

FOUNDING CHAIR OF THE WHAT WORKS CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

CANDIDATE BRIEF

March 2018

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Founding Chair 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. 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 is being provided through the DfE's Innovation Programme to support this work. New ideas - and practices which offer enormous potential for the sector - are emerging in local authorities such as Leeds and Hertfordshire, and from VCS organisations like Pause and Catch22.

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. The Department for Education are 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 policy 'start-up' - and if it is going to fulfil its potential it will need great leadership. That starts with the Founding Chair, who will guide the development of the Centre's initial strategy, build the board and the executive team, and bring into being independent and influential What Works Centre which the sector needs.

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 challenge facing the Centre is twofold:

- i) *Create a better evidence base* – both synthesising existing evidence: including though not limited to the promising material from the Innovation Programme evaluations, Partners in Practice, published research; and developing new robust evidence where it is found to be lacking;
- ii) *Ensure WWC activity leads to widespread change, not just outputs* – working with the sector to devise new engagement approaches for ensuring that evidence is both taken up and acted upon, generating widespread change across the practice system.

Neither of those is 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. Achieving an even larger impact will require the Centre to establish influence with research funders and leading research institutes. These will require strategic clarity, an understanding of how evidence is created and used in practice, and the capability to build networks of influence.

Making research insights genuinely useful and accessible to decision makers will mean moving beyond the world of reports and portals to build products and services which practitioners and practice leaders use and value. This will demand creativity, entrepreneurship, and a close relationship with the sector.

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 the VCS and commercial 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 challenge is, this is an opportune moment to be taking it on. The DfE 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. Thus, the Centre is not working alone; it will have the support of the DfE, leading LAs and representative bodies, voluntary and community sector organisations, and a profession 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, spanning [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 c. £5m of set-up funding from the DfE, 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 DfE 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 c. £5m of DfE funding – these two parts of the initiative between them have a budget of £9.8m.

The Development Team and Research Partner contracts run until March 2020, after which there is no guarantee of ongoing funding for the Centre. A key role for the new Chair will be to negotiate with 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 a year who are supported by social workers and their colleagues 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 New Chair

The distance between the Centre's possible futures is huge.

- 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 laden with risk.

Further, it is not clear what the Centre will need to do, and become, to bring about the impactful future. 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.

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 how we are approaching the work of 'incubating' the centre, and it informs what we are looking for in a chair as well.

Role Description

The Founding Chair of the Centre will lead the process of setting up the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, working with the development team led by Nesta and the Research Partner led by Cardiff University. The role of the Chair is to provide visible leadership for the initiative and to be accountable for its performance.

In fulfilling this role, the Chair will:

- Be the Centre's lead non-executive, chairing meetings of the founding 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 around the WWC initiative.
- Build out the membership of the founding board to incorporate a wider range of skills and perspectives, ensuring the ongoing effectiveness and development of the Board.
- Appoint the Centre's lead executive and play a role in other senior executive appointments as appropriate
- Ensure regular and effective oversight of the work of the development team and Research Partner, and (once appointed) the Centre's lead executives.

- 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 establishing 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 develop a high performing board that sets the strategic direction for a start-up venture
5. Understanding of the financial, structural, and human dimensions of setting up a new 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

The Founding Chair role will be a paid role, under contract to Nesta. It is not a public appointment.

Time Commitment

Once the Centre is established, it will be responsible for determining its own ways of working, so it will be for directors to decide the precise duties, frequency of meetings, and scale of involvement, and hence the time commitment. However, as a guide, we anticipate 6-12 Board meetings per year and an overall time commitment of c. 3-6 days per month.

Location

Central London

Term

An initial term until March 2020 to oversee the founding period of the Centre - with the option to extend after that, dependent upon arrangements for funding the Centre into 2020/21 and beyond.

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: 4th May 2018.

The How to Apply section of the GatenbySanderson website, www.gatenbysanderson.com, provides clear instructions; 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 team on **020 7426 3988**.

If you have any queries about any aspect of the appointment process, need additional information or wish to have an informal and confidential discussion, our advising consultants, **Katy Giddens (020 7426 3973)** or **Juliet Brown (0113 205 6089)** will be pleased to talk to you. GatenbySanderson will respect the privacy of any initial approach or expression of interest in this role, whether formal or informal.