Alliance for Useful Evidence Action Plan 2016-19

Aims for 2016-2019

The Alliance's past achievements have been highlighted in the *Alliance for Useful Evidence Progress Report, April 2014 - Feb. 2016*. Our proposal for the next period, 2016-2019, has been developed from reflections on our learning to-date, the recent Systematic Review of research on what actually works in research uptake, and our Theory of Change.

The people and organisations to benefit from our activity are the third sector, key civil servants and parliamentarians, with a particular focus on professionals providing support and services that operate in or impact on all UK jurisdictions.

Our higher aim is for decision makers to consistently use high quality evidence for public good

To achieve this we propose to work towards:

- Encouraging decision-makers to become more **motivated** to use evidence, and increasing their understanding of the benefits and risks of using evidence.
- Ensuring 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.
- Promoting **access** to high quality, easy to use evidence.

Proposed Activities

Below is an outline of some of the activities and outputs that will contribute to achieving these aims. These are:

1. Strategic Partnerships
2. Evidence Champions
3. Celebrating and Amplifying Evidence Use
4. Networking and Convening
5. Promoting High Quality Actionable Evidence
6. Training and Professional Development.

1. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

We will work with a small selection of key bodies across the UK to develop demonstration projects, and to share our learning for the benefit of the whole sector via public reports and events.

This model worked successfully in the first phase, working with: NSPCC; Probation Institute; NICE; and the housing charity HACT. The partners benefited from our advice (see *Alliance for Useful Evidence Progress Report, April 2014 - Feb. 2016* p4-5; and *Year Two Overview 2013-2014* p. 5-7) and - through us - they learnt lessons from the wider social policy sector. They allowed us to work with their Chief Executives, Chairs and senior management teams, which led to senior buy-in for using evidence.

Everybody benefits from these partnerships: we shared what we learnt with our network, through public reports, events and blogs. For instance, our high-level roundtable and research in partnership with NSPCC showed what systems work best for using evidence in protecting children from harm. Similarly, our partnership with NICE showed, the how you can add credibility to research evidence if you supplement it with public engagement through Citizen Councils.

We want to create six strategic partnerships with charities, local authorities, professional bodies or service providers in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England to help improve and increase their use and production of evidence.

Our work with third and public sector bodies will increase partners' access to, and motivation to use, evidence, as we can support organisations practically, illustrating the benefits to using evidence. We will implement some of our training and professional development activity with these strategic partnerships.

2. EVIDENCE CHAMPIONS

Evidence from behavioural insights highlights the importance of the messenger and social networks in any process designed to change attitudes and behaviour - such changes do not just depend on the persuasiveness of the message *per se*. Staff are more likely to listen to peers that they can relate to in their networks. We will create Evidence Champions within our target audience in the 'demand' side of evidence - people running charities and voluntary groups, developing policy, frontline professionals, charitable funders or public service delivery organisations - to help make the case to their colleagues for the need for evidence, and we'd expect these champions to make public pledges to the value to using of evidence. The aim is to foster leadership, within the third sector, policy makers and professionals, around the production and use of evidence, with the aim of making evidence part of people's "day job". We will train these champions at our masterclasses and support them in regular online and yearly face-to-face meetings.

We will stagger the invitations to join as Champions over the three years. The champions will come from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and candidates we have scoped for the first round include Northern Ireland, Scotland and English Police Assistant Chief Constable/Chief Superintendents, charity Chief Executives and teachers.

3. CELEBRATING AND AMPLIFYING EVIDENCE USE

We'd like to scope out with the Political Studies Association and New Philanthropy Capital or others the possibility of an award for the good use of evidence in public policy, and by the third sector. This would not be a prize about measuring impact *per se* - but the best use of learning from diverse and appropriate evidence, such as research from social science, or learning from other organisations and sectors. The story of award winners would be disseminated as case studies, which can be broadcast via podcast as well as in print.

We propose to produce and share case studies from our work with Evidence Champions and Strategic Partnerships where the case studies serve to illustrate the benefits of using evidence: e.g. saving money, or the evidence journey an organisation has taken from not using, or poor use of, evidence to increasing reliance on high quality research.

Outputs from Sections 1-3:

Some of the outputs from this activity include:

- 20 Evidence Champions;
- 10 pledges from leading politicians and third sector leaders and commissioners recorded through the media, or by the Alliance, e.g. on video;
- 6 demonstration projects, and learning shared through reports, blogs, events and case studies;
- 6 case studies posted on the Alliance's website;
- A prize for the third sector, and a public policy prize, developed for organisations or departments for the judicious-use of evidence in decision-making.

4. NETWORKING AND CONVENING

One of our success stories has been the development of a diverse network, which not only spans the globe but also reaches into a myriad of regional and policy networks across the UK. Over 3,000 people have joined the Alliance and we propose in the next phase to grow the networking and exchange of information within our network. We will support people in the Alliance to share learning with each other through face-to-face and online events, training, and social media interactions.

The systematic review of research backs up the value of learning between peers, such as Journal Clubs or other face-to-face contact. More local networking opportunities was the most popular request from our survey of members. So we propose to grow our regional events to broker relationships across the UK and to further develop an evidence eco-system within key geographic locations and networks. We will continue to increase the cross-fertilisation between different sectors within social policy (such as education or crime), and between researchers and those delivering social policy. We will run an event in at least one regional (non-capital city) location per quarter.

For cross UK learning, we propose to continue to provide and refine opportunities like webinars, which support networking where people are unable to physically connect due to geographical, financial and time restrictions.

Networks need focus and facilitation. One of our most successful past activities was convening a diverse group of 'evidence intermediaries' to plan for the 2015 General Election. At a series of three roundtables and a public conference, we brought together the heads of the major players in the social policy evidence arena: Institute for Fiscal Studies, FullFact, Education Media Centre, Wellcome Trust, Nuffield Foundation, UK Statistics Authority, Campaign for Science and Engineering, C4 News Fact Check, BBC statistics unit, columnists from Daily Telegraph and the Guardian, and staff from the Number 10 policy unit.

What worked well was the focus of the imminent Election.   The Alliance acted as a neutral, 'honest broker' to answer questions on how MPs and the media could work together, and avoid duplication, when promoting evidence-use. The Alliance had the credibility and high-level contacts to bring in senior, busy people to share their plans, successes - and even failures. We are uniquely placed to provide oversight of the social policy evidence sector – and to 'join the dots' by seeing how all the players fit together (see our infographic of the UK evidence ecosystem).

We want to grow this convening power. Each year, we will organise a range of tightly focused meetings, to look at one specific challenge – a challenge that cuts across any single sector, and cuts across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The demand for the three topics listed below has come from current partnerships and past activities:

1. **Using evidence for effective charity campaigning**. We are on the steering group for the NCVO Campaigning and Lobbying Standards Group. Our role on that group was to stress the importance of robust facts and evidence for campaigns - to bolster public respect for charities. NCVO have expressed interest in developing a specific group to share how we can do more to improve campaigning on evidence – with a series of roundtables, case studies of good practice, and a networking conference.

2. **What is good enough evidence for policy and practice**? This is a perennial topic for the Alliance. It's the most common question we are asked – particularly by charities and others who do not have large budgets to commission research. We are developing a more formal British Standards Institute 'standards of evidence' in another proposal to BIG. But in addition, there is an important convening role for the Alliance in sharing experiences: particularly between bodies that use frameworks for judging the quality of evidence and evaluations, such as the BOND NGO network, Dartington Social Research Unit, Project Oracle, the What Works Centres, Sutton Trust, Richmond Group of Charities. They are all members of our network, and we propose a series of events and a collection of essays to see if we can be more aligned on evidence standards.

3.   **Professions Summit on evidence in social policy**. We want to build on our 2013 Professions Summit. We propose to run a series of similar events with a smaller group of leaders of professional, standard setting institutions in the UK. Focussing on social policy (social care, education, healthcare, probation, policing etc.), the objectives of these events are to define the specific roles of national

institutions with regard to evidence synthesis and adoption; and to help these institutions express and promote their key roles in this context, including in their training curricula, policy statements and assessment processes. Consistent with the evidence on what works to achieve real change, this will involve time for follow-up and building relationships with specific targeted individuals. We will work closely with Professor Jonathan Shepherd, who has been one of the most influential and active members of the Alliance.

This networking and convening role is vitally important, and that is why we propose a new post of Alliance Networking and Events manager to meet the current high demand, including more meetings in England outside London (see lessons from Progress Report p21).

Outputs:

- Increase our network by 50% by the end of the next phase of the project (1,342): resulting in 4,000 people. We will target growth in the voluntary and community sectors and work with professional and public service delivery associations to deepen network membership in these constituencies;
- Tightly focused meetings with professional bodies, members that use quality standards and the voluntary and community sector. Over the three years, cover the three topics listed above;
- 10 learning or networking events per year (which includes events in activities 1-3);
- Joint publications and briefings with the voluntary and community sector and professional summit partners;
- Greater use of popular online platforms to share and promote the effective use of evidence.

5. PROMOTING HIGH QUALITY, ACTIONABLE EVIDENCE

To promote access to evidence, by decision-makers, we know that broadcasting and simply disseminating learning isn't effective. The forthcoming publication of our systematic review, *The Science of Using Science Knowledge*[1], provides key insights into what works in terms of promoting research uptake. After publication of this review, in April 2016, considerable effort will be required to cascade and disseminate the learning in this review. The Alliance, as an instigator of this review and network, is ideally placed to implement this, through its networking, convening and partnership activities. We will embed some of the key messages from the what actually works research in our future masterclasses.

To help evidence be used in practice and policy, we will continue to provide advice and support for 'what works' initiatives, which develop and disseminate high quality, actionable evidence.

6. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our approach to helping decision-makers learn and develop is based on the evidence of how adults learn. For instance, immersive engagement with complexity, and learning through peers and networks

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[1] *The Science of Using Science Knowledge* by Laurenz Langer, Janice Tripney and David Gough, of the EPPI-Centre, University College London.

are shown to be effective (see for example, *Understanding What Enables High Quality Professional Learning*, Pearson/CUREE, 2012).

We will grow our Evidence Masterclasses outside of London with third-party umbrella bodies. Our partners will include current ones (ACEVO, ACOSVO, WCVA, NICVA and SOLACE) and new ones such as the Small Charity Coalition, the Commissioning Academy, Disability Action[2] and The ALLIANCE. A recent survey of 1,000 charities by New Philanthropy Capital indicates that many in the charitable sector need more support to generate the type of evidence that they need and their funders require. Of those surveyed, 78% believed that measuring impact makes organisations more effective. Yet only 25% had been able to use evaluation to improve services. The single biggest barrier to better impact measurement indicated was a lack of skills and expertise (61%).

We know that training is more effective when follow-up is included. We propose in this phase to design appropriate follow-up for all our masterclasses. Tools might include online training and materials, and webinars. Our webinars in 2015 reached geographically diverse audiences including the Scottish Isles and rural villages in Northern Ireland. We want to build on this success. We will explore developing modular on-line training, for example with +Acumen, blended with our face-to-face training. The course and online resources will not, however, be 'tech-led' but be based on the evidence of 'what works' in digital learning.[3] To lead this scoping, planning and development we propose to employ a Learning Manager.

Outputs:

- 20 masterclasses over three years;
- A strategy and plan for effective follow-up for masterclass participants, and masterclass sustainability;
- Scoping and, if appropriate, development of on-line training and greater use of social media.

Sustainability

In the early years of the Alliance, the staff team has been focussing on delivering activities and monitoring outputs and impact, for themselves and funders, but has not had the time to develop a sustainability plan. We propose in this three-year funding period to plan for the project's sustainability, for example considering income-generating activities and how they can be developed. The aim of this work is to decrease our reliance on grant funding, from 2019-20.

The Alliance Team
March, 2016

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[2] Disability Action is a membership organisation focused on disability issues in Northern Ireland

[3] e.g. *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies; Learning Online: What Research Tells Us About Whether, When and How* Barbara Means et al, 2014; and for some good 'craft knowledge' http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.co.uk.