

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR
OF THE WHAT
WORKS CENTRE FOR
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL
CARE**

CANDIDATE BRIEF

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Director of the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care.

The What Works Centre is an incredible opportunity to make a difference to the lives of children and their families in England. 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 the sector supports 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, 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 is being provided through the Department for Education's Innovation Programme to support this work. New ideas and practices which offer enormous potential for the sector are emerging in local authorities and from voluntary and community sector organisations.

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 build the evidence on what works, for whom, where, and why. The Department for Education is funding the set-up of the What Works Centre to achieve just that - collecting the best evidence on what we already know, working with the sector to prioritise the many questions which remain unanswered, funding research, and working out how to make evidence more relevant for decision makers. What Works Centres have been a real success in other policy areas - including education, policing and healthcare - we expect great things from the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care.

It is a new initiative though - a 'social start-up' - and if it is going to fulfil its potential it will need great leadership. We are looking for an Executive Director to lead the Centre through its start-up phase to 2020, and possibly beyond. Working with the Founding Chair this person will develop the Centre's strategy, build its team, and be its lead ambassador to the sector. They will also lead creation of the tools and services through which the What Works Centre will help local authorities and their partners to make insights from evidence an integral part of their decision making.

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.

Isabelle Trowler
Chief Social Worker for Children and Families

Geoff Mulgan
CEO, Nesta

Introduction to the Centre

The What Works Centre for Children's Social Care is being created to foster evidence-informed practice in a sector which has, arguably, the greatest potential for positive social impact of any area of the public services.

The Centre faces two major challenges:

- *Creating a better evidence base* – by sponsoring new practice-focussed research in areas where existing research is absent, of inadequate quality, or lacking relevance to decision makers.
- *Ensuring that the Centre's work results in change, not just knowledge* – by investigating and addressing the barriers which currently keep practice leaders and practitioners from using insights from evidence to inform their decisions.

Meeting these challenges is not simple.

Making decisions about where to focus the Centre's own research budget will require it to build an understanding of where research evidence could have a real impact on practice. To achieve a greater impact, the Centre will also need to influence other researchers and research funders. This will require strategic clarity, an understanding of how evidence is created and used in practice, and the capability to build networks of influence in academia.

Making research insights both useful and accessible to decision makers will mean moving beyond the world of reports and portals. We anticipate working with practitioners to build innovative products and services which practitioners and practice leaders use and value. This will demand unusual capabilities in entrepreneurship and product development.

Over and above the mechanical tasks of ensuring that useful evidence exists and is accessible, the Centre will need to work with leaders at all levels within the sector to help them effect a change in culture. These leaders want to establish new norms of using the best available evidence in the 152 local authorities of England, not to mention in their partners in other public services, in the policy-making and regulatory bodies, and amongst voluntary, community and private sector organisations that work for and alongside them in delivering services. The Centre's role is to help them do that.

The Context

As tough as the Centre's challenges are, this is an opportune moment to be taking them on. The Department for Education has a clear, coherent, and consistent 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. The Centre's goal, of supporting the profession to make use of evidence both in practice, and in the development of practice systems,

is extremely well aligned to that reform programme¹. The Centre is not working alone; it will have the support of central Government, leading local authorities and representative bodies, voluntary and community sector organisations, and a sector which is keen to help shape and use the Centre's work.

The Centre will also benefit from being part of the network of What Works Centres - now ten in total - with ever greater influence and profile, including the What Works Centres for [Education](#), [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 will provide the Centre and its leaders with a group of peers who will be a valuable sounding board on strategy and organisational development, as well as a resource for collective influence².

The Centre is currently being established by a development team, led by innovation charity Nesta. Using £5m of set-up funding from the Department for Education, the development team is responsible for recruiting the Centre's founding leaders, supporting them to establish its strategy and build the organisation, developing and testing different ways of working with the sector, and providing an injection of capacity early in the Centre's life so that it can make a rapid start in its work.

In parallel with the work of the development team, the Department has commissioned a Research Partner for the Centre. The Research Partner team, led by Cardiff University, will develop a set of standards of evidence and then – through a programme of reviews, trials and other evaluations – strengthen the evidence base around effectiveness and cost-effectiveness within the sector. It too has around £5m of Government funding, giving the Centre and its research partner a combined budget of almost £10 million over 3 years.

The Centre's Executive Director will direct and be accountable for the work of both Incubator and its Research Partner, and will report to the Centre's Founding Board.

The Incubator and Research Partner contracts run until March 2020, after which there is no guarantee of ongoing funding from central Government for the Centre. A key role for the new Director, along with the Chair, will be to negotiate with both government and other potential funders over the next two years around the case for the Centre continuing its work beyond March 2020, and around the best financial and organisational models for doing so.

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 and their families who are supported by social workers and their colleagues each year will be living better lives as a result.

¹ Detail on the policy context can be found in the 2011 [Munro Review](#), and in DfE's 2016 strategy paper [Putting Children First](#)

² More information on the What Works Network and its constituent members can be found in the recent publication What Works – Five Years On, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677478/6.4154_What_works_report_Final.pdf

Our Executive Director

The Centre has the potential to play a key role in transforming social work in the UK and the lives of those who benefit from it. It could also set a template for reform of other key public services facing similar challenges.

However, the Centre does not exist yet, and the project to build it into a success is, like any start-up, difficult.

This difficulty stems in part from the fact that it is not clear what the Centre will need to do, and become, to have real and lasting impact. There is no clear template for a What Works project which, if followed, offers guaranteed success in influencing a profession and its leaders. Along with the other What Works Centres, we are experimenting and learning our way towards an effective strategy.

Like many, we think of that combination of great potential with great uncertainty about strategy as being the characteristics which distinguish start-ups from other types of initiatives. This informs how we are approaching the work of ‘incubating’ the Centre, and it informs what we are looking for in our Executive Director as well.

The Executive Director will be an employee of Nesta, the UK’s leading innovation charity. They will have the discretion of a CEO to set and deliver the What Works Centre’s strategy, but will benefit from being a part of the wider Nesta family with the support of its board, access to its staff and networks, a base for the What Works Centre team in its London campus, and convenient support services.

Role Description

The Executive Director will launch and position the new Centre as an organisation which can effectively challenge and support the sector to use insights from evidence in system and service design and delivery. organisation with its networks across government and industry, and its support services. They will:

- Recruit the Centre’s team and establish its culture through inspirational leadership
- Develop strategic plans which will deliver real-world impact for the Centre, whilst giving it opportunities to develop the capabilities and partnerships which it will need beyond the incubation phase
- Build a coalition of senior leaders throughout the sector who are committed to creating truly evidence-informed practice.
- Unlock opportunities for future funding and investment beyond 2020.
- Establish productive relationships with the Centre’s research partner and other key suppliers.
- Establish the Centre as a high profile and trusted organisation which can lead the national conversation on children’s services.

- Create strong partnerships which help the Centre to access funding, understand the needs of the sector, and influence practice. This will include building strategic partnerships with stakeholders including funders, policy makers and regulators, statutory and non-statutory service providers, advocacy groups, and potential delivery partners
- Ensure that the voices of children, young people and their families, in all their diversity, are heard throughout the Centre's decision making.
- Take responsibility for the quality and efficiency of the Centre's work, and in particular lead the development of tools and services which make it easier for the sector to create the evidence it needs and make use of insights from evidence.
- Manage the Centre's relationship with its current funder the Department for Education.

The Attributes We Are Looking for in a Director

We are seeking an ambitious and experienced leader who brings the energy, creativity, perseverance, and people skills which will be required to build the Centre into a powerful force for change.

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:

- Personal commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people, and their families.
- 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:

- Deep understanding of the context in which children's social care is delivered.
- Substantial track record of achievement, gained in a senior leadership role.
- Experience of developing and delivering a strategy for influencing the practice of both frontline staff and senior leaders.
- Experience of developing new initiatives using design-led approaches;
- Experience of building new organisations or teams from scratch and leading and developing them quickly to achieve high performance.
- Experience of working effectively with Boards in their role of providing scrutiny and challenge.
- Understanding of key concepts and debates in social science research, and in the application of research evidence to achieving public policy goals

Skills and Abilities:

- Outstanding and recognised leadership skills, with the ability to provide clear direction and build high-performing teams quickly and encourage and inspire staff.
- Ability to build relationships with senior stakeholders, including central government, and to secure sustainable funding relationships for an initiative like this one.
- Ability to build, maintaining and leveraging lasting partnerships across multiple organisations.
- A prominent, influential and inspirational communicator who builds confidence quickly and adapts style and approach to suit different audiences.
- High intellectual and analytical capacity; able to identify opportunities, within a very broad scope, for the Centre to have clear and early impact.
- Able to balance strategic and operational priorities.

Personal Style:

- 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.
- Natural collaborator, networker and convener who makes connections and brings others together.
- Politically astute with sound judgement.
- Entrepreneurial flair.
- Comfortable with ambiguity.
- Leads by example and has the highest degree of personal integrity.

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

Remuneration: Excellent

Time Commitment: This is a full-time role.

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

Term: A fixed initial term of September 2018 to March 31st 2020, under contract to Nesta, to lead the Centre's transition from early-stage start-up to independent and high-profile organisation.

Possibility of transitioning into permanent Chief Executive role once the organisation is independently constituted.

This role is not a public appointment.

How to apply

To apply for this post, please submit:

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

You will also be asked to complete an online 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: Monday 10th September 2018.

Applications should be uploaded via the GatenbySanderson website www.gatenbysanderson.com. The How to Apply section of the website provides clear instructions for uploading your application successfully. If, however, you have any queries in relation to the application process, or you experience difficulties uploading your application, please do not hesitate to telephone the GatenbySanderson team on 0113 205 6111.

If you have any queries about any aspect of the appointment process, need additional information or wish to have an informal and confidential discussion, please contact our advising consultants at GatenbySanderson, Katy Giddens (020 7426 3973) or Juliet Brown (0113 205 6089).