

What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

Practice Development Manager

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming Practice Development Manager at the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care.

The What Works Centre is an exciting 'social start-up' and a fantastic opportunity to make a difference to the lives of children and their families in England. Every year over 700,000 children and young people, and their families, have contact with the children's social care sector. Changes in how the sector supports these children and their families can have hugely significant effects that resonate throughout entire lifetimes.

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 up-and-down the country, and supported by a range of other organisations both statutory and third sector, are using that freedom to try different ways of designing and delivering children's services, and up to £200m is being provided through the Department for Education (DfE) Innovation Programme to support this work.

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 systematically develop the evidence base on what works, for whom, under what circumstances, and how. This is the best encapsulation of the What Works Centre's mission – to collect the best evidence on what we already know, work with the sector to prioritise the many questions that remain unanswered, fund research, and determine how best to make evidence relevant and accessible to decision makers. What Works Centres have been a great success in other policy areas – including in education, policing and healthcare – and we expect great things from the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, which will be a fully-financed and independent body by March 2020.

The Centre is currently being established by a development team, led by innovation charity Nesta. Using £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.

Reporting to the Centre's Head of Practice, this role will work with the Head of Practice in our work engaging with social workers and the wider sector, supporting local authorities to develop evidence mindedness and evidence readiness, and play a leading role in our "Practice in Need of Evidence" programme, building capacity and evidence around promising practice developed by practitioners. Alongside this, the Practice Development Manager will work alongside our Research, Programmes and Operations teams across every aspect of the Centre's work, to ensure that the voice of practice is a part of everything we do.

Thanks once again for your interest and we look forward to hearing from you.

Michael Sanders

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

Practice Development Manager

Role Description

1. To bring experience of social work practice to the delivery of the WWC's engagement and cultural change strategy.
2. Work with local authority partners to deliver tools and services that improve organisational evidence-mindedness and support high quality self-evaluation of promising practice.
3. Use the WWC engagement structure to bring messages from the sector, including from children and young people, families, practitioners, practice leaders and the wider sector, into the WWC and use them to deliver the WWC's core aims and objectives.
4. Represent the WWC at events and through communication with the sector, in particular with practitioners, to improve evidence-informed practice and further the aims of the Centre.
5. Support a movement for evidence-informed practice amongst social work practitioners through leadership workshops and running regional and national events.
6. Support and lead on innovative ways of engaging the social work workforce to understand capability, motivation and opportunity to use evidence and communicate messages about what works.
7. Contribute to the content of the WWC Evidence Store with particular focus on ensuring research findings are communicated clearly and support real world implementation.
8. Support WWC events to promote research partnerships with the sector, facilitate fora to deliberate complex issues and communicate our research findings with an understanding of practice context.
9. Support the development of a WWC social work education offering to improve capability, motivation and opportunity for practitioners to use evidence and be involved in generation of research.

The Attributes We Are Looking for in a Practice Development Manager

Essential

1. Social work qualification.
2. HCPC registered social worker.
3. Experience of practice in statutory children's social care organisation.
4. Excellent written and oral communication skills, including experience of public speaking and delivery of training.
5. Understanding of the social work practice landscape and challenges.
6. Commitment to social work values and ethics.
7. Understanding of, and commitment to, working to meet the needs of a diverse group of beneficiaries and stakeholders and the challenges and barriers associated with this.

Desirable

8. Interest in evidence-informed practice and research methods in children's social care.
9. Experience of practice development and/or social work education.
10. Understanding of organisational development and implementing cultural change in organisations and across the sector.
11. Experience of maintaining multiple stakeholder relationships.
12. Political awareness.

Initial Terms and Conditions of Appointment

- **Remuneration:** £35k - £45k pa, plus excellent benefits
- **Time Commitment:** Full time role (37.5 hours per week)
- **Location:** Central London. Travel around England may be required occasionally
- **Term:** Fixed initial term of April 2019 - March 31st 2020. Possibility of transitioning into permanent role once the organisation is independently constituted. We would consider and welcome candidates interested in secondments from other organisations.
- **Other:**
 - Reports to the Centre's Head of Practice.
 - This role is not a public appointment.

Introduction to the Centre

The What Works Centre for Children's Social Care is being created to foster evidence-informed practice in the children's social care sector.

The Centre faces two challenges if it is to be successful:

- *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 that might otherwise prevent practice leaders and practitioners from using insights from evidence to inform their decisions.

Addressing these challenges will not be simple.

Making decisions about where to focus the Centre's 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. The Centre will work with practitioners to build innovative products and services that practitioners and practice leaders use and value. This will demand specific 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 of the social work system to help them to effect a change in culture. These leaders want to establish the most effective norms for using the best available evidence in the 152 local authority areas in 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.

Context to the Centre's Work

As big a challenge as this initiative represents, this is an opportune moment to be taking them on. The Department for Education has a clear, coherent, and consistent reform programme that 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 programme. The Centre is not working alone; it will have the support of central Government, local authorities and representative bodies, a variety of voluntary and community sector organisations, and practitioners and practice leaders 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. This includes the What Works Centres for [Education](#), [Early Intervention](#), [Crime Reduction](#), [Local Economic Growth](#), [Health and Social Care](#), [Wellbeing](#) and [Ageing, and others](#). 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 for strategy and organisational development, as well as a resource for collective influence.

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, chaired by Sir Alan Wood. The Researcher will report to the Centre’s Head of Research, who reports in turn to the Executive Director.

The Incubator and Research Partner contracts run until March 2020, after which there will need to be a new financial settlement to fund the Centre’s ongoing programme of work.

If the Centre is successful in its mission then the simple question ‘what works?’, will be generating answers that 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.

About Nesta

Nesta is a global innovation foundation. We back new ideas to tackle the big challenges of our time.

Our mission is to spark and shape new ideas that improve how the world works for everyone. We use our knowledge, networks, funding and skills - working in partnership with others, including governments, businesses and charities. We are a UK charity but work all over the world, supported by a financial endowment.

We see - we spot opportunities in challenges

We spark - we generate novel ideas to solve big problems that matter to everyone

We shape - we provide the help needed for promising ideas to grow and adapt

We shift - we join with others to back world-changing ideas

How to apply

To apply, please send your CV and a supporting statement outlining clearly how you would succeed in the role to recruitment@nesta.org.uk, citing "WWC Practice Development Manager" in the Subject of the email.

Deadline for applications: 26th April 2019 midday.