



What Works *for*
**Children's
Social Care**

Research Assistant

Candidate Brief Jan 2021

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the Research Assistant 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 Research Assistant 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

This role will provide support to our ambitious research programme, which spans randomised controlled trials in workforce wellbeing, evaluations of whole system changes, machine learning, and much more. The Research Assistant will have a crucial role in ensuring the smooth implementation and running of trials and evaluations run by the Centre; including liaising with project partners (which includes local authorities and academics), managing data collection processes, compiling research materials, in addition to other tasks as required as part of the design, data collection and reporting of our project(s). The role also involves qualitative and quantitative tasks, such as organising and facilitating focus groups and/or interviews.

From time to time, the Research Assistant may also be required to review and summarise existing research, and support WWCS's Programmes team, which may involve compiling and/or assessing applications from organisations applying for funding for research/evaluation, such as local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, or organisations belonging to our Panel of Evaluators.

The Person & Attributes We Are Looking for in a Research Assistant

Essential

- A commitment to conducting high quality research for the public good
- A high level of organisational ability
- The ability to work as a part of a team
- A high degree of motivation and the ability to work autonomously where appropriate
- The ability to communicate and work with a range of stakeholders both within and external to the What Works Centre.
- A good degree in social sciences, social work, education, psychology, sociology or other related fields
- An understanding of quantitative and/or qualitative evaluation methodologies

Desirable

- An understanding or experience of children's social care
- Previous experience working in a research environment, including as a temporary or casual research assistant during university
- Experience of reviewing and interpreting research literature
- An understanding of research ethics and data protection

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

- Remuneration: c.£25K pa dependent on experience
- Time Commitment: This is a full-time role.

- Location: Central London. Following government guidelines for working during COVID-19
- Term: Fixed term for twelve months.
- Other - This role reports to a senior member of the Research team.

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 "Research Assistant" in the Subject of the email.

Deadline for applications: 12pm 1st March 2021