



What Works *for*
Children's
Social Care

Head of Practice

Candidate Brief

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Head of Practice at What Works for Children's Social Care.

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) is an exciting 'social start-up' and a fantastic opportunity to make a difference to the lives of children and their families in England. Every year over 700,000 children and young people, and their families, have contact with the children's social care sector. Changes in how the sector supports these children and their families can have hugely significant effects that resonate throughout entire lifetimes.

The Government's reform programme is increasingly giving control over how services should be run – along with accountability for the results – to the practitioners and practice leaders who are closest to children, young people and their families. Local authorities up-and-down the country, and supported by a range of other organisations both statutory and third sector, are using that freedom to try different ways of designing and delivering children's services, and up to £200m is being provided through the Department for Education's Innovation Programme to support this work.

With so much innovation taking place – and so much potential for change – the sector needs an independent organisation to look across all of this work and systematically develop the evidence base on what works, for whom, under what circumstances, and how. This is the best encapsulation of WWCSC's mission – to collect the best evidence on what we already know, work with the sector to prioritise the many questions that remain unanswered, fund research, and determine how best to make evidence relevant and accessible to decision makers. What Works Centres have been a great success in other policy areas – including in education, policing and healthcare – and we expect great things from What Works for Children's Social Care, which will be a fully-financed and independent body by March 2020.

The Centre is currently being established by a development team, led by innovation charity Nesta. Using £5m of set-up funding from the Department for Education, the development team is responsible for recruiting the Centre's founding leaders, supporting them to establish its strategy and build the organisation, developing and testing different ways of working with the sector, and providing an injection of capacity early in the Centre's life so that it can make a rapid start in its work.

This is a fixed term post to cover maternity leave. Reporting to the Centre's Executive Director, the post holder – a qualified social worker - will be the voice of practice at the heart of the Centre's decision-making and delivery, providing challenge and support both to the WWC's leadership (to ensure that a focus on practice remains at the heart of WWC activity and decision-making, and that WWC activity remains relevant to the needs and priorities of the sector) and to the sector (to ensure that leaders and practitioners engage with the challenge of becoming more evidence-minded). The head of practice will help build strong relationships between the Centre and the children's social care sector and will support the design, management and delivery of the Centre's range of products and services aimed at boosting sector capability, motivation and opportunity to adopt evidence-based practice.

Thanks once again for your interest.

Michael Sanders, Executive Director, What Works for Children's Social Care

Our Head of Practice

What Works for Children's Social Care is looking to recruit maternity over for the Head of Practice role – a qualified social worker to advise the Executive Director and other senior executives on issues in children's social care and on how best to engage the sector, and to ensure that WWCS's decisions are attuned to the sector. The post holder will build and manage relationships with a wide range of stakeholders across the sector and assist with the design, management and delivery of the Centre's range of products and services aimed at boosting sector capability, motivation and opportunity to adopt evidence-based practice.

The Role:

Sector relations

1. Be the voice of practice within WWCS, advising the Executive Director and other senior executives on issues in children's social care and on how best to engage the sector, and ensuring that WWCS's decisions are attuned to the sector.
2. Provide challenge and support both to the WWCS's leadership (to ensure that a focus on practice remains at the heart of WWCS's activity and decision-making, and that WWCS's activity remains relevant to the needs and priorities of the sector) and to the sector (to ensure that leaders and practitioners engage with the challenge of becoming more evidence-minded)
3. Build and manage relationships with sector stakeholders – within local authorities, VCS organisations, commercial suppliers, academic and research bodies and training providers, as well as with pan-sector organisations (including DfE, Ofsted, LGA, ADCS, BASW, Principal Social Workers Network) – to help ensure effective engagement with the sector.
4. Ensure the Centre becomes a key stakeholder in the national reform agenda for the sector, engaging with policy processes and with national organisations and initiatives to ensure the Centre's point of view is communicated to national policy-makers and decision-makers.
5. Build and develop relationships with children's social care professionals, and oversee the work of the Centre in supporting and facilitating grassroots-based movements and networks of staff committed to evidence-based practice.
6. Build and manage partnerships with social work education and training organisations – including universities and bodies such as Frontline - to help build an evidence-informed and research-literate profession. Design, develop and deliver a training offer to qualifying and post-qualifying social workers to improve research literacy and promote 'what works' methodologies.
7. Promote the Centre and its work through organising and speaking at conferences and events, writing blogs and articles, and engaging in traditional- and social-media activities. Coordinate a WWCS annual conference that is well attended by the sector and promotes the Centre's work and partnerships.
8. Work closely with the WWCS's communications lead to ensure the development and execution of effective strategies and tactics for communication with the sector.
9. Work closely with the WWCS's head of research and the Research Partner Consortium to set priorities for research and ensure the development and delivery of effective approaches to the generation and sharing of evidence.

Process management and service delivery

10. Lead on the management and development of the Centre's Stakeholder Advisory Group and Young Advisors to ensure meaningful participation in the Centre's activities, progress and development.

11. Assist the Executive Director in the design, management and delivery of the Centre's range of products and services aimed at boosting sector capability, motivation and opportunity to adopt evidence-based practice.

Strategic planning

12. Working closely with the Executive Director and Centre's management team to contribute to wider organisational strategy development and the development of operational plans and budgets.
13. Regularly report to the Board of Directors on activity and strategy.
14. Working closely with the rest of the Centre's management team and external stakeholders to agree priorities for future programmes and to identify approaches to ensure that the Centre's work remains cutting edge.
15. Contributing to the development and improvement of organisational systems and policies.
16. Manage a budget to ensure that organisational priorities and strategy are realised and that public money is well spent.

Line Management

17. The post holder will recruit, manage and develop directly employed, contracted and seconded staff in support of the responsibilities outlined above.

The Attributes We Are Looking for

The Person:

1. Personal commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people, and their families.
2. A passion for the agenda around What Works Centres and the broader agenda around evidence-based policy and practice in public services.

Knowledge and Experience:

3. Qualified Social Worker. (E)
4. Experience of direct social-work practice with children and families and also of management/supervisory work in the CSC sector. (E)
5. Knowledge of local government's duties and responsibilities for children's services. (E)
6. Knowledge of policy and practice issues in the CSC sector. (E)
7. Understanding of effective strategies and techniques for the management of a diverse range of stakeholders (E).
8. Experience of working in a fast-paced environment. (E)
9. Experience of line management. (E)

Skills and Abilities:

10. Ability to develop a high-performing team from scratch, blending directly employed staff, secondees and contractors/consultants.
11. Ability to work effectively with a wide range of partner organisations where successful project delivery entails aligning agendas across multiple organisations and navigating other organisations' decision-making processes.
12. The ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
13. Skills in facilitation and organisation development to assist with the development of practitioner movements.

Attitude:

14. Natural collaborator, networker and convener who makes connections and brings others together.
15. Politically astute with sound judgment.
16. Leads by example and has the highest degree of personal integrity.

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

Remuneration: Circa £60k plus excellent benefits.

Time Commitment: Full time role (37.5 hours per week).

Location: Central London. Travel around England may be required occasionally.

Term: Maternity cover - From December 2019 for an expected 9 month period.

WWCSC is in the process of becoming its own organisation and the role will transfer across during the term.

Other:

- Reports to the Centre's Executive Director.
- This role is not a public appointment.

About Us

What Works for Children's Social Care seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the children's social care sector. We generate, collate and make accessible the best evidence for practitioners, policy makers and practice leaders to improve children's social care and the outcomes it generates for children and families.

Our research looks at the point of referral through to permanence, including adoption, care-leaver support and targeted early help. We focus on children's social care practice in England and draw on and share learning at the international level.

We were commissioned by the Department for Education to work alongside CASCADE at Cardiff University. Engagement and co-design are central to our approach and we are working in close consultation with leaders, practitioners, children and young people, families and researchers across the sector to:

- Identify gaps in the evidence, and create new evidence through trials and evaluations
- Collate, synthesise and review existing evidence
- Develop, test and publish tools and services that support the greater use of evidence and inform the design of the future Centre
- Champion the application of robust standards of evidence in children's social care research.

WWCSC collates, produces, and translates research about "What Works" in Children's Social Care through a variety of different methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, to conduct research that can be used by social workers, leaders in the sector and policymakers to support children and their families.

To do this, all of our research needs to adhere to our four principles:

- Research needs to focus on impact – how does a piece of practice work, how does it impact on social workers, and if we take one action rather than another, what happens as a result?
- We need to bear in mind the nuance of social care. The lives of children and families are complex and complicated, and there are many factors involved in successful social work. What works in one setting for one family might not work in a different circumstance. We need to design our research to take into account – and even celebrate – this complexity.
- Studies have to be useful – if we can't identify who we think should be able to make use of a piece of research, it's not for us. While there is certainly value in more exploratory research, this is not part of the Centre's mission and objectives.
- Everything we do needs to help empower the profession. Our research needs to be conducted with the profession, and not done to them – it needs to provide recommendations, not prescriptions, and it needs to support existing and innovative practice to grow the evidence base.

How to apply

To apply, please send your CV and a supporting statement outlining clearly how you would succeed in the role to recruitment@nesta.org.uk, citing "WWCSC Head of Practice" in the Subject of the email.

Deadline for applications: 12pm Monday 14th October