**What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care: Research Partner**

The What Works Centre (WWC) for Children’s Social Care will foster a culture of evidence-based practice in the sector. It will be an ambitious project, independent of government, that will develop a strong evidence base around effective interventions and practice systems in children’s social care, and support their implementation by practitioners and decision makers. Its goal will be to improve outcomes for children and their families by supporting translation of evidence into better practice on the ground.

The WWC forms part of the Department’s wider agenda to develop a culture of learning across children’s social care. This includes driving a strong evidence base through the Innovation Programme and Partners in Practice, along with recommendations identified through the new Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and other key partners.

It is envisaged the WWC will require a range of capabilities to tackle the challenge of bringing research to time and resource-pressured practitioners operating in a high-risk environment. These include innovation, communication, strong leadership, and the ability to build and drive an agenda for change. The WWC will also need to adopt a dynamic model, with flexibility to test and trial a variety of approaches.

The Department has therefore decided to take an incubation approach to WWC set-up, with two contracts running in parallel up to March 2020:

* The first contract from 2017 to 2020 for an ‘incubator’ to develop and test the initial WWC model, including the setting of the strategic direction and leadership and development of a dissemination and engagement strategy.
* The second contract from 2017 to 2020 for a research partner to start the initial synthesis and development of the evidence base. Sifting and interviewing for the research partner contract has been staggered so that the successful incubator bidder/s can feed into the selection process.

Research Partner

The Research Partner will develop the strategic research programme for the WWC (in partnership with the incubator) and start the initial review of the literature, developing evidence base and dissemination strategy. This will include:

* establishing, with input from the Incubator and Department, a strong strategic research programme for the WWC that is driven by the needs of practitioners and influences organisational practice;
* developing a robust methodology for reviewing evidence, e.g. a set of evidence standards and outcome measures;
* conducting evidence synthesis by analysing and bringing together the existing research and evidence, e.g. producing reviews, scrutinising and collating existing data sets;
* identifying evidence gaps and running and/or commissioning evaluations and trials to strengthen the evidence base (this might include c. 4-6 new evaluations or trials in the contract period);
* testing and trialing, alongside the Research Partner, a suitable dissemination strategy, amongst a range of audiences and stakeholders – including creating accessible tools and resources suitable for practitioners operating in a resource and time-pressured environment;
* supporting the development of a coherent learning infrastructure across children’s social care – this should include the building of relationships with the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the wider social policy research work (other What Works Centre Network, research centres operating in related areas, and international research partners);
* driving a wider culture of learning and evidence-based practice in the children’s social care sector by engaging practitioners in a constructive dialogue and encouraging them to promote the importance of learning; and
* developing and implementing a methodology for robust impact measurement of the WWC’s activities.