setting up a What Works Centre

Scope

- What distinct policy area is in scope for a potential What Works Centre? Centres may expand their remit in time but should work together to avoid duplication of effort.
- What existing interventions and services are being delivered to achieve the policy outcomes you have an interest in?
- What evidence is there about the effectiveness of those interventions and what is the strength (or quality) of the evidence?
- Is there a need to build evidence and trial new approaches?
- Is there a need to undertake a comprehensive review of the available evidence on different approaches? How will the Centre set priorities? Who are the users that the Centre can target for the greatest impact?
- How will the Centre interface with other evidence initiatives, government structures and professional networks?

Demand

- Is the existing evidence already well known, referenced and used by those delivering services?
- How can the Centre ensure a focus on the needs and preferences of professionals, practitioners and managers within the sector?
- How can the Centre engage at different levels within the relevant sector?
- Are users incentivised to access evidence (for example, through payment by results mechanisms, or commitments to continual professional development)?
- How can the Centre motivate and upskill practitioners to build evidence over time?

Independence and Governance

- How will the Centre ensure that users can trust the independence of the evidence it shares?
- What transparent processes should be developed to make sure that evidence-based guidance published is peer-reviewed and independently vouched for?
- How will the governance of the Centre maximise its impact on decision-makers and citizens?

Methods

- How will you draw together varied disciplines to provide evidence for all users you want to reach (for example, the effectiveness of management models as well as interventions)?
- How will you make sure that the Centre gives primacy to high-quality impact evaluations but also utilises qualitative research where needed?
- Is there already a thriving academic or practitioner community producing high-quality impact evaluation? If not, how will you nurture it?
- How will you access the data you need to test the effectiveness of interventions and create new research?

Build or Buy?

- Are there sufficient providers in the market to deliver a centre (either on their own or through a consortium)?
- They would need:
 - A breadth of research skills (synthesising and doing research and impact evaluations of interventions and systems);
 - Experience in building communities of practice and professional knowledge-sharing networks;
 - Knowledge of the relevant sector;
 - A style of working that is collaborative, committed to interaction with users and not just dissemination;
 - A commitment to evidence-based change and experience of having enabled such change;
 - A commitment to being both relevant to the changing political context and independent, but interested in providing evidence in a responsive way to emerging challenges.
- Are there any existing What Works Centres which could expand to cover this policy area?
- Are there charismatic leaders who could lead the Centre with strong buy-in from relevant stakeholders? Should they be appointed before or after the creation of the Centre?
- Are there existing professional bodies that would have strong access to key users?
- Are there potential international partners?

Budget

Annual Budget	Indicative Capacity of a What Works Centre
£750,000 - £1.5 million	<p>Sufficient funding to do evidence synthesis. Depending on the quality of the available evidence and how well it clusters around types of intervention, you could also build a toolkit or series of toolkits.</p> <p>Limited capacity for dissemination work – you would need to think about where to target this both by sector and at what level (i.e., granular for local decision-makers or systemic and for national decision-makers). Not sufficient funding to invest in new studies and fill any evidence gaps until approximately year 3/4.</p>
£2 million	<p>As above, but a potential for more resources could mean you could cover good ground on some of the following (but still unlikely to have sufficient funding to fill evidence gaps):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Systematic reviews;• Moving evidence forward through better scrutiny of existing datasets and quasi-experimental approaches;• Systematic learning with a small selection of organisations – distilling this learning into useful findings for others – and improved engagement and dissemination work to encourage the adoption of good practice.
£4 million - £5 million	<p>As above, and would also enable better dissemination and budget to invest in research to fill evidence gaps actively. This would enable the Centre to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• test and evaluate existing programmes and practices which have not yet been robustly evaluated;• run or commission trials to fill evidence gaps and enhance our understanding.
£10 million	<p>This would provide sufficient funding to deliver comprehensive knowledge dissemination initiatives, sharing what works in the relevant sector and engaging decision-makers at multiple levels of seniority to shift spending accordingly.</p> <p>This is the ideal model. The additional funding can be used to fill evidence gaps through an extended analysis of evidence or further trials which are needed to understand how to effectively replicate and scale up those interventions which are effective in other places and settings.</p> <p>At this level, funding (perhaps more so than at other levels, but not exclusively) could also be utilised to match and incentivise contributions made by others to improve the evidence base.</p>