**What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care: Incubator**

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; and
* 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.

Incubator

Establishing an initial model for the WWC (to be housed internally up to 2020) to be tested, and trialing a suitable relationship with government and the sector to secure appropriate positioning for the WWC. The Department envisages that this may include:

* + a leadership team (including potentially a Chair, CEO and Board) with strong frontline experience of children’s social care and strong leadership and engagement skills;
	+ strong engagement and communications capabilities – to build the credibility and status of the WWC and develop and trial and test a dissemination strategy (in partnership with the Research Partner);
	+ a set of governance or user panels to provide accountability and challenge – including both academic robustness and user-representation to ensure that the end-products are user-friendly and accessible;
	+ innovative thinking, including potentially from outside of children’s social care, to inform methods of influence and communication; and
	+ An operational core, such as administrative support, HR, IT, legal, and other capabilities.

NESTA will work in partnership with Alliance for Useful Evidence, SCIE, FutureGov and Traversum