Using Evidence to Improve Policy and Practice:

The UK What Works Centres

14th July 2016
Aim: To examine the role of the WWCs

1. Origins, role and activities of the WWCs
2. The Theory:
   1. Evidence standards
   2. The role of evidence in the policy process
   3. Effective knowledge mobilisation
3. Lessons and Challenges for the WWCs
"The What Works Network will bring a real step-change to our evidence generating capabilities"

Danny Alexander, Former Chief Secretary to the Treasury
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>ESTABLISHED</th>
<th>FUNDING</th>
<th>EVIDENCE STANDARDS</th>
<th>DISSEMINATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NICE</td>
<td>Health and social care</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Annual grant of £66.4m from the Department of Health</td>
<td>Multistage process of evaluating evidence using the GRADE Approach plus expert opinion and stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Endowment Foundation</td>
<td>Educational achievement</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>£125m endowment from the Department of Education</td>
<td>Assesses interventions using systematic reviews or metaanalyses and develops and funds trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Works Centre for Crime Reduction</td>
<td>Crime reduction</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>£3.28m from the College of Policing and ESRC</td>
<td>Assesses interventions using the EMMIE Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention Foundation Foundation</td>
<td>Early intervention</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Three-year grant from Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Education, Department of Health and Department for Work and Pensions and ESRC</td>
<td>Evaluates evidence according to the EIF Standard of Evidence, a hierarchy based on methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth</td>
<td>Local economic growth</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Three-year grant from Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government and ESRC</td>
<td>Evidence reviews using minimum standard based on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Works Scotland</td>
<td>Public services reform</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>£3m over three years from the Scottish Government and ESRC</td>
<td>Collaborative action research in four case-study localities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPIW</td>
<td>Poverty plus other devolved functions</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>£2.3m over three years from the Welsh Government and ESRC</td>
<td>Evidence reviews, primary research and expert workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Better Ageing</td>
<td>Improved quality of life for older people</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>£50m from Big Lottery Fund</td>
<td>Under development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Works Centre for Wellbeing</td>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>£4.3m over three years from the ESRC, PHE, and others (inc several government departments)</td>
<td>Four evidence synthesis programmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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## Evidence Standards

### The NICE Evidence Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchy of evidence</th>
<th>Type of evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ia</td>
<td>Evidence from a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ib</td>
<td>Evidence from at least one randomized controlled trial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ila</td>
<td>Evidence from at least one controlled study without randomization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIb</td>
<td>Evidence from at least one other type of quasi-experimental study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Evidence from observational studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Evidence from expert committee reports or experts</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Grading of recommendation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Directly based on category I evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Directly based on category II evidence or extrapolated from category I evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Directly based on category III evidence or extrapolated from category I or II evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Directly based on category IV evidence or extrapolated from category I, II or III evidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The EIF Standards of Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence or rationale for programme</th>
<th>Description of evidence</th>
<th>Description of programme</th>
<th>EIF rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple high-quality evaluations (RCT/QED) with consistently positive impact across populations and environments</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Consistently Effective</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single high-quality evaluation (RCT/QED) with positive impact</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-quality evaluation (not RCT or QED) showing better outcomes for programme participants</td>
<td>Formative</td>
<td>Potentially Effective</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic model and testable features, but not current evidence of outcomes or impact</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Theory-Based</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No logic model, testable features, or current evidence of outcomes or impact</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence from at least one high-quality evaluation (RCT/QED) indicating null or negative impact</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Ineffective / Harmful</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes not yet rated, including those rated by evidence bodies whose standards are not yet mapped to the EIF standards, and submissions from providers or local areas of innovative or promising interventions</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Works Centre for Crime Reduction

EMMIE Framework
Effect – the impact on crime
Mechanism - how it works
Moderators - where it works best
Implementation - how to do it
Economic assessment - what it costs

“rates each intervention according to its impact on crime, strength of evidence and cost as well as summarising the evidence on how and in which circumstances each intervention works, helping practitioners to understand what makes a particular intervention work in a given operational context”

- What Works Centre for Crime Reduction
The Policy Process in Theory

Rationale → Objectives

Appraisal → Implementation

Feedback → Monitoring

Evaluation
The Policy Process in Reality

Rationale

Appraisal

Feedback

Implementation

Monitoring

Evaluation

Objectives

Implementation
If you want to change government decisions you have to do it before anyone knows they’re being made.

Isn’t that rather difficult in practice?

Yes. That’s what the Civil Service is for.
THE INNOVATION
- Relative advantage
- Compatibility
- Low complexity
- Trialability
- Observability
- Potential for reinvention
- Fuzzy boundaries
- Risk
- Task issues
- Nature of knowledge required (tact/implicit)
- Technical support

COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE
DIFFUSION
(informal, unplanned)
- Social network
- Homophily
- Peer opinion
- Marketing
- Expert opinion
- Champions
- Boundary spanners
- Change agents

DISSEMINATION
(formal, planned)

OUTER CONTEXT
- Socio-political climate
- Incentives and mandates
- Interorganisational norm-setting and networks
- Environmental stability

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Knowledge Mobilisation

CANE YOU COME BACK WITH THAT 3 YEAR STUDY SUMMARISED IN SIX BULLET POINTS IN POWERPOINT

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Lessons from the Literature...

1. Evidence standards need to be applied intelligently

2. Need to take into account complex contested nature of the policy process

3. Research-based evidence will not inform policy and practice without carefully designed and targeted approaches to knowledge mobilisation
Challenges

• Need to ensure evidence principles do not restrict the range of evidence considered

• Must resist simplistic binary distinctions between the interventions that work and those that do not

• Need to do more than collate, synthesis and transmit evidence as this only focuses on the supply side

• Must combat lack of absorptive capacity and willingness to engage
Thank you for listening