



Alliance
for Useful
Evidence

YEAR ONE OVERVIEW

1 MAY 2012 – 30 APRIL 2013

June 2013

This is an internal report which has been made public.

The Alliance champions the use of evidence in social policy and practice. We are an open-access network of individuals from across government, universities, charities, business and local authorities in the UK and internationally. The Alliance provides a focal point for advancing the evidence agenda, developing a collective voice, whilst aiding collaboration and knowledge sharing, through debate and discussion. We are funded by the BIG Lottery Fund, the Economic and Social Research Council and Nesta. Membership is free. To sign up please visit: www.alliance4usefulevidence.org.

Nesta...



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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to both give the Funders an overview of what has been achieved in the Alliance's first year and to aid discussion on what we should prioritise in the second year. This overview will inform the end of year report that will be submitted to BIG Lottery on 1 July 2013 (this is in the formal end of year in the contract with BIG Lottery). The Alliance's contract with the ESRC does not include a formal end of year report and so this counts as the Alliance's report for the ESRC. We will need to update the lists below with new events, publications and impacts taking place over next few months – such as our events in Cardiff and Belfast in May - before we submit our report in July.

We have already met – and in many cases exceeded – the quantifiable targets set out in our agreements with funders. The outcomes of these targets will of course need to be updated by July with new activities and achievements. Highlights include:

- The Alliance has far exceeded its membership target; membership has more than tripled in the last twelve months with a total of 1108 members by the end of March 2013;
- 16 articles in the national press have positively mentioned the Alliance, exceeding our target of 5. Media publications which have mentioned the Alliance include The Guardian, The Times, New Scientist and Research Fortnight. The Alliance was also promoted through Mark Henderson's popular book, Geek Manifesto (May 2012) and copies have been sent to all MPs; and;
- In addition to meeting our events target and regularly engaging with senior speakers, the Alliance has chaired or given presentations to approximately 800 people at further conferences and seminar events.

The achievements below have been conducted by two part-time staff (a coordinator and manager) who started in May 2012. ESRC, Nesta and BIG Lottery have all provided £50k a year for two years. A budget for the first year is also attached at the bottom of this document (Annex A).

TARGET OUTCOMES, AGREED INDICATORS AND WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

The work programme of the Alliance has consisted of ‘discussion events, publications, blog posts and a web presence’ (to quote from contracts with ESRC and BIG Lottery). Details and the results of these activities are set out below.

1. Membership

Target outcome	Through its membership and network, the Alliance will stimulate the demand and use of evidence in decision-making across national government, local government, practitioners, and service delivery organisations, thereby increasing the number and range of organisations investing resources and efforts towards the best and most useful evaluation.
Agreed indicator and level (Timescale: one year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Diversity of member organisations, measured according to geography and sector: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum of ten new Alliance members from each of the nations and regions - Minimum of ten new Alliance members from each sector b) Increased number of member organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target of 30% increase in member numbers in targeted areas
What actually happened	<p>a) Alliance member numbers have grown across the UK; as of 31 March 2013, there are currently 88 members in Scotland (57% increase), 15 members from Wales (550% increase), 12 members from Northern Ireland (200% increase) and 872 from England (232% increase) (see Table 1 below). We have also exceeded our targets across all UK regions (see Table 2 below).</p> <p>We have not started to promote the Alliance internationally but there are now 121 members from overseas. The majority are from the US, Canada, Australia and Europe but there are also members from Brazil, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Bolivia, amongst others.</p>

There is an even balance in membership across the charity, public and university sectors (see Figure 1 below), which reflects the focus of our events and publications.

- b) In total, Alliance membership has more than tripled from 358 on 31 March 2012 to 1,108 members by 31 March 2013, far in excess of our original target of 30%.

Nation	Number of members as of 31 March 2012	Total number of UK members as of 31 March 2013	Percentage increase
Scotland	56	88	57%
Wales	2	15	550%
Northern Ireland	3	12	200%
England	263	872	232%
Total	324	987	205%

Table 1: Breakdown of number of UK members by country

Region	Number of UK members as of 31 March 2012	Number of UK members as of 31 March 2013	Total number of UK members as of 31 March 2013	Percentage increase
Northern Ireland	3	9	12	200%
Wales	2	13	15	550%
Scotland	56	32	88	57%
North East	9	12	21	133%
North West	12	32	44	267%
Yorkshire & The Humber	14	26	40	186%
East Midlands	5	17	22	340%
West Midlands	10	31	41	310%
South West	13	35	48	269%
South East	28	47	75	168%
East of England	14	42	56	300%
London	158	367	525	232%
Total	324	663	987	205%

Table 2: Breakdown of UK members by region

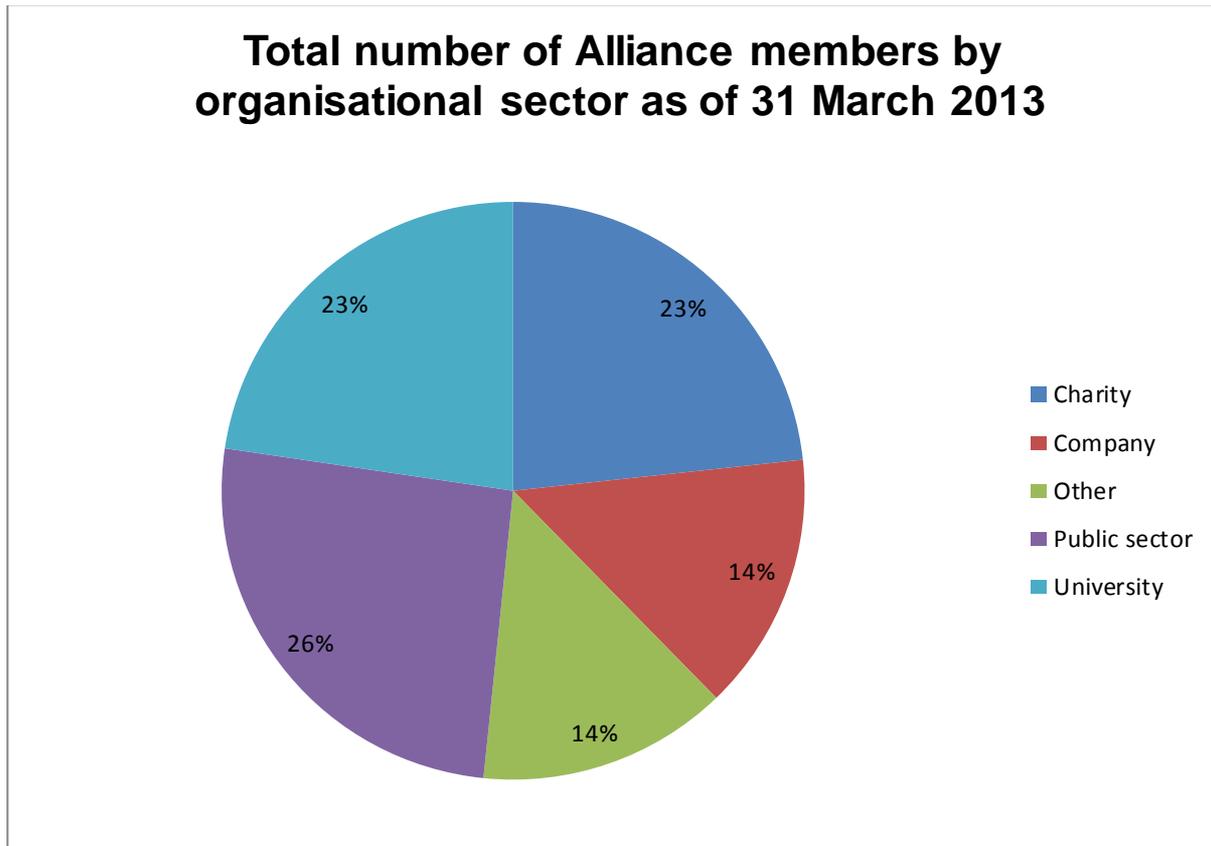


Fig 1: Total number of Alliance members by organisation sector as of 31 March 2013

2. Stimulating conversation: events and creating an online discussion forum

Target outcome

The Alliance will build an online discussion forum and offer live events that stimulate a substantive discussion of the nature and facets of useful evidence in an interdisciplinary context. Facilitating this discussion will lead to the cultivation of new approaches to research and evidence that are clear and better directed towards influencing decision makers.

Agreed indicator and level

- a) Minimum of two events every quarter, bringing together members and exploring new and challenging topics surrounding useful evidence.
- b) Monitoring discussion forum activity on a monthly basis over the year for increased and high level discussion around useful evidence through continuously increasing website traffic and activity and generating two new online discussions, blogs or e-news per month.

What actually happened

- a) Between May 2012 and April 2013, we have exceeded our targets and have organised nine events which have taken place around the UK, including Newcastle, Edinburgh, London and Coventry (see Table 3 in paragraph 2.1 below).
- b) The public events have been at full capacity and have generated lively debate and extensive conversation on Twitter during and after live events, encouraged by Alliance staff tweeting, re-tweeting and the promotion of hashtags.

Examples of tweets during and following events include:

- Will Moy, Director, Full Fact @puzzlesthewill: *'follow #A4UE for an interesting discussion on 'what counts as good evidence?' hosted by @A4UEvidence'* (9 November 2012);
- Ross Neilson, Policy Adviser, Cabinet Office @ross_neilson: *'@A4UEvidence great event earlier on better use of evidence in public policy'* (8 January 2013);
- Dr Caroline Adler, environmental and policy scientist @drcarolineadler: *'very much enjoying the tweets from Alliance for Useful Evidence event today'* (8 January 2013);
- Dan Silver, Director, The Social Action and Research Foundation @DanSilverSARF offered support if we want to do any more events in the North (4 March 2013);
- Guardian Public Leaders @publicleaders: *'@A4UEvidence keep us in the loop with your news/blog ideas'* (22 March 2013).

Guest blogs: our meetings have generated 18 guest blogs on the Alliance website. Contributions have ranged from internationally respected academics and leading thinkers to practitioners in the evidence field and on the frontline, such as a Year 7 teacher, a surgeon, a police officer and a youth charity worker. Additionally, staff and board members from our three partner organisations, the ESRC, BIG Lottery and Nesta, have also blogged for us.

New website: the beta version of the new Alliance website went live on 26 February. In the first month, 689 new people visited the website (unique visits), and there were

964 website visits in total. Average time on an Alliance website page is nearly 3 minutes, slightly higher than the average viewing time of just over 2 minutes on the old Alliance pages on the Nesta site, indicating that visitors are engaging with the website content. In the first month of the new website being live, on average, visitors have viewed 203 pages per visit, which is consistent with the old Alliance pages on the Nesta site. The majority of web traffic on the new website is UK based (612 unique visits), but there is a small but significant amount of web traffic coming from the US (76 unique visits), Canada (73 unique visits) and Australia (69 unique visits).

Alliance pages on the old Nesta website: between April 2012 and February 2013, the Alliance pages gained 14,122 unique page views, with a total of 18,226 page views in total.

Twitter: the Alliance has sent 466 tweets since opening a Twitter account on 19 September 2012, generating 215 mentions of @A4UEvidence and 176 retweets. At the end of March 2013, we had 484 followers, which translates into 500,216 potential stream impressions (the number of people who through their Twitter streams and potentially saw our tweets).

2.1 Events

We have secured speakers from our target audiences at high political levels (e.g. Chief Scientist, Permanent Secretary, Ministers), in addition to leading thinkers and practitioners from charities, Local Authorities, teaching bodies, police and social care. Our London events have been popular at full capacity and consideration needs to be given to how we manage numbers in future as the Alliance continues to grow beyond our expected numbers.

One approach that worked well – an approach suggested by the Funders Forum – was to ‘piggyback’ on other events that had a key target and captive audience. For example, the umbrella body for Local Authority CEOs - SOLACE - produced a ‘call for action’ for its members to use and value evidence at the local level, after we contributed to their annual summit. We organised three sessions at the SOLACE summit in Coventry, and were able to engage with over 500 Chief Executives and Directors from all over England, who consequently attended our events. Although this was not one of our formal targets, we have also given talks and supported other conferences including: the Annual Conference of the Third Sector Research Centre; Sussex University-SPRU debate on evidence for policy; Chief Scientists Brown Bag Lunch with Sir John Beddington; Annual Conference of Cambridge Science Policy Centre;

Intelligent Funders Forum of charities (May 21, 2013) and the Professions Summit with Gus O'Donnell (July 2, 2013).

Piggybacking on these conferences and external events is an effective way to allocate our time as it allows us to reach out to new audiences who may not be fully 'converted' to evidence, and we can help to persuade them about the value of evidence – and help increase demand. The challenge with those who are likely to come to our own meetings about evidence is that they are probably already 'sold' on evidence. However, the value of our own meetings is that it provides a forum for sharing good practice and ideas amongst those committed to evidence for policy and practice.

Event	Date	Location
Summer Networking Event	24 July 2012	Nesta
Scotland Networking Event	06 September 2012	Edinburgh
What works at local level	13 September 2012	Nesta
How can evidence transform your charity?	01 October 2012	Newcastle
An informed future - SOLACE Summit	16-19 October 2012	Coventry
Evidence for the frontline: what works for practitioners?	23 October 2012	Nesta
What is good evidence? Standards, kitemarks and forms of evidence	09 November 2012	Nesta
Future directions for scientific advice in Whitehall	08 January 2013	Nesta
The value of evaluation	22 April 2013	Nesta

Table 3: Alliance events May 2012 – April 2013

3. Raising the Alliance's profile

Target outcome	Through research, discussion and engagement, the Alliance will raise its profile and voice within the policy realm, acting as an advocate and supporter of embedding useful evidence across policy and practice. Campaigning and other strategic activity will also raise awareness of the importance and value of useful evidence in decision making. This will contribute to increased awareness and interaction with useful evidence across policy sectors.
Agreed indicator and level	<p>a) Monitor discussion surrounding the Alliance within public and policy spheres: target of five national media or policy articles and two international media or policy references annually.</p> <p>b) Meetings with high profile stakeholders within the public and policy spheres: target of five meetings per quarter with high profile policymakers to discuss the Alliance.</p>
What actually happened	<p>a) National media articles: We have had 16 media articles with positive mentions of the Alliance, exceeding our target of five mentions in the national media. This includes five mentions on the Guardian website and mentions in The Times, New Scientist, Research Fortnight, MJ and Public Servant amongst others.</p> <p>Live online debates: the Alliance has also been an expert panellist at a live online debate on the Guardian Public Leaders Network on the issue of consultation and policymaking ('How to consult citizens', The Guardian, 9 November 2012) and a debate involving the ESRC, Nesta, BIG Lottery and two authors of Alliance reports (What next, What Works Network?' The Guardian, 18 March 2013).</p> <p>External blogs: there were discussions and mentions of the Alliance on 27 external blogs, including BIG Lottery, Scotland, Culturesparks and Open Policymaking.</p> <p>Policy forums and outputs: we have had positive mentions in six policy forums and outputs: SOLACE Summit 2012 'call for action' on evidence in local authorities; the Institute for Government's 'Evidence and evaluation in policymaking; a problem of supply or demand?'; 'Testing models of commissioning: a guide to</p>

help policymakers learn about publically funded markets'; BIS Annual Innovation Reporting 2012; and a contributing essay by the Alliance in the Sciencewise-ERC policy report: 'Public dialogue in a changing context'.

The Alliance was also given a great plug in Mark Henderson's best-selling book, 'Geek Manifesto' (May 2012). His book has been sent to every Westminster MP.

Additionally, The Alliance is on the expert steering group with Catch-22, The Young Foundation, and Dartington SRU amongst others, for BIG Lottery's £25m Realising Ambition programme, a transformative strategic initiative for youth charities with robust evidence.

- b) We have met 47 senior policymakers and decision-makers in charities, local authorities, consultancy and academia – approximately a dozen meetings each quarter, exceeding our target of five meetings for every three months. These meetings are in addition to engagement with senior speakers at our seminars.

In addition to engagement with senior speakers at our seminars and events, we have chaired or given presentations to approximately 800 people at conferences and seminars. Examples include: Comic Relief event on evidence (5 December 2012); Centre for Justice Innovation conference on evidence for probation (7 December 2012); 'What counts as good evidence for policy?' debate at the Institute of Physics (4 February 2013); Society for Evidence-Based Policing annual conference (13 February 2013); informal 'brown bag' lunch with chief scientists and the GCSA Sir John Beddington (26 February 2013); and Association of Teachers and Lecturers seminar on evidence for education policy with shadow minister Kevin Brennan MP (14 March 2013).

See Annex B for a list of bilateral meetings.

4. Identifying best practice: dissemination and impact

Target outcome	Drawing from a wide range of activities and experiences both in and out of its network, the Alliance will identify best practice and learning which will be spread through production and dissemination of publications and events. Increased dissemination will amplify the impact and uptake of best practices and raise public awareness of useful evidence and its role in decision making.
Agreed indicator and level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Publications: eight Alliance-led or support reports to be produced annually. b) Development and delivery of new Alliance website (by the end of year one) c) Uptake of Alliance recommended practices or approaches to rigorous evidence – annual target of four public announcements of organisations improving their use of evidence in decision making. d) Monitor discussion surrounding the Alliance within public and policy spheres: target of five national media or policy articles and two international media or policy references annually.
What actually happened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) We have commissioned ten publications through open competition. The following reports are complete and are either published or will be launched at events in 2013 (see Paper D): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What Counts as Good Evidence?</i> (Prof Sandra Nutley et al, St. Andrews University); - <i>The Future of Scientific Advice</i> series of essays (Sir John Beddington, scientists, social scientists and other thought leaders); - <i>Lessons from Aboard; International Approaches to Promoting Evidence-Based Social Policy</i> (Dr Ashley Lenihan, LSE); - <i>Evidence for the Frontline</i> (Dr Jonathan Sharples, York University); - <i>How Can Evidence Transform Your Charity?</i> (Ruth Stephenson, consultant);

- *Squaring the Circle: Evidence at the Local Level* (Derrick Johnstone, Educe Consultants); and
- *Learning from Research; Short Guide to Systematic Reviews* (Prof David Gough, EPPI-Centre).

The following three briefings for events are due by the end of April 2013:

- Briefing for ‘What Works Wales’ Alliance/Wales Public Services 2025 event (Megan Mathias, consultant);
 - Report for Intelligent Funders Forum for charities (Charlotte Ravenscroft, NCVO); and
 - Social media as evidence (Jason Leavey, consultant).
- b) The new website was launched on 26 February 2013 and has received positive feedback from the Funders. The design is superior compared to similar organisations (e.g. CASE, Sense about Science, Getstats). We tweet every day that we are working and have gained nearly 500 new followers on Twitter since starting the account on 19 September 2012. We have located, commissioned and edited two guest blogs per month and produce a monthly email to all members.
- c) The Alliance has been in discussion with the following organisations about improving their use of evidence and engaging with social policy evidence: SOLACE (umbrella body for Chief Executives of Local Authorities); Realising Ambition (consortia of youth charities); Professions’ summits; Chief Scientists’ network; and the Intelligent Funders Forum of major UK charitable funders.

What Works Network: a game-changing initiative championed by the Alliance and its core partners, BIG Lottery, the ESRC and Nesta. This new ecosystem of evidence centres will synthesise and promote evidence in social policy. Launched on the 4 March 2013 at Nesta by Government ministers and the ESRC, BIG Lottery, and the Cabinet Office, this initiative will transform the landscape by actively encouraging and promoting useful evidence in social policy and practice.

- d) For activities relating to a ‘discussion surrounding the Alliance within public and policy spheres’, see ‘Outcomes’ for Target 3 above.

ANNEX A

Budget table

Alliance for Useful Evidence Budget 2012-13		
	Budget	Spend
WEBSITE	12,000.00	14,580.00
PUBLICATIONS	54,000.00	61,514.04
EVENTS	18,500.00	8,035.82
STAFF	65,500.00	72,886.99
TOTAL	150,000.00	157,016.85

ANNEX B

List of bilateral meetings between the Alliance and external partners

Jon Collins (Deputy Director, Police Foundation); Rob Doubleday (Director, CsAP), Hetan Shah (RSS); Jenny Dibden (Joint Head of Gov Social Research); Will Moy (Director, FullFact); Kevan Collins (CEO, EEF); Tom Brake MP (LibDem); Imran Khan (Director, CASE); Duncan Green (head of research, Oxfam); Anna Beckett (Ipsos Mori) Marcial Boo (Director Strategy, National Audit Office); Alex Murray (Chief Superintendent, West Midlands Police); Abdool Kara (Chief Executive, Swale Borough Council Council); Mark Holmes (Deputy Director, Innovation Infrastructure & Impact, BIS); Kitty Ussher (former minister HM Treasury); Sharon Witherspoon (Director, Nuffield Trust); Louise Kidney (Digital Engagement Lead, Cabinet Office); Bob Black (Auditor-General for Scotland); David Walker (Director, Getstats); Sara Llewellyn (Chief Executive, Barrow Cadbury); Chris Tyler (Director, Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology); Tim Colbourne (Special Adviser, No 10 Policy Unit); David Halpern (Head of Behavioural Insights Team, Cabinet Office); Heather Jameson (Editor, MJ); Rosie Chadwick (Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Innovation, Catch22); Phillip Bowen (Director, Centre for Justice Innovation); Hetan Shah, (Executive Director, Royal Statistical Society); Amanda Edwards (Deputy Chief Executive, Social Care Institute for Excellence); Ken Warwick (Member of Regulatory Policy Committee, BIS); Paul Johnson (Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies); James Richardson (Chief Scientific Adviser, HM Treasury); Stephen Anderson (Executive Director, Academy of Social Sciences); Dr Laura Haynes, (Head of Policy Research, Behavioural Insights Team, Cabinet Office); Edward Bracey (Policy Adviser for Research Community Issues; Government Office for Science); David Weston (CEO, Teacher Development Trust); Jane Tinkler (LSE); Paul Manners (Director, National Coordinating Centre on Public Engagement); Sam Matthews (CEO, Charities Evaluation Service); Matt Legg (Catch-22); Penny Young (CEO, NatCen), Kandy Woodfield (Director of Research, NatCen); Charlotte Ravenscroft (Policy Manager, National Council for Voluntary Organisations); Matt Barnard (Head of Evaluation , NSPCC); Mike Kell (Chief Economist, NAO); Joseph Lowe (Head of Green Book, HM Treasury); Lee Elliot Major (Director of Research, Sutton Trust); Stuart Matters (Policy lead on evidence-based practice, Department for Education); Emma Stone (Director of Policy and Research, Joseph Rowntree Foundation) ; Ross Nielson (What Works lead, Cabinet Office).