

## CEBE Workshop

### *Evidence informed education: taking stock, looking ahead*

*15<sup>th</sup> November 2017 2pm – 5pm at Wellcome Trust, Euston Road, London*

# Summary

## Overview

- Reflections on the last and next decades suggest a rise in partnership working
- Services and support for using evidence to inform practice have grown dramatically in recent years, but fewer developments in terms of evidence-informed policy making.
- Scaling-up what have been smaller scale initiatives, remains a challenge
- It's time to consider the evidence system as whole, rather than just its parts
- There remains a role for an independent network to facilitate collaboration
- CEBE will set up working groups to take forward ideas about enhancing evidence use

## Introduction

The purpose of the workshop was to exchange thinking about the direction for evidence-informed education in the next few years, by reflecting on the past. The future role of CEBE in facilitating collaboration was also considered, again in relation to its previous work. In her introductory remarks, Hilary Leever, Head of Education and Learning at the Wellcome Trust, described CEBE as a force for good with a track record of moving to action - a point reinforced in much of the feedback.

## Keynote – Baroness Morris of Yardley

Estelle Morris, a founder member of the CEBE steering group, first reflected on the developments over the past decade, describing the evidence movement as having developed from its early beginning to an adolescent stage. The issue for the future she saw as how to nurture the many seeds that have now been sown. Partnership and collaboration between schools is gradually replacing the experiment with institutional autonomy. The 'middle layer' may be being dismantled, but schools are beginning to create their own, bottom-up. We should not allow debates about infrastructure to dominate our thinking, however: the spreading of evidence informed practice is what matters, not the acquisition of a new kind of status e.g. as a 'research school'. Perhaps the next CEBE conference theme should be: "How do we serve schools".

## Illustrative examples

Speakers from a range of intermediary organisations spoke briefly to illustrate some of the actions on evidence-use that have been taken in recent years. Tom Bennett, founder of *ResearchED* explained that the network had created communities that were helping to overcome a 'file & forget' attitude to research evidence. Tapping into an unmet need, teachers were engaging with academics and helping develop research questions. Cat Scutt, Director of Knowledge and Research at the *Chartered College of Teaching*, described the services being developed by this new professional body. With research engagement at its heart it is providing access to research journals and has developed its own user-friendly journal *Impact*. Its online platform and series of research meetings will soon be complemented by a journal club and resources to support research engagement.

The roles of the *Education Endowment Foundation*, set out by James Turner, were to synthesise and generate research and to mobilise knowledge for use. It is working in close partnership with a number of organisations including the Chartered College. A key challenge for the future is applying evidence-based approaches at scale. The *Alliance for Useful Evidence* works across all areas of social policy. Its director, Jonathan Breckon lamented 'policy schizophrenia', in which advocacy and behaviour about evidence often appear to contradict each other. A future challenge for education would be to motivate teachers to engage with evidence as medical professionals currently do. Coalitions like CEBE are needed: 'We're stronger together'.

The work of *CEBE* was outlined by Andrew Morris, chair of its steering group. It is an enabling network, focussing on action through collaboration. It has no funds or formal constitution but works by working up ideas with willing organisations, then seeking resources to realise them. This has resulted in the *Education Media Centre*, the *Evidence for the Frontline* service and the *Leading Research Engagement* initiative. Future strategy is being influenced by the outcomes of this Workshop.

## Group discussions

Small group discussion focused on: what needs to be done better, and what opportunities there are at system level to act upon this. Themes that emerged across the six groups are summarised briefly below:

- *Use of evidence*
  - Evidence doesn't always provide the silver bullets people are looking for. Its 'enlightenment' value is at least as important as the instrumental impact.
  - Use of evidence needs to be encouraged and modelled by leadership teams.
  - Use of evidence should not be reduced to a tick-box procedure.
  - Success factors for effective research engagement need to be identified.
  - Structured interactions between schools needs to be encouraged.
- *Research Agenda*
  - Academic interests still tend to dominate the research agenda.

- The agenda needs to be driven more by knowledge gaps, as for example through the NIHR in healthcare.
- Questions arising from teacher-focussed services such as *Evidence for the Frontline* could be used as a cue for research projects.
- The production of practice guidance should be taken as a starting point for knowledge synthesis and primary research.
- *Training and development for teachers and leaders*
  - Teaching qualifications need to give greater emphasis to research evidence.
  - Leadership programmes need to engage more with research evidence.
  - Engaging with evidence in teacher education should be reflexive (bidirectional), rather than just reflective.
  - Teacher identity is more commonly associated with craft than ‘science’.
- *Communications*
  - A variety of communication methods need to be developed, suited to various types of audience.
  - The language of evidence-use needs to be refined, so that it is not dismissed as ‘just another initiative’.
- *Local provision (schools, colleges, early years and adult learning centres)*
  - Evidence use needs to be understood as a feature of professionalism.
  - Teachers doing research is not necessarily a good use of their time.
  - Success factors for teachers’ ‘communities of learning’ need to be studied.
  - Accountability measures and incentives sometimes hinder evidence-use.
  - Improvement funding (such as SSIF for schools) can provide an opportunity to encourage the use of evidence.
- *Middle tier*
  - The middle tier (e.g. TSAs, Ofsted, NGA, TeachFirst, MATs, regional commissioners) needs to be encouraged to adopt evidence-informed approaches.
  - Ofsted is currently reviewing its own use of evidence and could encourage it in the organisations it inspects.

## **Learning from other sectors**

Ideas and inspiration from across the public sectors were offered by Huw Davies, Co-Director of the *Research Unit for Research Utilisation* at the University of St Andrews and Rachel Tuffin, Chief Executive of the College of Policing. Huw pointed out that ecosystems are not created, but evolve. Gardening metaphors, such as cultivation, help us think about evidence utilisation. Work at RURU shows the importance of non-

instrumental uses of evidence. The ‘enlightenment’ approach is dialogic, taking account of the details of particular contexts. Studies of knowledge mobilisation practices at RURU have led to a set of eight ‘archetypes’ each with a characteristic set of assumptions about its particular purposes, knowledge and roles. This workshop has chosen the right focus: the system, not just a set of parts.

Rachel Tuffin described the tension between people thinking in terms of contexts and those thinking in terms of mechanisms. The College of Policing works with both. With its dominant role in the sector it has wide responsibilities including developing a CPD structure and curriculum, a qualifications framework and a repository of practice ideas. It is proving hard to persuade practitioners to engage with research, so a Collaboration Fund has been designed to support a wide range of projects, events and training activities, involving both academics and practitioners – ‘1,000 flowers blooming’.

### **Plenary discussion**

The final session enabled participants to exchange thoughts. The use of evidence by practitioners emerged as the main focus. The point was made that practitioners are easily put off when there is no evidence for specific problems they are facing. Experience in the *Evidence for the Frontline* pilot demonstrated that teachers’ questions often need to be refined, perhaps as part of CPD time before searching the evidence base. Schools need to help with modelling how to initiate an enquiry question. Practitioners and academics pose questions in different ways.

It was pointed out that the tacit knowledge practitioners acquire through experience is important, but, equally, evidence-based change may require rejection of traditional practices. An important starting point for change may be to look at practices that have been found to be ineffective and to save time and effort by simply ceasing to adopt them.

Finally, the future role of CEBE was discussed. Given the multiplicity of organisations and networks in the sector it was felt that the CEBE network was helpful, being able to stand back and not compete. It is needed to keep organisations talking to each other and to learn from experience in other sectors. However, as was pointed out, although CEBE has succeeded in setting things up, we don’t yet know about its impact. In the next phase, perhaps it should act more as a voice: lobbying and holding to account. One suggestion was that it might build a coalition around a single issue and give voice to it: “What do teachers want evidence about?”

### **Themes**

A number of themes emerged from the discussions:

1. ITE and teaching qualifications to emphasise use of evidence
2. Middle tier organisations (broadly defined) need to support the use of evidence
3. Leadership teams need to encourage and model the use of evidence in decision-making
4. A culture of evaluation is needed in leadership training

5. Methods of working with evidence need to be tailored to the needs of specific groups, such as teachers, teacher leaders, governors, trainers
6. 'Case study' narratives are needed to illustrate how research evidence can influence practice
7. The contextual detail of places of learning needs to be taken into account when interpreting generic evidence
8. Aspects of evidence informed practice need to be mapped in relation to CPD activity
9. The agenda for research needs to be responsive to practice questions
10. CEBE does a valuable job and should continue to exist. Its independence is vital

### **Next Steps for CEBE**

The Secretariat that organises CEBE activity is responding to messages from the Workshop. It is proposing to:

1. Develop a small number of groups to take forward discussion initiated at the Workshop, in order to deepen understanding of the challenges.
2. The means of communication within each group will be determined by the participants.
3. Groups will be invited to develop thinking and report back after a number of months.
4. Some may wish to continue thereafter, perhaps by organising a project or event or publishing a document; others may not.
5. The Secretariat will help coordinate this activity and help groups develop.

*Andrew Morris for the CEBE secretariat 15.12 17*