Title: Learning from research; systematic reviews for informing policy decisions

Date and location: October 23rd 2013, Nesta, 1 Plough Place, EC4A 1DE

Agenda:

12.00 Registration and refreshments
12.20 Welcome: Jonathan Breckon (Manager of Alliance for Useful Evidence)
12.25 Introduction from Chair: Phil Sooben (Director of Policy, Resources & Communications, ESRC)
12.30 Presentation by author, Professor David Gough (EPPI-Centre)
12.40 All: Comments on draft report
13.00 Response from authors to comments and edits to be made
13.05 All: how do we increase the use of synthesis to inform decision-making?
13.55 Concluding remarks from Chair
14:00 Finish
## Delegate List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Job Title, Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Abbi Hobbs</td>
<td>Social Sciences Adviser, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Ravenscroft</td>
<td>Head of Policy &amp; Research, NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Johnson</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Francis</td>
<td>Cochrane Research Fellow, Cardiff University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor David Gough</td>
<td>Director of Social Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr David Halpern</td>
<td>What Works National Adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Kevan Collins</td>
<td>Chief Executive, The Education Endowment Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eamonn Noonan</td>
<td>Chief Executive, Campbell Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Morris</td>
<td>Research Programme Manager and What Works programme lead, College of Policing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Arnold</td>
<td>President, Specialist Library Association and Information &amp; Support Policy Adviser, Macmillan Cancer Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Leon Feinstein</td>
<td>Head of Evidence, Early Intervention Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Matthew Lowther</td>
<td>Principal Public Health Adviser, NHS Health Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Max Nathan</td>
<td>Deputy Director, What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel Coelho</td>
<td>Senior Economist, The Institute for Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moussa Haddad</td>
<td>Policy &amp; Research Manager, The Royal Statistical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Peter Craig</td>
<td>Research Manager, Chief Scientist Office, Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Bernard Silverman</td>
<td>Chief Scientific Adviser, Home Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor James Thomas</td>
<td>Institute of Education, University of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Sandy Oliver</td>
<td>Institute of Education, University of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Fairbairn</td>
<td>Head of Knowledge Exchange Group, The Economic &amp; Social Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross Neilson</td>
<td>Senior Policy Adviser, Cabinet Office, Behavioural Insights team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Ellis</td>
<td>Associate Director, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Williams</td>
<td>Director of Social Research and Policy, Nuffield Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Guiney</td>
<td>Senior Policy &amp; Learning Manager, The Big Lottery Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Palmer</td>
<td>Senior Analyst, National Audit Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note of actions from Alliance for Useful Evidence Roundtable: Learning from research; systematic reviews for informing policy decisions 23.10.2013

1. **The configuring/aggregating approach** – the writers are aware that this approach causes potential problems as a concept and in terms of its accessibility to users. Our key objective is to find a language that is relevant to the majority of practitioners and does not alienate readers. **Action:** Alliance to discuss with authors using different language (though qualitative and quantitative would not be correct), rather than configuring/aggregating approach, or make a stronger case to communicate why these terms used.

2. **Applicability to policy makers and practitioners** - at the outset users need to be asked directly ‘what exactly do you want to know?’ This helps tailor review methods learning to specific requirement of decision-makers. It was suggested that the writers need to explore the idea of a guide to stages of research use for practitioners to identify what is appropriate when. This is currently an underdeveloped area. It is recognised that although there are currently many research studies, this is useless if practitioners don’t know the appropriate way to use them. Every practitioner involved with systematic reviews needs to employ a managerial strategy in the way that they can be best used. This should involve specific training if necessary. Bridging the gap between synthesis and end users is absolutely key. The What Works centres are finding ways to bridge the gap between academics/synthesisers of research and end use practitioners. **Actions:** (1) Consider the addition of a Q&A section to the guide; (2) include case studies and stories to bring the guide alive; and (3) Alliance to discuss with ESRC, BIG and Nesta a separate guide to the stages of research; (4) Alliance to develop training workshops with Policy Profession as part of its forthcoming skills and learning offer.

3. **Audience** – Who is target audience for this guide? Further information is needed on who exactly is commissioning and using reviews and what the specific needs of these users are. A comment was also made that the recommendations are ‘left hanging’ and suggested that they should be explored more fully in terms of aiming at specific audiences and actions. **Action:** (1) highlight audiences for guide (currently listed in introduction); and (2) consider changing title to make more accessible to non-specialists.

4. **Gathering evidence more generally** - It may even be the case that an extensive systematic review is not always the most appropriate option and perhaps a bit more detail on when a more rapid systematic review e should be used could be included in the guide. Perhaps the Q and A should include a section on when not to use the rapid or systematic review. The possibility of framing the entire guide as a way of deciding the best way to gather evidence generally – not just for systematic reviews - should be
considered. **Action:** (1) include rapid reviews in Q&A; (2) consider including information on general approaches to gathering evidence in future work.

5. **Valuing reviews** - there are currently too few capable of carrying out the rigorous research requirements of systematic review. This is possibly the result of an assumption within the academic community that reviews are not ‘real’ research. Systematic review should be marketed as an extremely high quality piece of research devoid of ‘cherry picking’, subjected to peer review and potentially requiring its own recruitment stream of those who are capable of carrying it out. It is undervalued compared to primary research and needs greater recognition from the research community and funders. **Action:** delegates of roundtable, including research funders and those on REF panels should encourage greater value and credit for reviews.

6. **Avoiding duplication of reviews** - the question or necessity of ‘reviews of reviews’ needs to be explored further. Although replication of primary research is a good thing, duplication of systematic reviews may just create. We don't necessarily need more systematic reviews in some well-researched areas such as 'early intervention', unless there are identified gaps. What we need in some areas is clearer communication and fewer competing syntheses. **Action:** guide to include, possibly in Q&A, more on reviews of reviews and what to do to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Any further suggestions for edits or changes to the guide should be emailed to Jonathan Breckon at the Alliance for Useful Evidence jonathan.breckon@nesta.org.uk by 8 November 2013.