

Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Department for Education

1. I was grateful for the opportunity to give evidence to the Education Select Committee on 3 February jointly with Minister Burt about the mental health of looked-after children. Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of looked-after children and care leavers is of concern to everyone and I am pleased my Department and the Department of Health are working together to emphasise that message.
2. The Committee asked for further details on the What Works Centre, to which I referred in my evidence. In December 2015, the Department for Education announced plans to create a new What Works Centre (WWC). The WWC will build an evidence base to show us the best practice available to help social workers and other practitioners to give better support to children and families. It will become a trusted and authoritative voice in the field, similar to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) model for healthcare. It will also identify good practice from existing evidence and will run new trials to test innovative ways of working. That involves identifying the most effective ways of supporting children suffering from abuse or neglect, including therapeutic approaches. In addition, it will help social workers and others to implement the most effective practices to improve support for children and families.
3. Up to £20 million will be made available over the Spending Review period to fund the WWC and the centralisation of Serious Case Reviews. The Centre will join the world's first network of independent WWCs, which support policy makers, commissioners and practitioners to make decisions based upon strong evidence of what works and to provide cost-efficient, useful services. The seven existing independent WWCs already address issues such as crime reduction, educational attainment and local economic growth.
4. We are currently exploring options for the model for the new WWC and further information on funding and procurement will be available in due course. We aim to launch the Centre by the end of 2016.
5. It is in this spirit of identifying evidence based approaches to improving children's social care that we are funding new models of practice through the Innovation Programme, to which I also made reference. In addition, I should mention the work underway to develop our Partners in Practice programme. This represents an exciting new partnership with the country's best performing local leaders that now includes twelve local authorities from which the whole system will be able to learn.
6. I understand that Alistair Burt has written separately with details of the Expert Group for developing care pathways which he announced to the Committee on 3 February.
7. We both look forward to reading the Committee's report in due course.

February 2016