



What Works *for*
Children's
Social Care

Researcher –
Qualitative

Candidate Brief Jan 2021

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the Researcher role 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, 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 £200m has been 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 are working to follow in their footsteps.

Now, we are looking for a Researcher to join our team, and to help us deliver research projects in a wide variety of domains.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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

Introduction to the Centre

About Us

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) 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 and work with a range of stakeholders. 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.

The role

What Works for Children's Social Care is looking to recruit a Qualitative Researcher to work in our research team. This role will work particularly on the team's growing portfolio of primary research, from small-scale pilots to implementation and process evaluation of large randomised controlled trials in children's social care.

You will be part of the team that leads the centre's programme of work to understand how best to support social workers and young people in contact with the care system, from the point of contact and referral, all the way through to foster care and adoption.

Among other responsibilities, the Qualitative Researcher role will include:

- **Designing and conducting qualitative research.** Working with the senior qualitative researcher, research director and the leadership team of the centre, the Qualitative Researcher will design and conduct qualitative evaluation and research for interventions in children's social care. This will range from small-scale pilots, to understand evidence of promise, to large-scale implementation and process evaluations as part of randomised controlled trials, to understand how and why an intervention may be bringing about change.
- **Theorising impact.** The Qualitative Researcher will run workshops and develop logic models/theories of change of interventions with partners, to help conceptualise how an intervention's activities bring about change, and the contexts in which the intervention is situated.
- **Manualisation and Codification.** Working with social workers, families, young people and intervention developers to understand and describe interventions in plain English, and in such a way that they could be replicated or reproduced in alternative contexts. This might include supporting the production of training materials, either written or on video.
- **Capacity building.** The researchers will work with partner organisations, as well as internally to build capacity in program evaluation through collaborative working and through training.

The Person: Attributes We Are Looking For

Values:

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. The Qualitative Researcher will need a high level of expertise in designing research, conducting fieldwork and analysing qualitative data, particularly with children and young people.

4. Experience in conducting evaluation of pilot or early stage programmes, gathering evidence around the intervention promise and apply lessons to support an intervention to scale
5. Experience in designing mixed-method/implementation and process evaluations, working alongside programme teams and quantitative colleagues to design research that can shed light on how and why an intervention may be effective, or not.
6. Experience designing and conducting research and evaluation in children's social care, education or other relevant fields.
7. Experience with implementation science – running logic model or theory of change workshops, as well as developing diagrams that depict theorized programme impact.
8. Experience working in a research organization and working creatively to overcome fieldwork challenges.
9. Experience working in or around the children's social care system, or otherwise with young people, is desirable.
10. Experience handling and storing sensitive data in line with GDPR regulations, experience with research ethics is also desirable.

Skills and Abilities:

11. Significant experience recruiting for and conducting qualitative fieldwork, such as interviews or focus groups, on sensitive topics and/or with vulnerable groups
12. High level of competence in qualitative analysis software such as Nvivo, Dedoose or Atlas.ti.
13. Familiarity with questionnaire and survey design
14. Familiarity with randomized controlled trials, or other quasi-experimental methodologies
15. A background in qualitative methods, through anthropology, psychology, social science or any other relevant field preferred
16. Ability to oversee and manage multi-site projects, including planning for and monitoring project milestones as well as building relationships and working with key internal and external stakeholders
17. Ability to synthesize and communicate research findings to a range of audiences

Personal Style:

18. Ability to work at a fast pace and to tight deadlines where appropriate.
19. Highly credible with a wide range of audiences including national and local system leaders, frontline staff, children and young people and their families, in articulating the case for reform to service design and delivery.

20. Natural collaborator, networker and convener who makes connections and brings others together.
21. Politically astute with sound judgement.

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

Remuneration

£30,000 to £40,000 PA, dependent upon experience

Time Commitment

This is a full-time role.

Location

Central London. Travel around England is a requirement of the post.

Term

Fixed Term - 12 months, with the possibility of extension

Other

This role reports to the Centre's Senior Qualitative Researcher.

This role is not a public appointment.

How to apply

To apply, please send your CV and a supporting statement outlining clearly how you meet the above criteria to hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk, citing "Researcher - Qualitative" in the Subject of the email.

Deadline for applications: 12pm 1st March 2021.