



Alliance for  
Useful Evidence

# Our impact

**2016—2019**

**Final funders report**

December 2019



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# Foreword by Jonathan Breckon: What Next?

We have now come to the end of our seven years of core funding. So, what next? Firstly, before offering some ideas, it is good to pause and thank the Economic and Social Research Council, the National Lottery Community Fund, and Nesta. Not just for their funding, but also for their guidance. We met regularly as a Funders Forum - along with the Cabinet Office What Works Team - and their advice in the initial set up and growth stages was immensely valuable. We will be seeking their advice again for our next steps.

The next stage of our journey is going to need a good hard look at where we can add value. It is easy to fall into the depths of despond when reading the doom-mongering of Twitter and certain news websites. Why bother if basic facts - let alone high-quality social science - are under threat? "Post-truth" was declared the 2016 [word of the year](#) by Oxford Dictionaries. Three years later, post-truth politics is a phrase that never seems to have gone away, and has no plans to leave any time soon. But the alternative to gloom, is active resistance. We need as many pro-evidence champions as possible. No single organisation, leader, or political party can change things. But larger coalitions of the willing can make a difference. It seems to us that any chance to convene and cajole organisations into a positive and practical use of evidence is a good thing.

We should not be politically naive and dismissive of populism and the public. We need to check ourselves, and remind evidence-proselytizers like ourselves of the limits of data, and confront the reality of [street-level experience](#). On that front, it is so heartening to see that a new Health Foundation and ESRC £15m [evidence and implementation centre on adult social care](#) demands co-production with frontline professionals and those lived experience of care. We need more of this close involvement with citizens and practitioners, less desk-based distance from the frontline.

The only downside of a wider evidence movement is we can trip over each other - and duplicate. There are now six What Works Centres covering children and youth outcomes: the Early Intervention Foundation; Education Endowment Foundation; What Works for Children's Social Care; Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education; and affiliates The Youth Endowment Fund and Youth Futures Fund. In this dense ecosystem - or what Professor David Gough describes as a messy 'swamp' - there may need to be mergers - such as the move of [Project Oracle into the Centre for Youth Impact](#) - or more support in hosting new entities in old bodies, such as the [Family Justice Observatory](#) now firmly ensconced within Nuffield Foundation, or [What Works for Children's Social Care](#), incubated inside Nesta - before it becomes an independent charity. In 2020, we hope to help with some of these collaborations and joint endeavours via the creation of the [Evidence Quarter](#) in the heart of Whitehall.

The potential pitfall of that geography is that it sits inside the London Bubble and we need to do everything possible to reach out to others across the UK, not just in Stormont, Edinburgh and Cardiff, but also at the local level. In future, we hope to work with the Nesta offices in Scotland and Wales, learn from our [Evidence Exchange](#) project with Carnegie UK Trust, and build on our past relationship with the Centre for Effective Services in Northern Ireland and Queen's University Belfast. But none of that

comes without cost. We have been very fortunate to have received funding for staffing across the UK over the past 7 years. That capacity has come to an end. Genuine UK-working needs time and money - and credible staff on the ground - not tokenistic work from outside London.

And what of the immediate future? After digging around in all the available evidence of need, we will create a new strategy in 2020. A core part of the future will be working with Nesta colleagues - and particularly the incoming Nesta CEO, [Ravi Gurumurthy](#) who comes from working with David Milliband at International Rescue Committee in New York. We will see how we can be part of Nesta's next five-year strategy. That may be inside Nesta or on the outside: we have been considering spinning-out of Nesta, such as to a university so that we can boost our research capacity - but we need to see how that fits with Ravi's ideas for Nesta. In Spring 2020, we will also be looking to announce a new four-year project to help researchers influence policy. Whatever does make up our strategy - and we want to have another [evidence-informed Theory of Change](#) - working alongside others is key, and what we have learnt over the past, is that you need to build deeper relationships, and not be too thinly spread. Whatever else falls on us from Westminster or the White House, this is a good cause and worth fighting for, now more than ever.

Jonathan Breckon  
Director of Alliance for Useful Evidence



# Introduction

This report summarises the work of the Alliance for Useful Evidence (“the Alliance”) between July 2016 and December 2019<sup>1</sup> (“the grant period”) which was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the Economic and Social Research Council, and Nesta (“the partners”).

During the grant period we’ve delivered an array of events, training, publications and projects within six broad areas of activity, all contributing to our ultimate goal of increasing the use of evidence in decision making. Highlights include:

- delivering Evidence Works: A Global Forum for Government, a high level two-day conference attended by 140 people from 40 countries around the world,
- obtaining commitment from 27 professional bodies to use evidence and evaluation, in the signing of the Declaration on Evidence,
- leading the incubation of What Works for Children’s Social Care,
- taking our Evidence Masterclass training to more than 500 participants in government and civil society, and
- applying learning on what works for research uptake to inform a programme for academics, and a project for evidence champions from the voluntary and public sectors.

Below, we outline our aims, and how we went about achieving them. We highlight the difference we made, and share what we learned from our successes and challenges. We hope this will be useful for anyone involved in delivering or funding evidence-uptake work.

## Background

The goal of the Alliance for Useful Evidence is to increase the use of evidence in decision making in social policy and practice. We work across the UK and almost always in partnership, as an intermediary between government, the public sector, civil society and academia. We are currently hosted by the innovation foundation Nesta, with most of the team based in its London Blackfriars office.

We have received funding from our partners since our launch in 2012. Reports for previous funding periods ([2014–2016](#), [2013](#) and [2012](#)) can be found on our website. In this most recent 3-year grant period we sought to build on and develop existing areas of work, such as training, convening and cross-UK learning on evidence use. We also wanted to try out some new activities, based on research from our 2016 project the Science of Using Science, about what works when it comes to getting evidence used. These included setting up a network of evidence champions, developing strategic relationships, and giving prizes.

# Project aims

Our aims for the three years were to:

## ① Encourage decision-makers to become more motivated to use evidence, and increase their understanding of the benefits and risks of using evidence.

Many of our activities are directly intended to motivate and inspire people to use evidence. Through prizes, for example, we incentivise those who use evidence well in politics or in academia, recognising their efforts publically and bringing them to the attention of peers and colleagues. In our work with professional bodies we encourage them to use their influence to set professional norms around evidence use. Through case studies – for example [our short film](#) about the charity Khulisa – we share others' approaches to evidence and how it has benefited them. We built the skills of [Evidence Champions](#) so they could motivate their peers, and we worked strategically with 6 organisations over several months, enabling us to provide sustained encouragement and tailored, practical support.

In being motivational, we don't ignore the realities of the complex socio-political contexts our audiences work in. For example in our thought leadership reports and articles we explore the nuances, challenges and critiques of evidence-based decision making, as well as the benefits. We are pragmatic, and encourage an achievable, proportionate approach.

## ② Ensure that our target audience has more knowledge of what makes good evidence, when and how to use it, and the skills and confidence required to put this knowledge into practice.

Increased motivation and awareness of the benefits of evidence won't by themselves make a difference; the appetite needs to be met with practical skills, some specialised knowledge and the confidence that comes with putting them into practice. Through our capability building workshops we increase learners' knowledge about how and when evidence can help them, build their skills to find research and assess its relevance and quality, and help them communicate their findings. We do this through tailored training content and hands-on simulation activities, delivered by facilitators with extensive experience of using evidence in policy and practice. Participants include civil servants, local government officials, parliamentarians, public health managers and charity leaders, as well as academics wanting to understand how to communicate their research.

Our resources can help to embed these skills and build confidence. Ideally used in conjunction with our training, they also work as standalone resources, allowing us to reach a wider audience.

### ③ Promote access to high quality, easy to use evidence.

Increasing the opportunity to use evidence is perhaps the broadest area of our activity, and where our efforts are usually aligned with those of others. It's about all the external things that help people to access and make use of high quality evidence in their daily work. A core element is being a catalyst for the UK's what works movement, enabling What Works Centres and other evidence intermediaries to make evidence easy for their target audiences to access and use. It also includes things like our work on standards of evidence ([Mapping the Standards of Evidence use in UK social policy](#)), our support for open access to research ([Open Access: Five provocations blog](#)), and our research on democratising evidence ([Evidence vs Democracy](#)).

## Theory of Change

Our three aims and the activities contributing to them, are depicted in our [Theory of Change](#) (see Annex D) which is based on the COM-B model of behaviour change (Michie et al, 2011). COM-B states that in order for people to change their behaviour (eg to increase their use of evidence) they must have the motivation and capability to do so, as well as the opportunity.

*"I really liked looking at your theory of change, I think it's excellent. I'll be looking at it again – we are starting to develop our next three year strategy and have a few staff strategy days coming up."*

*Policy Manager in a charity promoting public understanding of science*

# Understanding our impact

## Our approach

It's difficult to find out where, when and how evidence is used in policymaking (something we responded to with our 2015 [Evidence Transparency Framework](#) developed with the Institute for Government and Sense About Science). There are many well-documented challenges in measuring impacts on policy and decision-making – as well as in understanding and assessing the use of research. We can't be sure how or where our activities contributed to change.

While measurement of policy-impact itself is difficult, where we can be more confident is understanding how we have helped to increase the things that make evidence use possible: motivation, capability and opportunity. We did this by asking Evidence Masterclass participants how they feel about finding and applying evidence after they have participated in the course, conducting interviews with individuals who have taken part in the Evidence Champions programme, tracking how our research and resources have been used and adapted by others, and observing changes in the way that evidence use is funded and enabled in the wider ecosystem. Since many of our activities build upon each other and contribute to the same aim, below we highlight the main overall outcomes of our activities, in relation to each of the three aims.

## The difference we made

**Aim: Encourage decision-makers to become more motivated to use evidence, and increase their understanding of the benefits and risks of using evidence.**

- **A higher profile for evidence use in government and increased demand for evidence skills from parliamentarians**

We led events in the first ever Evidence Week in parliament in 2018, and conducted half-day training sessions on evidence use and research methods for parliamentarians and MP's staff through the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST). We are currently working with POST to develop and pilot a more in-depth training programme for parliamentary body staff. In response to a growing demand from Parliament to encourage evidence use, the Alliance has risen to meet this demand – working with POST and other partners to design and deliver an array of initiatives tailored to the unique needs of UK Parliament.

We used survey measures to understand whether our training was increasing self-reported motivation. In Evidence Masterclass post-course surveys completed by 120 civil servants from 31 government departments including BEIS, HMRC and DfE, 82% of respondents said they felt motivated to practice and use the things learnt in the training.

Evidence from our [Science of Using Science](#) report suggests that awards and prizes



are crucial in increasing evidence and improving recognition for its use. We have partnered with the Political Studies Association's Best Use of Evidence Award in 2016 - 2019, highlighting the work of politicians who use evidence well. Last year's winner was Tracey Crouch, who won for her "openness and scrupulous and effective use of evidence to inform policy decisions" as seen in the Government response to the consultation on proposals for changes to Gaming Machines and Social Responsibility measures. The decision was strengthened by Crouch's resignation from the Government over concerns regarding implementation of reduced stakes for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals. Crouch said:

*"It was important that the decision [to make changes to the Gaming Machines and Social Responsibility Measures] was evidence-based, which is why the review took as long as it did. It enabled us to discuss the issue with many stakeholders, look through all the evidence and came to a firm policy conclusion. The team at DCMS were absolutely brilliant and this award is really theirs."*



Tracey Crouch MP receiving the award for Best Use of Evidence at the 2018 Political Studies Association awards. Photo: PSA



**Julia Rampen** @JuliaRampenMM . Nov 27, 2018  
Best use of evidence #PSAAwards going to Tracey Crouch, who resigned over FOBTs. Any why her campaign matters [newstatesman.com/2017/10/wecan...](http://newstatesman.com/2017/10/wecan...)

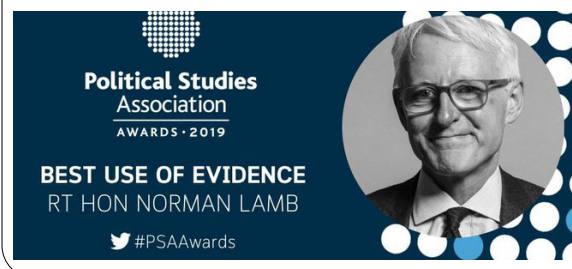


**Annette Boaz** @AnnetteBoaz . Jul 18, 2019  
Prizes really important for recognising excellence @TransformUre Nominations open for a @PolStudiesAssoc use of evidence prize supported by @A4UEvidence



The winner of the Best Use of Evidence Award 2019 is MP Norman Lamb, who was nominated for his sustained campaign for evidence-based policy on drug usage in the UK. He has been an effective advocate for science and research including sponsoring the first ever Evidence Week in Parliament in 2018 and chairing the Commons Science and Technology Select Committee.

**The Political Studies Association** @PolStudiesAssoc . Nov 12, 2019  
The @PolStudiesAssoc is delighted to announce @normanlamb as the recipient of our 2019 Best Use of Evidence Award. #PSAAwards



The need for greater transparency on the use of evidence by government, highlighted in the Evidence Transparency Framework and the subsequent 'spot check' carried out by Sense about Science with our support, was picked up by others. John Manzoni (Chief Exec of Civil Service and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary) quoted from the Framework in his keynote at Reform's 2017 conference 'Big Data in government: challenges and opportunities' saying "Transparency is part of this – transparency of evidence, 'showing your working', and opening up to greater scrutiny the data and analysis on which we base policy decisions."

- **Increased awareness of the value of evidence within charities and public sector**

We have helped to encourage a more thoughtful and sophisticated approach to evidence through a variety of activities with voluntary and public sector organisations.

Through our strategic relationship with Wales Council for Voluntary Action we delivered training for staff based on needs identified in a staff survey, and a webinar for WCVA members. We also delivered a webinar for participants of Nesta's Inclusive Economy Partnership programme and an Evidence Masterclass for social entrepreneurs with ShareLab Scotland.



**Research Oxford** @researchoxford1 . Dec 5, 2018  
Thanks to @ETaylorCollins @A4UEvidence @WCfPP & the other participants for an excellent #EvidenceMatters webinar today. Would be interested in more opportunities of this type to share & learn as part of the research & evaluation community



**Carolyn Parry FRSA RCDP** @CareerAlchemist . Aug 2, 2018  
@A4UEvidence Thanks Helen for a really useful session with @nesta\_uk this morning. Really helpful.

We have worked with Volunteer Now and delivered two Evidence Masterclasses for third sector organisations in Northern Ireland, with very positive feedback.



**Martin Quinn** @MartinQuinn\_79 . May 23, 2019  
Thanks to @chhkincaid and @A4UEvidence for the excellent #evidence masterclass today. Lots of great information and tips to take away @SuppCommunities

In our publication [Evidence for Good](#) we provided seven case studies on how evidence has been used by charities in ways other than to demonstrate impact to inspire charities to think about evidence more broadly. One area where charities can use evidence is in campaigning, and we are supporting the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) with a research project on this, due for publication later this year. We encourage charities to use or commission evidence reviews when possible, and we conducted a rapid evidence assessment on youth mentoring for One Million Mentors.



**Elizabeth Chamberlain** @ncvoliz . Aug 30, 2018  
How do charities make use of evidence in their work? Great report 'Evidence for Good' by the @A4UEvidence alliance [4usefulevidence.org/publication/ev...](http://4usefulevidence.org/publication/ev...) And now we will be working with them to look specifically at how charities use evidence in campaigning: [blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2018/08/28/evi..](http://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2018/08/28/evi..)

We gave talks at conferences including two organised by our evidence champions in the Advice Services Alliance, and the National Fire Chiefs Council.



**Advice Services Alliance** @AdviceSAlliance . Mar 25, 2019  
An excellent talk from 'evidence' expert Jonathan Breckon at our Conference on research in the #advice sector. Other speech videos available here: [tinyurl.com/yc4wanc](http://tinyurl.com/yc4wanc) #MondayMotivation

*"Thanks to all the team for a really useful session and for the work you are doing to support the wider adoption of evidence. It genuinely helps to have you and the A4UE expertise behind us."*

*Evidence Champion, National Fire Chiefs Council*

- **Recognition of the role of professional bodies in mobilising evidence**

Obtaining a commitment to evidence from 27 prestigious professional bodies at an event chaired by Lord Gus O'Donnell was a significant step toward creating a culture where evidence use is a professional norm. The signing of the [Evidence Declaration](#) gained coverage in Civil Service World, Schools Week, Policing Professional and Ambulance Today. A year later we asked each signatory body to let us know how they had been upholding the pledge, and their responses led to the report '[Bodies of Evidence](#)' which contains examples from 12 signatories of the Declaration, and our own recommendations to all professional organisations.



Left to right (top): Lord Gus O'Donnell, Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Jonathan Breckon (bottom): Chief Constable Ian Hopkins, Non Executive Director of the College of Policing, Professor Carrie MacEwen, Chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Professor Dame Alison Peacock, CEO, Chartered College of Teaching.



**Royal College of Anaesthetists @RCoANews** . Sep 4, 2019  
 We support this document & @A4UEvidence for championing research within health, education & policing organisations. We're pleased today's report highlights our Guidelines for the Provision of Anaesthetic Services [bit.ly/RCoAGPAS](https://bit.ly/RCoAGPAS) which form the basis of recommendations

*"[We are] in an era when there is a regrettable anti-science trend in aspects of social media and some parts of traditional media, as well as in some political discourse. We believe it is particularly important that professional societies, such as the medical royal colleges and other learned societies, promote and defend the primacy of empiricism, scientific methodology, and the crucial importance of evidence-based decision-making."*

*Ian Wylie, former Chief Executive of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists*

**Aim: Ensure that our target audience has more knowledge of what makes good evidence, when and how to use it, and the skills and confidence required to put this knowledge into practice.**

- **Increased policymakers' and practitioners' knowledge of how to find and appraise evidence**

To assess our training programme, we used surveys to try to explore what the sessions meant for participants knowledge and understanding of evidence – although we did not always have good data on their knowledge before participation.

Feedback from 120 participants of Civil Service Learning CSL Evaluation Data October 2016–2019 showed that:

- 82% of respondents believe the course increased their understanding of evidence-informed decision-making and why research is an essential part of it
- 83% of respondents believe the course improved their knowledge of different frameworks and techniques used to weigh different sources of evidence



*"This course has already positively impacted the way in which I have approached certain activities & tasks – taking time to weigh up the evidence & assess the risks. Very good tutors with good working knowledge to bring the session to life. Nice small group allowing everyone to interact & share experiences & thought processes. Really engaging session."*

*Civil Servant working on EU Exit, July, 2018*

*"I feel more confident to question the evidence presented"*

*Participant Evidence Masterclass Northern Ireland Third Sector, May 2019*



There is growing demand for our Evidence Masterclass content (and adaptations of it) from civil servants, local government, and charities, and increasing interest in embedding this in longer term training programmes, such as Civil Service Learning's Policy Apprenticeship programme. This is encouraging as we know that standalone training days will have limited effect when delivered in isolation.

## • Support for academic-policy learning

Many of our activities stimulate demand for useful evidence, but we also encourage those on the supply side to take a proactive, collaborative and pragmatic approach to influencing policy. One of our most popular blogs last year was Kuranda Morgan's blog [Dissemination is Dead, so Do This Instead](#) with 1500 views. In the Science of Using Science Learning pilot which we developed with UCL Public Policy, 20 academics from a range of disciplines took part in eight x 2 hour sessions over eight months. Formal feedback was obtained from participants at the mid-point and end of the survey. Of those that responded, 80% stated that they had found the content very useful or somewhat useful. The [Learning Report](#) describes the programme that was delivered, provides a summary of the feedback received from the participants, and puts forward key insight and recommendations.

The benefits of the approach included an improved awareness of stakeholder incentives and proactive relationship building, and improved understanding of the policy making context. We learned that future courses could be improved with the inclusion of more in-depth and specific case studies, greater tailoring to participants' subjects, experience and needs, and by becoming embedded in broader organisational systems. Modules included 'understanding policy stakeholders' and 'communicating evidence'.

*"I definitely got a better understanding of civil servants and how they move around"*

*"The programme has given me... more clarity about the needs of policy makers."*

*Participants on the course*

The new Bazalgette Professorship developed with the Faculty of Public Health, aims to shine a light on the work of academics who have made major contributions to public health policy and/or practice, for the benefit of UK population health. The winner, professor Ian Roberts, gave a fascinating and inspiring inaugural lecture, featured in [the Lancet](#).

Prof Ian Roberts said:

*"Every year, hundreds of thousands of people around the world die from acute severe bleeding including women with post-partum haemorrhage and major trauma victims. A single injection of this inexpensive drug – tranexamic acid – could save over a hundred thousand lives each year. That's why I want to use my year as FPH's Bazalgette Professor to increase access to tranexamic acid for those who need it. No one should bleed to death for want of a drug that costs a few pounds."*



*Prof Roberts demonstrating how blood clots work.*

- **Tailored, practical resources available to wider audiences**

Wherever possible, our reports and resources are published under a creative commons licence and we encourage others to share, build upon and adapt them. Our materials have been included in the "Evaluation Process" section of Data Cymru's new evaluation guidance website and the William T. Grant Foundation syllabi, amongst others (see Annex B).

Resources we had previously developed have been adapted and translated for specific audiences. We developed two different adaptations of our Using Research Evidence Practice Guide:

- '[Using Evidence in Scrutiny: A practice guide for local government scrutiny](#)', with Centre for Public Scrutiny and Solace, and
- '[Research in the Humanitarian Sector: A practice guide](#)', with Evidence Aid and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which was translated into French and Spanish, to reach an even wider audience.



Launch of Practice Guide in Parliament



**Juliet Whitworth** @juliet\_w  
Excellent new guide on using evidence in scrutiny by @CfPScrutiny. Allies to every day decision making too. [cfps.org/uk/using-evidence...](https://cfps.org/uk/using-evidence...) #data



**Luke Stannard** @luketstannard . Oct 24, 2018  
The 'Research Evidence in the Humanitarian Sector: A Practice Guide' - is useful, timely and not advocating 'replacing professional judgement but increasing evidence use in humanitarian action [evidenceaid.org/wp-content/upl...](https://evidenceaid.org/wp-content/upl...) @nesta\_uk @A4UEvidence @SaveUKNews

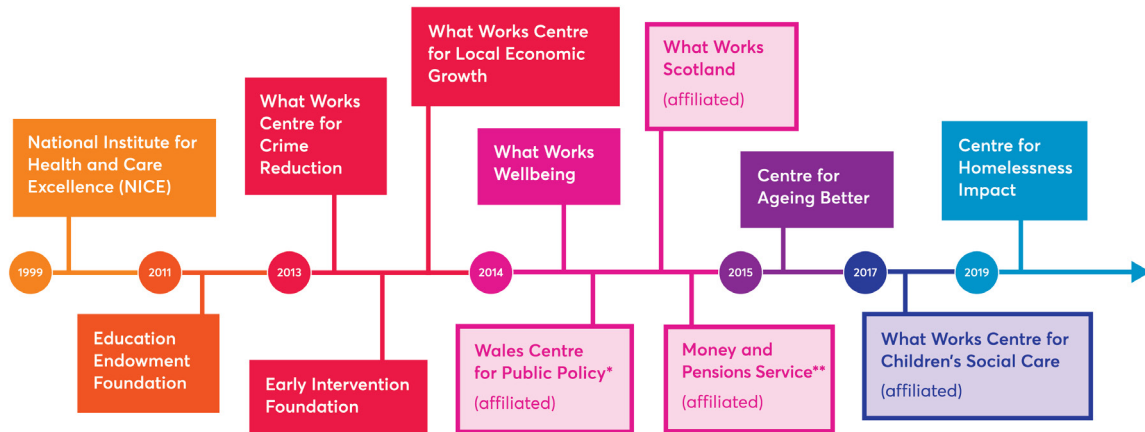
*"Everyone I share it with (including when teaching) thinks it is excellent from students to well trained researchers! We are now progressing with a Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Research Network research methods book and will use your publication as one of the really good resources where appropriate. Thank you for such a useful usable resource!"*

*Head of Global Disaster Risk Reduction, Public Health England*

## Aim: Promote access to high quality, easy to use evidence.

### • A flourishing UK What Works movement

We played a key role in supporting the growth of the What Works movement and there are now 12 What Works Centres (WWC) with more in development.



\* Formerly Public Policy Institute for Wales \*\* Formerly Money Advice Service

We led the incubation of the Department for Education funded What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC). To date it has research projects live in over 100 local authorities and published an online Evidence Store with evidence of the effectiveness and strength of evidence of 16 interventions. In a letter to the Centre's Founding Chair, and Nesta's CEO, Nadhim Zahawi MP, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, wrote to say how impressed he was with achievements of WWCSC to date:

*"The Centre has clearly achieved a great deal in a very short space of time and has now reached a point in its development where it has the challenging and engaging leadership necessary to continue to build the organisation successfully. It has established credibility amongst the sector through comprehensive engagement with local authorities and has a bold and ambitious vision to improve the evidence base in children's social care."*

*Parliamentary Under Secretary Nadhim Zahawi MP, July 2019*

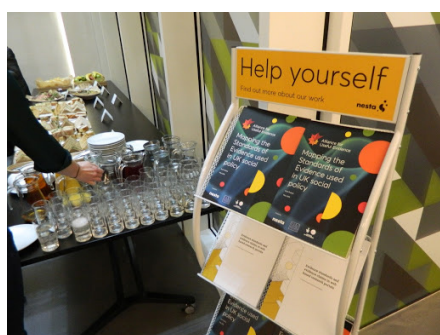
We have advised the formation of new centres including TASO, Centre for Homelessness Impact, and the Legal Education Foundation, and held a networking event for existing WWCs to come together with aspiring evidence intermediaries.

Our voice was among calls for a WWC for Northern Ireland following the Alliance event earlier that year. Northern Ireland Assembly's Finance Committee agreed in September 2016 to seek further information from the Cabinet Office "to ascertain the provision of funding by Central Government to the currently established 'What Works' Centres in Great Britain and the opportunities there may be for Northern Ireland from adopting this approach" following the Alliance event earlier that year. Progress has currently stalled on this as parliament in NI is currently dissolved.

- **Easier navigation of Standards of Evidence and steps towards consolidation**

By convening providers of Standards of Evidence and mapping the 18 (and counting) existing standards and their uses, we have brought clarity to this growing field and formed a community around it. We inspired and published a very considered approach to the problem of multiple standards from Jim Vine ([Standardising the Standards: The Case for Shared Standards in the Evidence Sector](#)).

We have also played a significant role in shaping the OECD's forthcoming 'Principles and standards for the good governance of evidence in social policy'. However, our conviction that evidence users would benefit from the consolidation of the existing standards – ideally creating one agreed "Standard" – will need further investment of time and goodwill to pursue.



Standards of Evidence workshop at Nesta, November 2018

*"I've just read your report Mapping the Standards of Evidence used in UK social policy and it was so helpful to see it all in one place with the key challenges / proposed ways forward, thank you. I've worked in charity evaluation for many years (CYP sector), and I've certainly found it an area of confusion and uncertainty."*

*Research, Evaluation and Participation Manager, children's NGO*

- **Promoting forums for public engagement with evidence**

Improving access to evidence for communities and civil society is something we saw as key to a democratic evidence movement. Our report '[Evidence vs Democracy](#)' has been timely – and aimed to take a critical look at the evidence movement and how we might do more to engage with citizens. The report was used by Nesta colleagues to call for a Citizen's Assembly in Scotland, and has sparked conversations with engagement experts like Involve, the public participation charity, as well the former Scottish What Works Centre.

Anna Hopkins was invited to speak in Belfast by Community Foundation Northern Ireland. The Foundation are hoping to make mini-publics – as a platform for helping citizens engage with evidence – part of their strategy. The report is referenced by the Extinction Rebellion movement in their calls for a citizen's assembly on climate and ecological justice. Anecdotes told us that the report has reached policy makers as far as Singapore. And, some organisations told us that they would change the way they approached evidence-informed public engagement.

*"We are going to reference [Evidence vs Democracy] and use your report as part of the training we run called "Raising the Citizens Voice". In addition you make some very useful insights into evidence management that we will also now use as part of our practice."*

*DemocracyCo*



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- **Growing interest in, and funding for, research on research**

Our 2016 Science of Using Science project report is frequently cited in the ongoing conversations on the future of research on research and we were delighted to see the announcement last year of a Wellcome Trust fund for Research on Research (see [blog](#)). The need for more investment and attention in this area was one of the key takeaways of the What Works Next roundtable that we hosted with the editors of What Works Now in June 2019. The Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (Cedil) funding on enhancing the use and usefulness of evaluation findings is another example. As with so many of these impacts (and as we reflect in our Theory of Change), by no means do we claim sole credit for this, but we have been part of a push for more research on research. At the [What Works Next? roundtable event](#) we hosted in June 2019, there were calls for greater development of research on research as a field of enquiry, and for more leaders in the field, such as the Alliance, to push the agenda on this.

*"We are all working with a fairly limited evidence-base on the use of evidence itself. This is slowly starting to change, and publications such as The Science of Using Science and What Works Now? Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice are an important step forward."*

*Dr Jo Casebourne, Chief Executive of Early Intervention Foundation, in her recent blog [What works in getting evidence used?](#)*

- **Inspired international evidence initiatives**

We've received enquiries from Czech Republic and Brazil about setting up similar initiatives, and requests to translate and adapt our publications. The Brazilian Aliança pela Políticas baseadas em Evidências (APBE), or Alliance for Evidence Based Policy will promote the qualified and systematic use of research evidence in the design and implementation of public policy in Brazil through advocacy, capacity building, knowledge and networks. 'Using Research Evidence – A Practice Guide', and 'Using Evidence – What Works' have been used in South African government training, and in the Twende Mbele Programme (the African M&E Partnership). The Human Social Science Research Council in South Africa referenced SoUS in its Research Use and Impact Assessment (RIA) in August, 2019.

*"It was your work that inspired us to create the Brazilian Aliança pela Políticas baseadas em Evidências [...] your motto of championing the smart use of evidence in decision making has never been so important [in Brazil] we're using your conceptual framework to monitor and support more effective use of evidence in Brazil and to create an influential network of Evidence Champions"*

*Rafael Ribeiro and Flavio Malagutti, Co-founders of Brazilian Aliança pela Políticas baseadas em Evidências*

# Our learning and insights

We're proud of all we've achieved over the past three years, and the part we have played in shaping a vibrant evidence ecosystem. As our funding comes to an end, these are our observations and reflections; where we're seeing the greatest demand for evidence and how we - and intermediaries like ourselves - can be most effective in meeting that demand. These are the 'lessons' we intend to learn from as we enter the next phase.

## **We are not alone - the importance of cohesion and playing our part**

The UK has strength in its diverse ecosystem (or 'evidence swamp' as others have vividly described it!). With that though comes the potential to trip over ourselves - for example on multiple standards of evidence, or what works centres with overlapping focuses. In a crowded space, it's increasingly important to recognise the role we play and how that fits into the bigger picture. It's also vital to work with others - both individuals and organisations - to have greater impact and avoid duplication. A recent partnership with NCVO, for example, allowed us to combine our expertise in a forthcoming report on the use of evidence in charity campaigning. Working with Professor Jonathan Shepherd (Cardiff University and Royal College of Surgeons) gave us credibility with the leaders of professional bodies who signed the [Declaration on Evidence](#), and ensured that the tone and style of '[Bodies of Evidence](#)' was appropriate to that audience. The [Evidence Quarter](#) forming in 2020 is an attempt to be even more joined up and tackle complex problems together.

## **The need for a clear identity: what we do and don't do**

Playing our part requires us to understand what we can and can't do, and to communicate that clearly. It can be tempting to try to do it all, particularly when there is demand, and we want to help, but we found that this can lead to confusion on the outside and lack of direction internally. For example, working with charities through our strategic relationships and evidence champions projects, we found that the greatest demand for support was around monitoring and evaluation whereas our 'USP' is actually in mechanisms that support the use of evidence. At times this led to us feeling we were spreading ourselves too thinly, trying to develop expertise in new areas (where others are already operating) and not achieving what we'd set out to do. Instead we now try to find the happy medium, recognising that the demand for M&E support isn't go to go away, but trying to signpost and guide organisations which need support in these areas, rather than filling that gap ourselves.

## **Honing in on our strength: enabling others**

Having the confidence to say what we don't do allows us to focus on where we have expertise. We believe there has and continues to be a need for a think-tank role in the evidence informed decision making sector, which we help to fill. A key part of our toolbox has been codifying knowledge in resources which combine rigorous research with readability and actionable insights. Our most practical guide ([Using Research Evidence](#)) has proven to be the most popular, and led to the most requests for adaptation and translation. A second key area where we can directly enable others to use evidence, and where demand is increasing steadily, is capability building programmes and training for a wide range of audiences. In the future these dual mechanisms could form an even more central core of the Alliance's work. The third way in which we 'enable' is more indirect, through our support for the development of evidence centres. This is another space where we want to do more, by advising, scoping or incubating new centres and codifying our knowledge of how to set up an evidence intermediary so that others can make use of it.

### **Starting from (and not assuming) the problem**

As we work with diverse audiences and contexts it's important that we always start a new project or partnership by asking and analysing what the needs are, rather than offering ready-made solutions. This is especially true as we increasingly work with devolved forms of government and attempt to shift ownership of the evidence agenda to local decision-making contexts. We need to help establish systems of evidence generation and uptake driven by local realities and needs, which can only be achieved through co-production of services.

### **Practicing what we preach**

Having a theory of change based on evidence has provided a bedrock for the past three years, which has helped to steer us towards the activities that are most likely to be effective, and keep the end goal in sight. We have found that the COM-B framework really resonates with the evidence use sector. Where we have less certainty is knowing what the impact of our own interventions has been. As we reach a point where we need to make decisions about the future it is essential that we apply an evidence-informed lens on ourselves: critically assessing where the need is, what our assumptions are, and thinking up front about how we can trace our contribution to the ecosystem as a whole.



Alliance for  
Useful Evidence

## Annex A: Activities

Below are the activities we said we would deliver compared with what we achieved. During the grant period we reported against these targets in quarterly progress reports, and discussed them at regular Funders Forum meetings, attended by a representative of each partner.

### Strategic relationships

Activity	Targets	Achievements
Strategic support to organisations to become more evidence based, with learning that can be shared.	6 strategic relationships.  6 case studies (which may come from other activities).	We developed 6 strategic relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer Now</li> <li>• Wales Council for Voluntary Action</li> <li>• 1Million Mentors</li> <li>• Aesop</li> <li>• Centre for Homelessness Impact</li> <li>• Money Advice Service</li> </ul> <p>We published 19 case studies (on our <a href="#">website</a>, in <a href="#">Evidence for Good</a> and in <a href="#">Evidence Use in Mini Publics</a>).</p>

### Evidence prizes

Activity	Targets	Achievements
Rewarding and highlighting successful use of evidence through prizes, to raise awareness, and increase other decision-makers' motivation to use evidence.	1 prize per year with Political Studies Association (PSA).  Scoping of new prizes in voluntary and public sector.	We ran 1 prize per year in partnership with PSA, for Best Use of Evidence by a politician or elected official (2016, 2017, 2018).  We ran 2 new prizes in partnership: Wales Social Research Association's Impact Award (2017) and the Faculty of Public Health's Bazalgette Professorship (2019).

### Evidence Champions

Activity	Targets	Achievements
Growing a network of individuals we can support to become champions for evidence within their organisations.	20 Evidence Champions.  10 public pledges to use of evidence (which may come from other activities).	We engaged 20 Evidence Champions over the course of the project and held 4 workshops for them.  We secured public commitments to evidence from 27 leaders of professional bodies who signed the <a href="#">Declaration on Evidence</a> .

## Membership of the network

### Activity

Manage and develop a diverse network of allies. Develop the 'offer' to allies.

### Targets

Greater use of online platforms to share evidence.

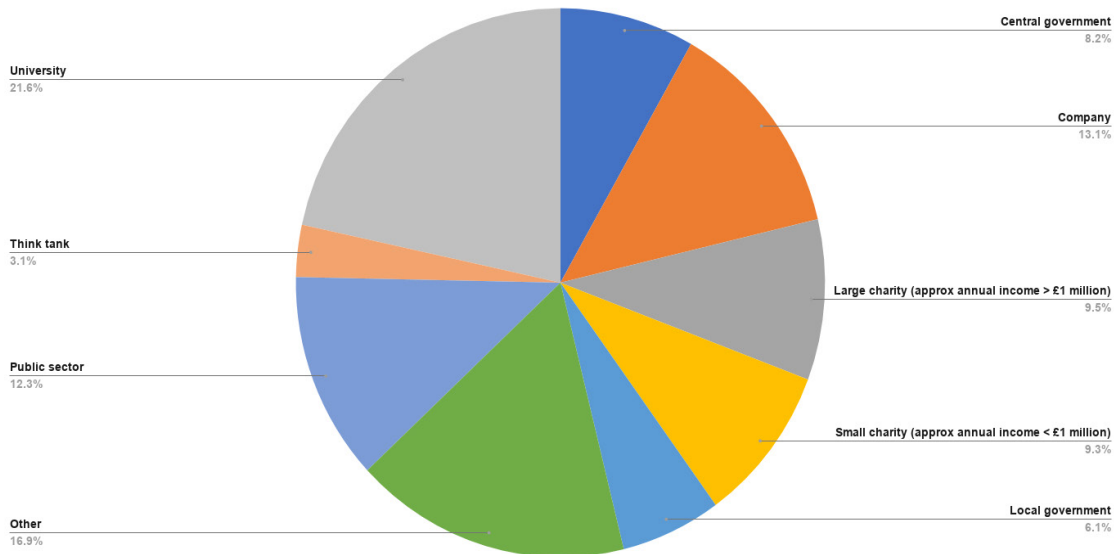
50% increase in network (from 2875 July 2016).

Network drive, to include a focus on local government.

### Achievements

We published 60 blogs on our website from Alliance team and guest authors. We sent 15 e-newsletters to our member list. We increased our Twitter followers from 3683 to 5600 (52%). We redesigned and relaunched our website in January 2018 (including a new infographic of our network). We increased our network from 2875 to 4595 (60%). 6.1% are from local government see figure.

Organisations in Alliance network



## High level meetings

### Activity

Convening high level 'thought leadership' discussions/meetings.

### Targets

3 tightly focussed meetings with a range of organisations.

### Achievements

We held 7 high level meetings on 4 topics:

Standards of Evidence: convened a group of leaders from organisations which produce evidence standards 4 times from 2016 - 2018.

Professional bodies' use of evidence: 27 heads of professional colleges and faculties convened at Royal Society in November 2017, organised with Professor Jonathan Shepherd.

The Scottish approach to evidence: the Scottish Evidence Summit convened 30 senior representatives from health, social care, education, policing and housing in January 2018, in partnership with Iriss.

What Works Next?: a roundtable meeting held in June 2019 for authors and key researchers/thinkers on What Works, in partnership with the editors of What Works Now?

## Reports

### Activity

Reports on 'thought leadership' topics with associated research briefs.

### Targets

6 publications over 3 years.

### Achievements

We led or co-produced 10 publications:

6 Alliance-led reports:

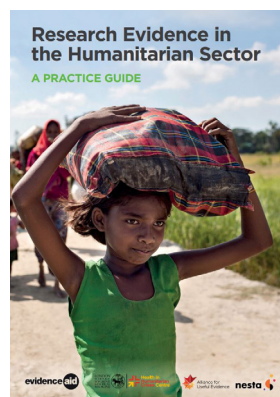
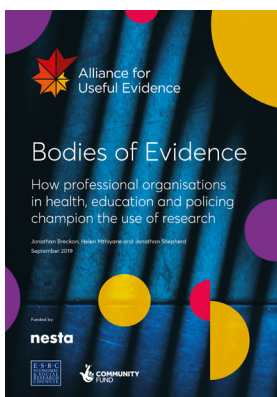
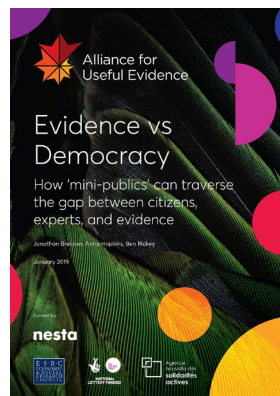
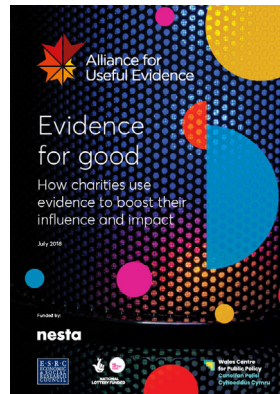
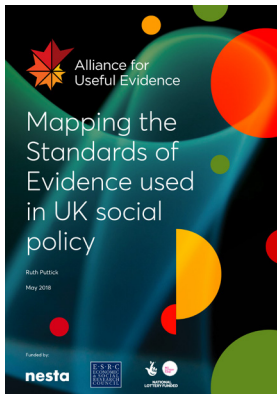
- *Bodies of Evidence: How professional organisations in health, education and policing champion the use of research*
- *Evidence vs Democracy: How 'mini-publics' can traverse the gap between citizens, experts, and evidence (plus the accompanying case study series: Evidence Use in Mini Publics)*
- *Evidence for Good: How charities use evidence to boost their influence and impact (with Wales Centre for Public Policy)*
- *Mapping the Standards of Evidence Used in UK Social Policy*
- *Delivering change, defining outcomes and capturing evidence: What can we learn across the UK?*
- *The Scottish approach to evidence: A discussion paper (with Carnegie UK Trust)*

2 adaptations of Using Research Evidence: A Practice Guide (2016) for new audiences:

- *Research Evidence in the Humanitarian Sector* (with Evidence Aid and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)
- *Using Evidence in Scrutiny: A Practice Guide for Local Government* (with the Centre for Public Scrutiny and SOLACE)

2 Nesta publications (with sections by the Alliance):

- *Public Value: How can it be measured, managed and grown?*
- *A Compendium of Innovation Methods*



## High quality, and actionable evidence

Activity	Targets	Achievements
Supporting and promoting high quality, and actionable evidence	<p>Provide development services and advice to What Works Centres (WWCs).</p> <p>Advise and support a range of organisations interested in using evidence.</p>	<p>We led the consortium incubating What Works for Children's Social Care (funded by the Department for Education).</p> <p>We provided formal and informal advice to other WWCs and evidence intermediaries including the Centre for Homelessness Impact, the Legal Education Foundation and Transforming Access in Student Education (TASO).</p> <p>We held a networking workshop for WWCs and 'What Works wannabees' in 2017, with the What Works Network.</p> <p>We presented on, and provided advice on the What Works movement around the UK and internationally (inc Canada, France and Australia<sup>1</sup>). We translated into English Agence nouvelle des solidarités actives' Learning from the British What Works Centres: What Lessons for Evidence-Based Policy in France?</p> <p>Jonathan Breckon provided advice on Early Intervention Foundation's '10 Steps for Evaluation Success'.</p> <p>Jonathan Breckon co-authored the chapter Using evidence in the UK in the book 'What Works Now?' (Policy Press, 2019).</p>

## Training and Professional Development

Activity	Targets	Achievements
<p>Helping decision-makers learn and develop skills around evidence use.</p> <p>Helping researchers develop knowledge and skills for getting research used by decision-makers.</p>	<p>20 Evidence Masterclasses over three years.</p> <p>Strategy and plan for follow-up with masterclass participants. Incorporating learning from Science of Using Science project.</p>	<p>We delivered 50 Evidence Masterclasses, to local and national government, public sector and charities, across the UK.</p> <p>We developed a pricing model so that Masterclasses are now sustainably funded and contribute income to core A4UE activities.</p> <p>We used the Science of Using Science project findings to develop and deliver a pilot programme with UCL Public Policy on academic: policy engagement, 'The Science of Using Science Learning'.</p>

## Events

### Activity

Networking and learning events to facilitate interaction within our network and increase awareness of and understanding of relevant topics.

### Targets

As part of all activities above, deliver 30 events, including roundtables, seminars, panel events and conferences.

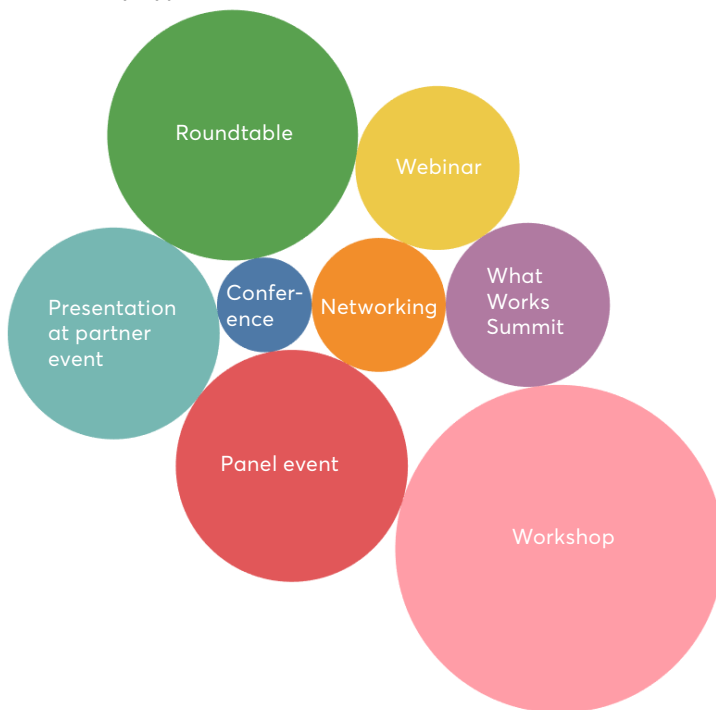
2 per nation per year, with attention to parts of England outside London.

### Achievements

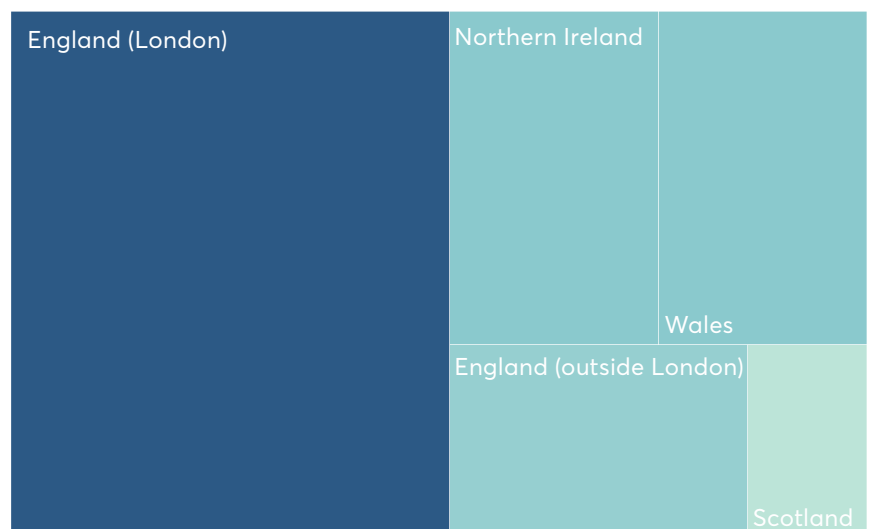
We delivered 39 events over three years, including workshops, panel events and webinars (see graphics below for spread by country, and event type, and Annex B for list of all events):

England - London (20)  
 England - outside London (5)  
 Scotland (2)  
 Wales (6)  
 Northern Ireland (6)

### Events by type



### Events by location





## Annex B: References, press coverage, guests blogs

<b>Alliance activity</b>	<b>How it was reported/shared</b>
<i>The Bazalgette Professorship</i>	Article ' <a href="#">Offline: A story of discrimination against women</a> ' in The Lancet
<i>Bodies of Evidence</i>	Guest blog ' <a href="#">How do professional bodies champion research?</a> ' by Helen Mthiyane for the Chartered College of Teaching
Declaration on Evidence	Article ' <a href="#">Ex cab sec Gus O'Donnell laments difficulty of evidence-based policymaking</a> ' in Civil Service World
Declaration on Evidence	Article in <a href="#">Police Professional</a> (log in required)
Declaration on Evidence	Article ' <a href="#">College of Teaching signs pledge to use evidence-based practice</a> ' in Schools Week
Declaration on Evidence	Article in Ambulance Today (Edition no longer available online)
Declaration on Evidence	Joint supporting statement ' <a href="#">The position of medical royal colleges on the role of evidence</a> ' published by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges
<i>Evidence for Good</i>	Guest blog ' <a href="#">Measuring the difference you make</a> ' by Emma Taylor-Collins for Arts Professional website
<i>Evidence for Good</i>	Article ' <a href="#">Evidence beyond impact</a> ' by Emma Taylor-Collins part of "Supporting Evidence-Informed Policymaking and Service Delivery in Canada's Non-Profit Sector" for online journal The Philanthropist
<i>Evidence for Good</i>	Inclusion in <a href="#">Data Cymru's guide to evaluation</a>
Evidence Masterclass	Inclusion in <a href="#">William T. Grant Foundation teaching and learning syllabi</a>
Evidence Transparency Framework*	' <a href="#">Transparency and evidence - show your workings</a> ' by David Halpern (What Works National Adviser) for Civil Service quarterly
<i>Evidence vs. Democracy</i>	Referenced in 'New development: What works now? Continuity and change in the use of evidence to improve public policy and service delivery' article for <a href="#">Public Money and Management</a> , Sandra Nutley, Annette Boaz, Huw Davies and Alec Fraser
<i>Evidence vs. Democracy</i>	Report listed as a resource on <a href="#">Extinction Rebellion's website</a>
The Science of Using Science project*	' <a href="#">Evidence-informed policy: how to bridge the academic-policymaker divide</a> ' by WCPP's Sarah Quarmby for Apolitical
The Science of Using Science Learning	Guest blog ' <a href="#">Dissemination is Dead, so Do This Instead</a> ' by Kuranda Morgan for UCL Public Policy

Using Evidence: What Works?*	Referenced in ' <a href="#">Ending homelessness faster by focusing on "what works"</a> ' business case and feasibility study for Centre for Homelessness Impact
Using Research Evidence: A Practice Guide*	Inclusion in Co-production Network for Wales' <a href="#">co-production knowledge base</a>
Using Research Evidence: A Practice Guide*	Inclusion in <a href="#">Data Cymru's guide to evaluation</a>
Using Research Evidence: A Practice Guide*	Guide is <a href="#">included</a> in <a href="#">Centre for Youth Impact's Resource Hub</a>
General	Jonathn Breckon contributor/adviser to " <a href="#">Committing to Action Next Steps for Canada's Evidence Ecosystem</a> "
General	Article ' <a href="#">Government "must up its game" on evidence-based policymaking</a> ' quoting Jonathan Breckon in Civil Service World giving evidence to House of Lords Constitution Committee

\* activities delivered under previous grant period but still being shared/cited

## Annex C: List of events (to July 2019)

<b>Event</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b> (for webinar, location of majority of audience)
Evidence Works 2016: A Global Forum For Government	Conference	2016	England (London)
Royal Statistical Society event	Presentation at partner event	2016	England (London)
Driving social change: how can a longitudinal perspective help the third sector?	Roundtable	2016	England (London)
Solace annual conference	Workshop	2016	England (outside London)
Exploring the Scottish Model of Evidence	Roundtable	2016	Scotland
What Works Network Open Day	Networking	2017	England (London)
Evidence Declaration for Professional Bodies	Roundtable	2017	England (London)
Evidence Champions Networking and Learning Workshop	Workshop	2017	England (outside London)
How can government make the best use of evidence?	Panel event	2017	Northern Ireland
Post-Truth: What is it and what can we do about it? (with Royal Statistical Society)	Panel event	2017	Wales
Delivering change, defining outcomes and capturing evidence – What can we learn from how we measure success and achieve outcomes across the UK?	Roundtable	2017	Wales
Launch of Research in Humanitarian Sector with Evidence Aid, at Save the Children.	Panel event	2018	England (London)
Nesta Sparks: Using Evidence for Smarter Decision Making	Panel event	2018	England (London)
Advice Services Alliance conference: What's the problem? Measuring Outcomes in the Advice Sector	Presentation at partner event	2018	England (London)
Evidence Week launch	Presentation at partner event	2018	England (London)
Launch of Research in Humanitarian Sector with Evidence Aid, at the Houses of Parliament	Roundtable	2018	England (London)

<b>Event</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b> (for webinar, location of majority of audience)
Standards of Evidence: How do we use them? Can we improve them?	Workshop	2018	England (London)
CHI workshop on Standards of Evidence	Workshop	2018	England (London)
Workshop on charity campaigning with NCVO	Workshop	2018	England (London)
Evidence Champions - influencing and behaviour change workshop	Workshop	2018	England (London)
Nuffield Trust interactive event: Advancing rapid evaluation: challenges and opportunities	Workshop	2018	England (London)
Evidencing your contribution	Workshop	2018	England (London)
Dental Public Health event	Workshop	2018	England (London)
Fire Chief's Council Dwelling Fire Research Conference	Presentation at partner event	2018	England (outside London)
Webinar for Inclusive Economy Partnership grantees	Webinar	2018	England (outside London)
The Challenges of Using Evidence to Inform Policy and Practice	Panel event	2018	Northern Ireland
Scottish Evidence Summit	Roundtable	2018	Scotland
Networking evening with WCPP	Networking	2018	Wales
Evidence Matters webinar	Webinar	2018	Wales
Summit on Youth Homelessness	What Works Summit	2018	Wales
Social Business Wales Conference	Workshop	2018	Wales
Rethinking Public Value	Panel event	2019	England (London)
What Works Next	Roundtable	2019	England (London)
Evidence Champions - evidence matters workshop	Workshop	2019	England (London)
Webinar for Centre for Collective Intelligence Design grantees	Webinar	2019	England (outside London)
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland - Community Voice	Presentation at partner event	2019	Northern Ireland
Youth Mental Health Summit	What Works Summit	2019	Northern Ireland
Early Years Summit	What Works Summit	2019	Northern Ireland
Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (Collaborative Learning Group)	Workshop	2019	Northern Ireland

# Annex D: Theory of Change



## Theory of Change

Ultimate goal

Decision-makers in government and civil society routinely make appropriate use of high quality evidence to inform strategy, policy and practice

Three strands together enabling behaviour change

