



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

Senior Researcher

Candidate Brief

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Senior Researcher for What Works for Children's Social Care.

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 their 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.

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 the What Works 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 for Children's Social Care is the largest funder of children's social care research in England. Our ambitious research agenda is seeing a growing number of high quality impact evaluations being carried out to help improve the lives of young people and their families.

Reporting to the Centre's Director of Research, the post holder will be a key member of the research team supporting the implementation of the strategy and managing members of the team. The role will lead on designing and delivering feasibility pilots, and the implementation and process evaluations which accompany our quantitative impact evaluations.

Thanks once again for your interest and we look forward to hearing from you.

Aoife O'Higgins
Director of Research, What Works for Children's Social Care

The Role

The What Works for Children's Social Care is looking to recruit a Senior Researcher to work in our newly established research team. This researcher will lead on designing and delivering feasibility pilots, and the implementation and process evaluations which accompany our quantitative impact evaluations. The Senior Researcher will also lead a small team of research associates and research assistants.

Among other responsibilities, the Senior Researcher role will include:

Design and lead pilot and implementation and process evaluation

- Developing research questions and designing mixed methods implementation and process evaluations to accompany quantitative impact evaluations, as well as mixed method pilot evaluations to inform future impact evaluation.
- Writing and/or quality assuring research protocols
- Overseeing development of data collection materials including information sheets, consent forms, topic guides, and surveys
- Leading and/or quality assuring participant recruitment and data collection using methodologies such as interviews, focus groups, observations and surveys
- Undertaking and quality assuring analysis and reporting of qualitative data as well as descriptive analysis of survey and administrative data for pilots and IPEs.
- Writing reports and accessible summaries of research findings, and presenting research findings to research and non-research audiences

Development and implementation of WWCSO qualitative standards

- Working with the Director of Research and leadership team to develop WWCSOs qualitative research methods and processes
- Provide support to our Programmes team to commission high quality pilot and implementation and process evaluations. This will include writing and assessing evaluation proposals, providing ongoing support to external researchers and quality assuring protocols and reports.
- Advising on qualitative components of our Practice in Need of Evidence programme - Research design, delivery, analysis & reporting for qualitative pilot evaluations and implementation and process evaluations

Coordinating evidence synthesis work strand

- Keep oversight of new publications and manage a pipeline of content for the Evidence Store.
- Managing quality assurance process for systematic reviews & meta-analyses and Evidence Store entries
- Coordinating plain English summaries to accompany Evidence Store entries

Line management & internal capacity building

- Line management of 2-3 research associates and/or research assistants

- Contributing to knowledge and understanding of qualitative research across the wider research team and other directorates within WWCS, through guidance, training and quality assurance.
- Setting direction for and undertaking quality assurance of qualitative and mixed methods pilot and IPEs.

Stakeholder relationships

- Building and maintaining relationships with key external stakeholders including policy makers, senior leaders and practitioners within children's social care, as well as academics and WWCS's stakeholder groups.
- Engaging with the sector to support design and undertaking of research projects and to inform interpretation and dissemination of findings
- Working closely with quantitative colleagues within the research team, as well as with colleagues in other directorates to facilitate the design, undertaking and dissemination of research. This includes WWCS's Programmes, Policy, Practice and Communications teams.

Project management

- Overseeing a number of complex evaluations, ensuring these are delivered on time and to a high standard
- Upholding research ethics and data protection standards within the research team, including ensuring projects meet the ethical standards set out in WWCS's research ethics framework and undergo review by the WWCS research ethics committee.

The Person

Your written application should give examples of experience of each of the criteria listed under Knowledge and Experience. These responses will be discussed at interview, along with your values, skills and abilities, and personal style.

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 Senior Researcher will need a high level of expertise in qualitative research design, analysis and interpretation, and be able to design, collect and analyse descriptive quantitative data collection through surveys and administrative data
4. Experience conducting pilots and/ or qualitative IPE, in settings relevant to children's social care.

5. Line management experience
6. Experience working in or around the children's social care system, or otherwise with young people, is desirable.
7. A working knowledge of impact evaluation and quantitative methods is desirable, to facilitate close working with quantitative colleagues undertaking impact evaluation, and designing pilots and IPEs which inform impact evaluation design and interpretation..

Personal Style:

8. Ability to work at a fast pace and to tight deadlines where appropriate.
9. 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.
10. Natural collaborator, networker and convener who makes connections and brings others together.
11. Politically astute with sound judgement.

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

- **Remuneration:** £36,975 - £48,200 pa dependent on experience, plus excellent benefits
- **Time Commitment:** This is a full time role (37.5 hours a week)
- **Location:** Central London. Occasional travel around England is a requirement of the post.
- **Term:** Permanent
- **Other:** This role reports to WWCS's Director of Research. This role is not a public appointment.

Introduction to the organisation

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 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
- 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 meet the above criteria to hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk, citing "WWCSC Senior Researcher" in the subject of the email.

Deadline for applications: 12pm Friday 4th February

Interviews will take place in the week commencing 14th February.