

"If anything is going to turn policy makers into 'smart users' of research evidence it is this book. It uncovers the difficult questions behind the commitment to 'evidence-based policy'...." *Graham Leicester, Director, Scottish Council Foundation*

"Evidence-based policy is a key component of the government's modernisation agenda, and this book helpfully dissects what it means.... There is a compelling call for a more eclectic and pluralist, while rigorous, approach to what constitutes 'evidence' which should be heard by policy makers and researchers alike."
Professor Sue Richards, University of Birmingham

What counts is what works - but how can we actually tell what works? And what can we do with such knowledge to influence policy and practice?

As all parts of the public sector embrace 'evidence' as a means of providing more effective and efficient public services, this book provides a timely and novel contribution to such debates.

The authors consider the role of evidence in specific public policy areas (healthcare, education, criminal justice, social care, welfare, housing, transport and urban renewal), using experts in each field to explore the creation, dissemination and use of evidence within each. They consider in particular:

- How is research evidence of service effectiveness created?
- How does such evidence shape policy and influence service delivery?
- What efforts are being made to encourage greater utilisation of evidence in policy and practice?

The rich cross-sectoral accounts of the many and diverse activities in each sector provide an insight into the ebb and flow of evidence as guidance to policy and practice. *What works?* develops perceptive analyses of outstanding problems, and raises challenging agendas for service development and future research.

The authors conclude with the all-important question of the implementation of evidence-based practice and lead the way to the reinvigoration of innovative thinking.

With its relevance to both cutting-edge practice and research, this book is important reading for a wide range of managers and professionals in the different sectors, as well as students and academics studying public policy, public administration, and social policy and management.

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WHAT WORKS?

Edited by Huw T.O. Davies,
Sandra M. Nutley and Peter C. Smith

WHAT WORKS?

Evidence-based policy and
practice in public services

Edited by Huw T.O. Davies, Sandra M. Nutley and Peter C. Smith
Foreword by Ron Amann

reducing reoffending
social inclusion
effective clinical practice
experimentation
sustainable transport
research utilisation
preventing intervention

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Foreword

Ron Amann

During the past few years there has been a surge of interest in the theory and practice of 'evidence-based policy', both in the academic community and among policy makers. In early 1999, two important national conferences on evidence-based policy were held: one under the auspices of the Association of Research Centres in the Social Sciences (ARCISS), and the other convened by the School of Public Policy at University College London in association with the Cochrane Centre at Oxford. These key events coincided with the finalisation of the ESRC's plans for a new national Resource Centre for Evidence-Based Policy which will draw together high-quality research evidence to support policy makers and practitioners in a variety of policy domains; at the same time, the journal *Public Money and Management* devoted a special issue to a series of case studies on evidence-based policy. The current volume stems from that seminal collection.

In searching for an explanation of why this surge of interest has occurred at the present time the editors rightly point to such factors as the expansion and availability of relevant social science knowledge, the decline in deference to government and the demand for greater public accountability. Correspondingly, the enthusiasm on the part of government for systematic and well-focused evidence reflects, as they perceive it, the rapidly changing and more complex character of the society with which they have to deal: a challenge which requires foresight, accurate knowledge and rigorous analysis. These high-level concerns about the need to improve the quality of policy making form a distinct stream within the *Modernising government* White Paper which was published in March 1999. They have led to the creation of new units within the Cabinet Office such as the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU), whose job it is to develop policy initiatives in a much more research based way through cross-departmental teams (including the involvement of experts from outside Government). The Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS), which began its work in June 1999, has been given the special task of developing a new approach to policy making based on the latest techniques of knowledge management. CMPS, PIU