



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Improving Government with Robust Evidence

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Introduction

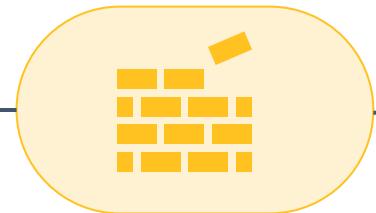
- 1. Professional Social Researcher.**
- 2. Experience across general government in the UK**
- 3. Chief Analyst in Department for Work and Pensions**
- 4. Why is this topic important to me?**



Aims of today

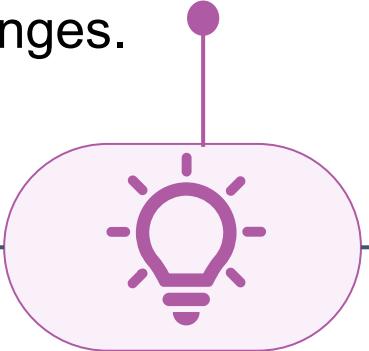
Challenges and Solutions

Including how to address data quality, resource constraints, political pressure, and other common challenges.



Building a culture of evidence-based policymaking

Reflections from my own experience



Improving outcomes by designing and delivering high quality evaluations

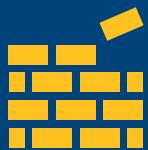
Using examples of evidence-based approaches that have led to improved policy outcomes, and how to learn from mistakes.





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Building a culture of evidence-based policymaking



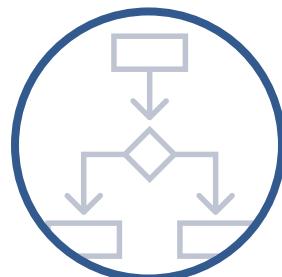


Building a culture of evidence-based policymaking

What
you will
need...



Senior support: to ensure evidence-based policymaking is a priority and issues are unblocked.



Systems and structures:

1. Processes
2. Mandating the use of evidence
3. Incentives



Capability

1. Training
2. Support
3. Collaboration and knowledge exchange across profession and with academia and the private sector



Culture change: key lessons



Have senior champions



Reduce the distance between policy officials and analysts, making friends in all areas



Encourage **experimentation**, new techniques, new methods



Transparency and accountability must become the norm



Celebrate **success** and create a sense of **belonging** among analysts



Measure, measure, measure (especially impact)



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Challenges and solutions



Conducting evaluation in government and using evidence in policy making more generally, presents several challenges:

Flick the switch

The 'policy shotgun'

Data

Context

Politics

Universal roll out makes it difficult to identify a comparison group

Multiple simultaneous, makes it difficult to tell which aspects are working.

Technical challenges linked to data can make it difficult to conduct analysis.

Domestic challenges and media focus.

Needing to implement policies quickly can impact space for development of the evidence base.

Programmes are piloted before roll out and are rolled out gradually over time

Different elements of the intervention are piloted separately

Linked data to underpin better evaluation

Cultural shift: joined-up data, joined-up working, and shared outcomes.

Structural shift: evaluation is a requirement to get funding from the Treasury.

PITFALLS / ISSUES

SOLUTIONS



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**Improving outcomes
by designing and
delivering high
quality evaluations**





High-quality evaluations

Evaluation is central
in everything that
HMG does



Some examples:



The Health Led Trials: where the policy is found to work



The Social Workers Schools Trial: when the policy is found **not to work**



Improving Land rights in Democratic Republic of Congo: testing variation in policy delivery

Health Led Trials

In 2016 DWP commissioned **the Health Led Trials** to test the effectiveness of **Individual Placement and Support (IPS)** and expand access to people with various health conditions



Implementation, design and evaluation

- Ran in two Combined Authorities in England between 2018-2020
- Randomised controlled trial (RCT) design with 10,000 participants - **largest ever trial of IPS**
- An innovative shared data platform Combined primary and secondary data
- An economic evaluation estimated fiscal and societal returns, whilst a process evaluation used qualitative methods to explore delivery and implementation.

Result

1. The trial overcame challenges to show that **IPS could be effective** in delivering employment, health and wellbeing impacts when provided to a broader population.
2. Evidence from the trials has been central to the Government's response to health-related economic inactivity and lessons from the delivery are being used to inform the roll out of a new nationwide supported employment programme starting in 2025 which will **eventually support 100,000 people per year**.

The Social Workers Schools Trial 2020-2022

To tackle an increase in rates of children being involved with children's social care, **Social Workers in Schools (SWIS)** trialed embedding **social workers in secondary schools** to undertake statutory work with children and families.



Implementation, design and evaluation

- The SWIS trial is one of the largest RCTs ever undertaken in CSC in the UK, involving around 280,000 students across 291 schools based in 21 local authorities in England.
- Primary impact evaluation question: what was the impact of SWIS in reducing rates of children going into care?

Result

1. There was **no evidence of benefit from the SWIS scheme on the primary outcome**: the rate of section 47 enquiries (i.e. children going into care) was estimated as 5.5% higher in the SWIS arm than in the control arm but this effect was not statistically significant.
2. All effects of SWIS on the secondary outcomes (CSC referrals, children entering care and mean number of days spent in care per child entering care) were similarly small and none of them were statistically significant.
3. **DfE followed the evidence and stopped the programme.**

Improving Land rights in Democratic Republic of Congo

Project tested **whether reducing the cost of obtaining a land title increased access to property titles** in Kananga, DRC. Having the title has benefits to the household, because they gain household security, and to the local government, because they can increase taxation



Implementation, design and evaluation

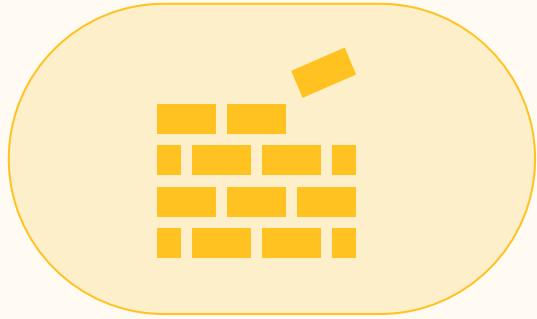
- It was part of the second 'Metaketa', where the **same interventions are tested in different cultures/contexts**. This round focused on formalisation, taxation, and public services, with studies in six countries.
- Households were screened for eligibility for obtaining a land title. If eligible, they were **randomly assigned to treatment and control groups**.
- The Department for International Development tested **different levels of subsidy** (0%, 25%, or 50% subsidies), to assess the effectiveness of different levels needed to affect behaviours.

Result

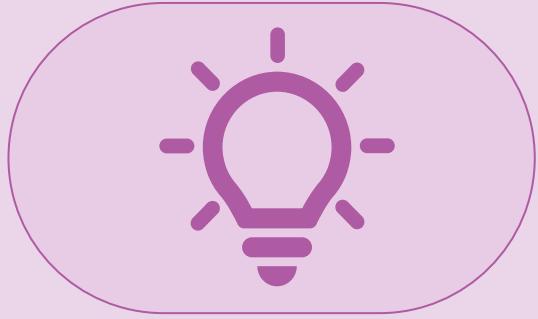
- The **probability that households obtained a property title increased by 14 percentage points and increased citizens' intentions to obtain a land title by 45 percentage points**
- Findings suggest **ticket and transaction costs are key constraints on land formalisation in Kananga**.

Directly linked to policy changes

In summary:



A cultural change requires a multipronged approach, but it's possible and it pays off.



There are several challenges, but also **solutions that can alleviate the risks.**
Nothing is impossible!



Evaluations and evidence might result in difficult messages and significant policy changes, but it's the only way to provide better outcomes to the public.