

What Works Network: Membership Requirements

Purpose of the What Works Network

The 'What Works Network', and each of its constituent centres, seek to provide the best evidence of "what works" to the people who make decisions about public services. These people include government ministers, civil servants, council leaders, service commissioners, citizens themselves and professionals from across the public sector.

The Evaluation Task Force, a joint Cabinet Office-HM Treasury unit, is the secretariat of the What Works Network. The Network is one part of a wider 'What Works Initiative', launched by the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury in 2013, to improve outcomes and productivity across the public sector through the better use of evidence.

The 'What Works Centres' provide independent, evidence-based and practical advice. They are different from standard research institutions. Each centre is committed to increasing both the supply of, and demand for, evidence in their policy area, and their output is tailored to the needs of decision-makers.

As a network, the What Works Centres benefit from shared learning and resources, collaboration on areas of common interest, and relationships with government departments and networks through the Evaluation Task Force.

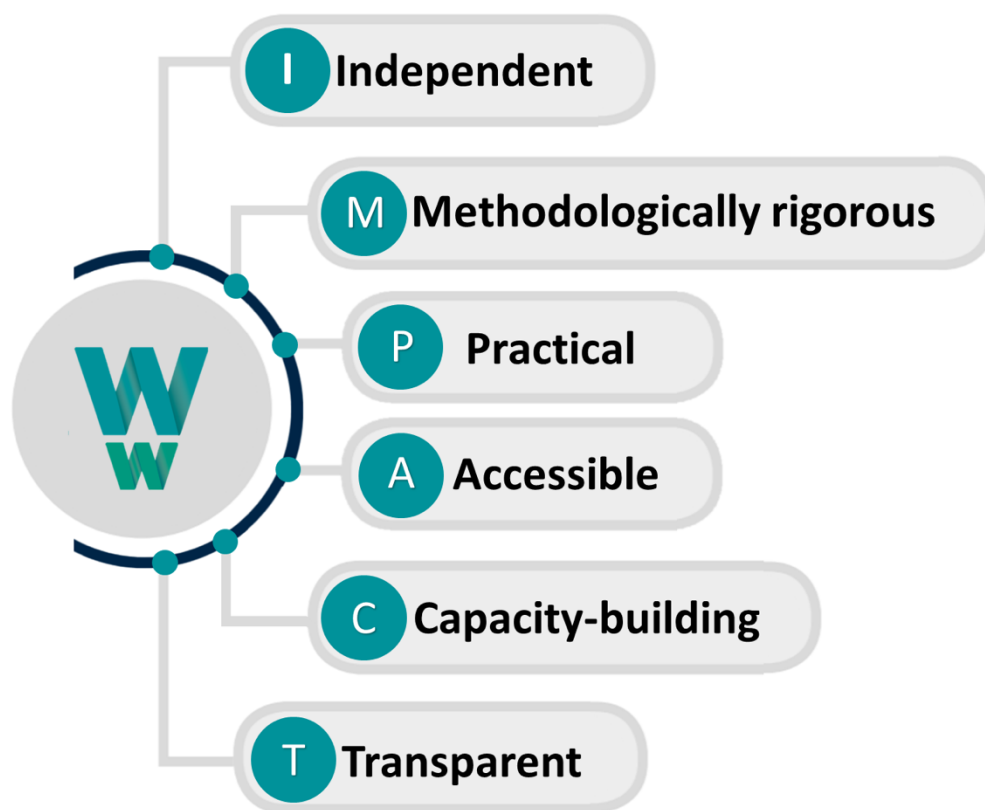
Together, the centres work to build the network's international reputation for authority, rigour and innovation.

Membership Criteria

Full membership of the What Works Network involves a commitment to its IMPACT principles, which are described below. In addition, the What Works Centres should:

- share learning across the network and seek opportunities to collaborate through:
 - tri-annual What Works council meetings
 - quarterly operational group meetings
 - other ad-hoc conversations
- engage with national and local exercises led by the Evaluation Task Force to provide a co-ordinated offer from the What Works Network
- decide on the strategic merits of prospective new members joining the network

Each of the What Works Centres is committed to six principles, designed to uphold the academic legitimacy of the centres, and improve the effectiveness of services and outcomes for citizens:



I Independent - Providing independent, unbiased advice to users, retaining editorial control over all research and products.

M Methodologically rigorous - Using a clear and consistent process for evidence generation and synthesis; engaging with the wider academic and policy community to assure the quality of evidence products (for instance, through peer reviews), and giving primacy to findings from high-quality impact evaluations through a robust system for ranking evidence.

P Practical - Playing a leading role in driving the use and generation of evidence in a specific, pre-defined policy area across the United Kingdom, committing to the principle that it is both possible and useful to compare the effectiveness of different types of intervention and practice, and taking practical steps towards evaluating and improving the centre's own impact.

A Accessible - Putting the centre's target user group at the heart of all activities. Sharing evidence with users, at no cost, in formats that are easy to understand and that enable them to make practical decisions based on "what works".

C Capacity building - Mobilising evidence and working to ensure that it is put into practice by decision-makers, building user groups' understanding of how and when to use and generate evidence, so that they can make better use of the centre's evidence products and add to the international evidence base.

T Transparent - Providing comprehensive, easy-to-understand information about the methods and limitations behind the centre's output, publishing both the research generated and the evidence around the impact of the centre's work.

How What Works Centres Operate

Each centre operates in its own way, but all centres

- generate evidence on what works in a defined policy area.
- translate evidence for specific user groups in a user-friendly format.
- encourage the adoption and intelligent use of evidence, as well as contributions to the evidence base in their policy area.

Generate

Members produce high-quality and relevant evidence on what works and what doesn't in their policy area.

- produce high-quality, accessible evidence syntheses (drawing on systematic reviews and meta-analyses) which meet the needs of decision-makers and service-users
- make direct comparisons between different practices in their policy area by producing toolkits that summarise the evidence base according to:
 - the effectiveness of different interventions and approaches - using consistent evidence standards
 - strength of the evidence - using a common currency for rating quality
 - cost-effectiveness - using cost information and cost-benefit analysis where possible
- interrogate the evidence to draw out accessible and practical information about the applicability and implementation of each intervention
- identify research gaps and work with partners to fill them using rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental techniques

Translate

Members identify decision-makers in their policy area and commit to translating technical research into a format that they can understand and use. They strive to understand their users' needs and put them at the heart of everything they do.

- publicise and share evidence generated with users, providing guidance on how to interpret and use the information and adapting style where needed
- maintain independence and methodological rigour when communicating the evidence, making sure that advice to users does not reach beyond what the evidence suggests and primacy is given to findings from high-quality impact evaluations
- commit to a high level of transparency around all evidence and recommendations to decision-makers
- use plain English explanations of the limitations of any advice to ensure that users do not misuse the evidence published by the centre

Adopt

Members commit to improving the use of, and demand for, high-quality evidence among decision-makers.

- build capacity within user groups to understand, use and build evidence through workshops, conferences, targeted communication and other innovative approaches
- work in collaboration with other What Works Centres, professional bodies, inspectorates and other groups and networks to reach user groups where possible
- engage with the broader academic and policy community to improve the relevance, credibility and use of the evidence and advice produced by the centre
- provide advice and encouragement to those commissioning and delivering innovative interventions and research projects so that their work is evaluated effectively and contributes to a growing evidence base
- put the needs and interests of stakeholders by designing and delivering public services at the heart of their work plan
- make practical steps towards evaluating their own impact

Steps to Join the What Works Network

Step 1: Express an Interest

Express an interest in becoming a member to the Evaluation Task Force, setting out how you think your initiative meets the What Works criteria and fills a significant gap in the network. If you're setting up a new initiative, you may want to ask the Evaluation Task Force for advice on your proposed work programme.

Step 2: Initial feedback

You will be given initial feedback on whether the initiative sufficiently meets the What Works Network membership criteria. The Evaluation Task Force will provide regular updates to the What Works Council and ministers, on membership requests and how they are being supported.

Some may join as 'affiliate members' at this stage before being admitted as 'full members', with provisional approval from the What Works National Advisor.

Step 3: Council decision

If an initiative, institution or 'affiliate member' fits the What Works membership criteria, they will be invited to present their case to the council and to seek advice on developing the initiative further. The council will have a closed discussion to decide whether to admit the new member. If any existing members have a conflict of interest, they will need to declare this and leave the discussion.

Step 4: Public announcement

Ministers, No 10 and other stakeholders will be updated on the council's decisions to admit new members.

An announcement of any new members will be made to the public by the council with help from the Evaluation Task Force.