



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

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**Children's Social Care**

**Candidate brief: Senior**  
**Researcher**

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the Senior Researcher role at What Works for Children's Social Care.

What Works for Children's Social Care is a young charity, incorporated in April 2020 following a period of incubation inside Nesta, the UK's Innovation Charity. The organisation's mission is to dramatically increase the quality and quantity of research in children's social care to enable social workers, system leaders, and policymakers to make evidence informed decisions that impact on the lives of young people every day.

This represents an incredible opportunity to make a difference to the lives of children and their families. Every year, over 700,000 children and young people, along with their families, have contact with the children's social care sector - often at the most formative period in their lives. Changes in how we as a profession support these children and their families can have huge effects which last throughout their lives.

New ideas are emerging all the time throughout the sector and from voluntary organisations working closely with local authorities. New ideas alone are not enough to see an improvement in the lives of young people and their families - these ideas require rigorous evaluation, and support in scaling up, if their collective promise is to be realised. We are fortunate to be working with 21 organisations through our "Practice in Need of Evidence" programme, and a further 130 through our grant funding processes.

With so much innovation taking place, and so much potential for change, the sector needs an independent authority to look across all of this work and build the evidence on what works, for whom, where, and why. Our evidence store collates the best of currently available research, while our programmes and research teams work to close the evidence gaps we identify, and our practice and policy teams work to make sure that all of this is both informed by the voice of social work practice, and communicated to practitioners and policymakers for maximum effect.

Our sister What Works Centres have been a real success in other policy areas – including education, policing and healthcare - we have big shoes to fill, but substantial giants on whose shoulders to stand.

Reporting to the Centre's Director of Research, the post holder will have a key role in supporting and implementing the research activity for the Centre.

Thanks once again for your interest.

**Michael Sanders**

Chief Executive, What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

## The Role

What Works for Children's Social Care is looking to recruit a Senior Researcher to work in our research team. This senior post will play a cross cutting role across some of the centre's most exciting and important programmes of work. The post holder will manage a small team working on quasi-experimental evaluations and randomised controlled trials in children's social care.

Among other responsibilities, the Senior Researcher role will include:

- **Leading a suite of impact evaluations.** Overseeing and managing a suite of evaluations, including quasi-experimental impact evaluations and randomised controlled trials, working with local authorities and other partners. This could involve interventions designed to improve the wellbeing of social workers and related professions, or interventions to directly improve outcomes for young people and their families,
- Building our understanding of and ability to use quantitative data in children's social care, particularly by using administrative data held by central government and within the ONS's secure research service.
- **Supporting external evaluations**  
Providing quality assurance to work conducted by external independent evaluators commissioned by our programmes team to evaluate interventions that we fund.
- **Shaping the centre.** Working with colleagues and the senior management team of the centre to shape the processes and policies of the centre to ensure the success of the centre from years to come.
- **Line management** managing members of the research team
- **Expert Judgement** working with our policy team to advise colleagues and external partners on evaluation

## 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 analysing quantitative data for impact evaluation.
4. Experience in leading randomised controlled trials and/or quasi-experimental evaluations in children's social care.
5. Experience working in a research organisation and working creatively to overcome statistical challenges.
6. Training in econometrics or statistics for impact evaluation.
7. An ability to make analytical decisions independently and rapidly, and to consult with experts or more senior colleagues when needed
8. Experience working in or around the children's social care system, or otherwise with young people

### **Skills and Abilities:**

9. High level of competence in Stata or R.
10. Familiarity with econometric techniques used in evaluation, including power calculations and matching.

### **Personal Style:**

11. Ability to work at a fast pace and to tight deadlines where appropriate.
12. 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.
13. Natural collaborator, networker and convener who makes connections and brings others together.
14. Politically astute with sound judgement.

### **Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment**

- Remuneration: £40,000-£55,000 pa - depending on experience
- Time Commitment: This is a full-time role.

- Location: Central London. Following government guidelines for working during COVID-19
- Term: Permanent.
- Other - This role reports to the Director of Research

## How to apply

To apply, please send a supporting statement outlining clearly how you meet the above criteria to [hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk](mailto:hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk), citing “Senior Researcher” in the Subject of the email.

Deadline for applications: 12pm 5th July 2021

## Introduction to the Centre

### 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 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.