



What Works *for*
Children's
Social Care

What Works for Children's Social Care

Chair Of Trustees

Candidate Brief

December 2020

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Chair of Trustees of 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. Its board of trustees during its incubation period and beyond has been led by Sir Alan Wood, who has overseen the growth of the charity from spending £1.6million on research in children's social care in 2019-2020 to more than £17million in 2020-2021. The centre'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.

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 and young people and their families. Local authorities across the country are using that freedom to try different ways of designing and running children's services, and up to £200m has been provided through the DfE's Innovation Programme to support this work. Although the shape of the government's efforts in this domain has yet to be determined, the direction of travel - towards government supporting innovation, improvement and autonomy - is unlikely to change.

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 17 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. Both the Department for Education, and our existing board of trustees, expect great things from What Works for Children's Social Care.

We remain, however, a new initiative - a policy 'start-up' - and if it is going to fulfil its potential we need great leadership. We have been fortunate in our founding chair, Sir Alan Wood, and our founding board of trustees, who have guided us this far. With Sir Alan departing in March next year,

we are excited to recruit a new chair who can help us to continue our work.

We hope that the information in the attached pack helps you to make a decision about whether to apply for this vitally important role. Thanks once again for your interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Wood". The letters are cursive and connected.

Sir Alan Wood, Outgoing Chair of Trustees,
What Works for Children's Social Care

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Sanders". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Michael Sanders
CEO, What Works for
Children's Social Care

Introduction to the Centre

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.

The Context

The challenge of increasing evidence and its use in children's social care could hardly be more important.

The Department for Education has a reform programme which for several years has worked towards its vision of a profession moving away from paperwork and process compliance to embrace professional freedom and accountability. Our goal, of supporting the profession to make use of evidence both in practice, and in the development of practice systems, is well aligned to that reform programme, but at the same time must challenge the department, as well as others working on reforms, to ensure that innovation produces not just novelty but knowledge, and that that knowledge has a purpose. An evidence base does not matter if those things which are evidence based are not supported, and those things that fail to demonstrate impact are not discontinued. Thus, it is important that we are independent of government, but that we do not stand alone. We work closely with the DfE, local authorities, and representative bodies, voluntary and community sector organisations, and a profession which is keen to help shape and use the Centre's work.

We also benefit from being part of the network of What Works Centres, now more than ten in total with ever greater influence and profile, spanning [Education](#), [Higher Education](#), [Homelessness](#), [Early Intervention](#), [Crime Reduction](#), [Local Economic Growth](#), [Health and Social Care](#), [Wellbeing](#) and [Ageing](#). Led by the Government's National Adviser on What Works, Dr. David Halpern, and supported by a dedicated team in the Cabinet Office, the What Works Network brings together these centres and encourages collaboration between independent organisations with overlapping interests. What Works for Children's Social Care sits at the core of this, collaborating closely with several of our sister centres, and leading the Evidence Quarter, our office in central London which also serves as a home and community for other evidence centres.

We have made good progress in our mission to date, commissioning more than 30 randomised controlled trials, and 20 other research projects, working with more than 70% of all local authorities in England, and with research projects active in more than 800 schools nationally. Our social worker polling has been signed up to by 1000 social workers, and we have just launched an oversubscribed inaugural training programme on evidence, that is helping to create a more evidence minded profession.

Over the next few years, the centre aims to continue to work with a wider cohort of academics and researchers working to support vulnerable young people, while continuing to apply pressure to some established methodological orthodoxies. We also hope to confront some of the greatest challenges of the day, including through an ambitious programme of practical and research work responding to the challenge posed by the greater representation of people from groups which have experienced racism within the social care system.

If the Centre is successful in its mission then the simple question, 'What Works', will be generating answers which are used by practitioners to make better decisions, and by practice leaders to design better systems, all across England. The 700,000 children a year who are supported by social workers and their colleagues will be living better lives as a result.

Our New Chair

The organisation has achieved some notable successes already in its short life, but there is much left to be done. We have yet to confirm long term, sustainable funding, either in the form of an endowment or longer term grants or contracts from government or other sources. The role of the chair is critical to our success not just in securing funding, but ensuring that that funding is used effectively in service of our mission to transform the evidence base in children's social care. We also face notable challenges;

- Translating early successes, and the establishment of a large number of research projects, into actionable change
- Ensuring the development and stability of our energetic, talented, and diverse team
- Continuing to push the boundaries of what research is possible in children's social care
- Contributing to broader debates, particularly those around the effects of poverty on the lives of young people, and the debates prompted by the Black Lives Matter movement about the interaction between the state and families from backgrounds that have experienced racism.
- There is no clear template for a What Works project which, if followed, offers a good chance of success. Many What Works Centres are making good progress, but all would identify continuing challenges in their work, and there is not a blueprint for success that can be replicated for new Centres in new sectors.
- Securing and diversifying funding from both governmental and non government sources.

Like many, we think of that combination of great potential and extreme uncertainty about strategy as being the characteristics which distinguish start-ups from other types of initiative. This informs the kind of chair we are looking for.

Role Description

The Chair of the Board of Trustees will lead the board in agreeing and supporting the vision and strategy of the organisation. They will work closely with Dr Michael Sanders, the Chief Executive of What Works for Children's Social Care, and the organisation's other directors, to shape our strategic thinking and how this is implemented practically. They will hold the executive to account and ensure that robust challenge is provided. They will oversee the work of our grants and ethics committees, and, working closely with other trustees specialising in particular areas, ensure the quality of the governance and outputs of the organisation.

In fulfilling this role, the Chair will:

- Be the Centre's lead non-executive, chairing meetings of the board, guiding the development of its strategy, ensuring good governance, identifying and managing any conflicts of interest that might arise within it, and developing and overseeing an approach to the identification and management of risk.
- Oversee our board, who bring diverse perspectives to the centre's governance, and ensure that every voice on the board is heard and listened to.

- Oversee the processes by which new trustees are appointed to the board as and when existing trustees' terms expire.
- Should it become necessary, lead the process of recruiting a new Chief Executive Officer.
- Line manage the Chief Executive
- Be an ambassador for the Centre to the sector and to other key stakeholders, maintaining constructive relationships and establishing the Centre's credibility and influence
- Take forward the work of the Centre as an independent and financially sustainable organisation.

The Attributes We Are Looking for in a Chair

We are seeking an established leader who brings credibility in the sector and ensures that we can achieve our ambition. We are therefore looking for a founding Chair who brings:

1. Personal commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people.
2. Understanding of the context in which Children's Social Care is delivered
3. Ability to set and communicate a compelling vision for the Centre
4. Ability to lead a high performing board that sets the strategic direction for a start-up venture
5. Understanding of the financial, structural, and human dimensions of leading an organisation
6. Understanding of the agenda around What Works Centres and the broader agenda around evidence-based policy and practice in public services.
7. Ability to build relationships with senior stakeholders across a wide range of organisations, including government, and to secure sustainable funding relationships for an initiative like this one.

In addition we are looking for:

- Ability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty.
- Ability to lead a multi-disciplinary team.
- Ability to analyse financial information.
- Understanding of the principles and practice of good governance.
- Commitment to working with customers, clients, and service users in shaping organisations.

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

Remuneration

This post is not remunerated, but all reasonable expenses will be reimbursed.

Time Commitment

4 Board meetings per year and an overall time commitment of c. 1-2 days per month

Location

Central London

Term

An initial term until March 2024

How to apply

To apply for this post, please submit:

- a comprehensive CV
- a detailed supporting statement that:
 - o fully addresses the appointment criteria as set out in the person specification (maximum 3 sides of A4), and your motivation for the role
 - o includes details of two referees who we would be able to contact if required

You will also be asked to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form as part of your application. The information will be treated as confidential, and used for statistical purposes only. This information will not be treated as part of your application.

The closing date for applications is: 5pm 20th January 2021.

Applications should be sent to hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk with 'Chair of Trustees' as the subject of the email.