

Evidence-based policy resources

A selection of records from the Idox Information Service database on the use of evidence in policy-making:

Lawrence, Amanda et al

Where is the evidence? Realising the value of grey literature for public policy and practice

Swinburne Institute for Social Research (2014)

<http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/where-is-the-evidence-grey-literature-strategies-nov-2014.pdf>

Examines the importance and economic value of grey literature in public policy, based on a research project in Australia. Finds that: grey literature is heavily used and highly valued for policy work; policy grey literature is produced for impact and often paid for by public funds; and there is a lack of digital curation and services are hampered by outdated legislation. Contends that there are clear opportunities to reduce the challenges and increase the benefits of digital grey literature. Recommends: improving production standards and accountability; ensuring greater discoverability and accessibility; recognising the value of grey literature for scholarly communication; improving collection and curation of policy resources; and reforming copyright and legal deposit legislation. [B40274]

What Works Network

What works? Evidence for decision makers

Cabinet Office (2014)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378038/What_works_evidence_for_decision_makers.pdf

Highlights the work of the What Works centres, and outlines a selection of findings from the work they have carried out to date. Explains that a series of What Works centres have been created since 2010, with the goal of ensuring that the best evidence of what works is available to the people who actually make policy decisions, including not only the government, but also doctors, teachers, police chiefs and children's services professional, amongst others. Notes that the centres are focused on the generation, transmission and adoption of evidence. Outlines findings from each of the following What Works centres: health and social care; the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE); education; the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF); early intervention; the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF); crime reduction; the College of Policing; and the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth. Notes that the What Works Network is continuing to expand, with the recent launch of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, the inclusion of What Works Scotland and the Public Policy Institute for Wales as associate members, and the upcoming Centre for Ageing Better. Describes forthcoming work to increase the profile and reach of the centres, including the potential for collaboration with other countries. [B40311]

Local Government Knowledge Navigator

From analysis to action: connecting research and local government in an age of austerity

Local Government Knowledge Navigator (2014)

<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11719/Analysis+to+Action+Paper-+final.pdf/d1f00122-127f-43c8-b106-d08a4807513a>

Considers the challenges facing local government from the impact of austerity measures, increased demographic changes and a shifting relationship between the state and the citizen. Argues that increased knowledge and evidence are vital if the changes needed are to be well-informed in both the short and longer term. Finds diverse and compelling knowledge and evidence needs across local government, suggesting that although there exists a rich diversity of research derived knowledge and evidence, this is barely tapped by local government. Proposes action to change cultures to bring research and local government together and establish a web-enabled interactive exchange platform in order to better connect local government and research knowledge. Outlines next steps to encourage culture change and connectivity, maximise the use of research and improve strategic investment. [B40136]

Shepherd, Jonathan

How to achieve more effective services: the evidence ecosystem

Cardiff University (2014)

http://www.vrg.cf.ac.uk/Files/2014_JPS_What_Works.pdf

Makes recommendations both to government and to the network of 'What Works Centres' on the effective functioning of these Centres in their role as part of the 'evidence ecosystem' that informs public policy. Offers generic recommendations on evidence creation, translation and implementation. Examines the necessary requirements for the adoption of evidence-based interventions and programmes. Explores evidence sources, transmission lines, problems and incentives in the following sectors: crime reduction; health and social care; education; early intervention; ageing better; and local economic growth. Makes sector-specific recommendations on what the evidence ecosystem should look like, and what could be done to improve it. [B39929]

Madaleno, Margarida; Waight, Severin

Guide to scoring methods using the Maryland scientific methods scale

What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth (2014)

<http://whatworksgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Scoring-Guide-final.pdf>

Presents a scoring guide to assess the usefulness of evaluations in evidence reviews. Examines a wide variety of commonly employed methods on the Maryland scientific method scale (SMS), which ranks policy evaluations from 1 (least robust) to 5 (most robust) according to the robustness of the method used and the quality of its implementation. Explains that the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth (WWG) produces systematic reviews of the evidence base on a broad range of policies in the area of local economic growth, and that an important step in the review process is the assessment of whether an evaluation provides convincing evidence on likely policy impacts. Notes that robustness, as judged by the Maryland SMS is the extent to which the method deals with the selection biases inherent to policy evaluations. Looks at a number of examples of policy evaluations for each of the methods examined, scoring them on the quality of their implementation. Explains that this scoring guide can serve a scoring handbook for anyone wanting to assess the robustness of a particular policy evaluation. Suggests that the guidance can also help organisations undertaking evaluations, either in assessing them after completion, or in helping choose between methodologies beforehand. [B39957]

Spiliotopoulou, Lefkothea et al

A framework for advanced social media exploitation in government for crowdsourcing, IN Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy, Vol 8 No 4 2014, pp545-568

Presents: a framework for advanced exploitation of multiple social media by government, which aims to efficiently and effectively collect knowledge, ideas and opinions from citizens, and applying crowdsourcing practices in the public sector; an ICT infrastructure which supports its application, as well as an application process model for it; and an evaluation of this framework in 'real-life' pilot applications. [A52575]

Newman, Joshua

Revisiting the 'two communities' metaphor of research utilisation, IN International Journal of Public Sector Management, Vol 27 No 7 2014, pp614-627

Discusses the development of evidence-based policy and investigates how much (if any) policy decision makers in the public sector use academic research when formulating and implementing public policy. Draws on a recent large-scale survey of Australian public servants, at state and national levels, to test the hypothesis that Caplan's 'two communities' theory is an inaccurate description of what is a more complex relationship between policy makers and the academic world. Compares the personal and professional characteristics of survey respondents, including gender, age, length of time in public service, and level of education achieved. Finds that those who claim to use academic research for their policy-related work are more likely to have advanced university degrees, have previously worked in the university or non-profit sector and work in education or social policy. Indicates that those policy workers who say that they rarely use academic research evidence in their policy work are more likely to have trained in the private sector and work in health or economic policy fields. Concludes that there is scope to develop greater synergy between the 60% of engaged practitioners and the academic environment, particularly around knowledge brokering. [A52127]

Evans, David

Patient and public involvement in research in the English NHS: a documentary analysis of the complex interplay of evidence and policy, IN Evidence and Policy, Vol 10 No 3 Aug 2014, pp361-377

Considers the international shifts towards greater patient and public involvement (PPI) in health research and development. Examines the evolving relationship between evidence and policy on PPI in research through a documentary analysis of English health R&D policy documents published between 1991 and 2010. Considers what model of the research policy interface best explains the expansion of PPI in research and why this is important. Demonstrates that the development of English policy on PPI in health research pre-dates the existence of an underpinning research evidence base. [A51660]

Anderson, Will et al

Planning for public health: building the local evidence base, IN Town and Country Planning, Vol 83 No 8 Aug 2014, pp341-347

Considers how best to gain local evidence of the impact of spatial planning decisions on health and wellbeing. Discusses the promotion of health and wellbeing in the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance and highlights the Town and Country Planning Association's Reuniting Health with Planning project, including the 2012 guidance (Ref. B26910) which recommended that planners and public health specialists develop an evidence base. Highlights issues that have emerged as planners and health professionals have tried to pursue health and wellbeing outcomes through planning: the different approaches to evidence; conflict between health outcomes and commercial outcomes; and difficulties involved in establishing a local evidence base compiled primarily from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and local plans. Describes a case study approach to evaluating the impact of planning decisions on health and wellbeing which involve the following: defining the case and research questions; describing the baseline health and wellbeing profile of the population drawing on data from JSNAs, local plans and other indicators; defining additional research methods including local surveys; collating and analysing data; reviewing the evidence and the 'logic model', and exploring

how initial theories of change stand up to the emerging evidence; and communicating the findings. Outlines the logic model based on the impact of interventions on health and wellbeing outcomes from designating space for a community garden in a masterplan. [A51600]

Oliver, Kathryn; Lorenc, Theo; Innvaer, Simon

New directions in evidence-based policy research: a critical analysis of the literature, IN Health Research Policy and Systems, Vol 12 No 34 20144

<http://www.health-policy-systems.com/content/12/1/34>

Analyses the literature on evidence-based policy to explain why barriers to the use of evidence are persistently identified. Describes the literature in terms of its theoretical basis, definitions of 'evidence' methods, and underlying assumptions of research and suggests that much of the research in this area is theoretically naïve, focusing primarily on the uptake of research evidence as opposed to evidence defined more broadly, and that little empirical data analysing the processes or impact of evidence use in policy is available to inform researchers or decision-makers. Suggests that, rather than asking how research evidence can be made more influential, academics should aim to understand what influences and constitutes policy, and to produce more critically and theoretically informed studies of decision-making. [A51470]

Strassheim, Holger; Kettunen, Pekka

When does evidence-based policy turn into policy-based evidence? Configurations, contexts and mechanisms, IN Evidence and Policy, Vol 10 No 2 May 2014, pp259-277

Considers an alternative to the linear model of evidence-based policy and proposes to understand expertise and evidence as "socially embedded" in authority relations and cultural contexts. Argues that policy-relevant facts are the result of an intensive and complex struggle for political and epistemic authority and that this is particularly true where science and policy are difficult to distinguish and the guidelines for validating knowledge are highly contested. Suggests that more comparative research on the cultural and institutional 'embeddedness' of epistemic and political authority is needed to understand the mechanisms leading to policy-based evidence and the long-term consequences of these transformations. [A50302]

Arvidson, Malin

Evidence and transparency in the open public services reform: perspectives for the third sector (TSRC working paper 117)

Third Sector Research Centre (2014)

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-117.pdf>

Explores the concepts of 'transparency' and 'evidence of what works' in open public services policy, from the perspective of the third sector. Focuses on government documents outlining visions and strategies for reforming welfare service provision in the UK along the model of 'open' public services. Suggests that, for third sector organisations, the policy of open public services sets a new framework for how relations with commissioners, users and other service-delivering agencies are formed, and for their role as public service providers. Examines the 2011 Open Public Services White Paper and the 2010 paper 'Healthy lives healthy people: our strategy for public health in England'. Discusses four areas of research: evidence-based policy making; challenges in attributing outcomes and controversies in evaluation methods; what informs organisations 'disclosure logics'; and the relation between institutional culture and the use of information. [B37197]

Carpentieri, JD

Evidence, evaluation and the 'tyranny of effect size': a proposal to more accurately measure programme impacts in adult and family literacy, IN European Journal of Education, Vol 48 No 4 2013, pp543-556

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejed.12046/pdf>

Outlines a strategy for improving the evidence base on adult and family literacy, with the larger aim of improving practice, focusing particularly on overcoming some of the most vexing issues currently hindering the research

and evaluation of adult and family literacy programmes. Notes that the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy recently concluded that there is generally good evidence on the effectiveness of literacy interventions targeted at children, but much less evidence on the effectiveness of interventions targeted at adults and families. Looks at: existing evidence for programme effectiveness; how effectiveness is evaluated; coupling evaluation realism with policy realism; improving programme evaluation by measuring more, better and longer; and why longitudinal evaluation represents a worthwhile investment. [A48665]

Parsell, Cameron; Fitzpatrick, Suzanne; Busch-Geertsema, Volker

Common ground in Australia, an object lesson in evidence hierarchies and policy transfer, IN Housing Studies, Vol 29 No 1 Jan 2014, pp69-87

Examines the process of transferring the Common Ground model of supportive housing into Australia's social housing sector. Argues that despite official commitments to evidence-based policy, the 'advocacy coalition' driving this international policy transfer employed a 'knowledge hierarchy' wherein professional intuition and personal experience are afforded a higher status than formal evaluative evidence. Provides an example of the contested nature of what 'counts as evidence' in housing and homelessness policy, and considers what role academic research should play in the policy development process. [A48798]

Pawson, Ray; Wong, Geoff

Public opinion and policy-making, IN Social Policy and Administration, Vol 47 No 4 Aug 2013, pp434-450

Discusses evidence-based policy and the use of systematic reviews of existing research on the effectiveness of interventions to provide guidance for policymakers. Suggests that when applied to the assessment of public support for interventions there are two stumbling blocks: opinion data on contentious issues is volatile and prone to measurement error; and the barometer of public opinion should be set for the present rather than reflecting sentiments of other times. Makes the case, by reviewing public support for legislation banning smoking in cars carrying children, that authoritative evidence to support policy is not a matter of taking contemporary, error-free snapshots of public opinion, but derives from building and testing explanations of how public attitudes arise. [A45866]

Lenihan, Ashley

Lessons from abroad: international approaches to promoting evidence-based social policy

Alliance for Useful Evidence (2013)

http://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/assets/Alliance-paper_Lessons-from-Abroad.pdf

Outlines different approaches taken by foreign and international institutions seeking to advance evidence-based policy (eBp). Explores approaches to eBp adopted by institutions in Germany, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the Netherlands and Belgium). Looks briefly at approaches taken by five major intergovernmental organisations: the European Union, International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the World Bank. Highlights some of the organisational elements and best practices that emerged from the most innovative international bodies: openness to different methodological approaches, and all forms of rigorous evidence; independence of structure, budget, and findings; diversity of funding; leadership and institutionalisation of good practice; wise use of resources; effective and targeted communication; transparency and co-operation with other epB institutions; and a commitment to self-evaluation. [B32681]

Cartwright, Nancy; Hardie, Jeremy

Evidence-based policy: a practical guide to doing it better

Oxford University Press (2012)

Examines the theory of evidence-based policy. Discusses what kind of evidence will help to make an 'effectiveness prediction' of the implementation of a policy, looking in particular at how policy-makers can move from 'this policy worked somewhere else' to 'this proposed policy will work here'. Discusses the role of support factors and causal roles within the theory of 'evidence of use', looking at how to understand what kinds of

knowledge are good for reliable predictions about whether policies will work. Examines the use of horizontal and vertical strategies to search for factors to predict effectiveness in social policies. Assesses the effectiveness of randomised control trials (RCTs), evidence-ranking schemes, advice guides and fidelity (implementing the policy exactly as was done in the study situations) within contemporary evidence-based policy and practice. Highlights the need to use discretion and judgement in making decisions about evidence-based policy, rather than following an orthodox, rules-based system. [B30022]

Downe, James; Martin, Steve; Bovaird, Tony

Learning from complex policy evaluations, IN Policy and Politics, Vol 40 No 4 Oct 2012, pp505-523

Seeks to examine the practice and process of meta-evaluation by drawing on the experience of conducting a longitudinal study of policies that were designed to improve the performance of local government. Describes the context and purpose of meta-evaluation and presents a framework for assessing its rigour and relevance based on a series of meta-evaluation tasks. Considers the strengths and weaknesses of the study against these tasks and the contribution it made to policy and practice. Reflects on the implications for applied social research and the concept of evidence-based policy. [A42002]

Rutter, Jill

Evidence and evaluation in policy making: a problem of supply or demand?

Institute for Government (2012)

http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/evidence%20and%20evaluation%20in%20template_final_0.pdf

Presents findings from a series of seminars exploring evidence-based policy making. Looks at the meaning and types of evidence. Considers the potential for evidence and evaluation to influence policy making and the supply barriers which might need to be addressed if that potential is to be fully exploited. Finds barriers on the supply side, including: research is not timely enough in providing answers to relevant policy questions; many of the issues with which government deals are not suited to the most rigorous testing; and a lack of good usable data to provide the basis for research both within and outside government. Identifies demand barriers preventing a more systematic use of evidence and evaluation, including: problems with the timeliness and helpfulness of evidence and the mismatch between political timetables and the timelines of the evidence producers, combined with ethical reservations about experimentation; many political decisions were driven by values rather than outcomes; a lack of culture and skills for using rigorous evidence in the civil service; and a need to create openness to feedback among other service providers. Concludes that while changes can be made to the incentives of players in the system to increase the use of evidence and evaluation, real change will come when politicians see evidence and evaluation as ways of helping them entrench policies. [B27935]

Smith, Katherine E; Joyce, Kerry E

Capturing complex realities: understanding efforts to achieve evidence-based policy and practice in public health, IN Evidence and Policy, Vol 8 No 1 Jan 2012, pp57-78

Looks at some weaknesses in commonly employed conceptualisations of the relationships between research, evidence and policy. Presents data from empirical case studies exploring national policy, and perceptions and uses of geographic information systems in public health decision-making at the local level. Highlights how each demonstrates the fluid nature of evidence and the overlapping and intricate nature of the relationships that shape knowledge translation. Argues that this calls into question the appropriateness of prioritising professional or political divisions. Outlines how complexity theories might be used to develop more sophisticated ways of conceptualising the relationships between research, policy, and practice. [A37963]

Konnerup, Merete; Kongsted, Hans Christian

Do Cochrane reviews provide a good model for social science? The role of observational studies in systematic reviews, IN Evidence and Policy, Vol 8 No 1 Jan 2012, pp79-96

Discusses whether the Cochrane standard for systematic reviews of healthcare interventions is appropriate for social research. Examines the formal criteria of the Cochrane Collaboration for including particular study designs and uses the Cochrane Library to provide quantitative evidence on the de facto standard of actual Cochrane reviews. Indicates that the majority of reviews appear limited to considering randomised controlled trials only. Argues that an inclusive approach is essential for truly evidence-based policy and practice in regard to social interventions. [A37964]

Cameron, Alicia et al

Policy makers' perceptions on the use of evidence from evaluations, IN Evidence and Policy, Vol 7 No 4 Nov 2011, pp429-447

Discusses the use of evidence in policy making, and draws on a Department of Health funded research study to explore the views of people working within the policy process about the role of evidence. Outlines the rise in evidence-based policy making. Discusses the importance of evaluation, the characteristics of high-quality research and the reasons why evaluations should be carried out. Highlights tensions between formative and summative uses of research, and suggests that this tension appears to be exacerbated by a lack of clarity surrounding the objectives that policy leads had for the research. Reports that there is uncertainty concerning the status of pathfinder, demonstration and pilot sites within the policy process. Finds that there is widespread commitment among policy leads to evaluation, however, there a lack of clarity about the rationale for evaluation, and how and by whom the lessons from evaluation could be used. [A37218]

Cherney, Adrian; Head, Brian

Supporting the knowledge-to-action process: a systems thinking approach, IN Evidence and Policy, Vol 7 No 4 Nov 2011, pp471-488

Examines nine organisational variables that influence the successful implementation of a knowledge-to-action framework for evidence-based policy and practice. Sets out a model for evidence-based policy and practice, highlighting its components, which involves the '9Cs': communication; capacity; competency; compatibility; commitment; collaboration; creativity; and compliance. Discusses each of these elements in turn and their role in evidence based policy and practice. Suggests that the proposed model addresses a range of implementation issues at the organisational and individual levels that have a bearing on the knowledge-to-action process. Considers the limitations of the framework and the challenges of knowledge-to-action implementation. [A37220]



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