

Monitoring child well-being: better policy & practice,
Eurochild's 6th Annual Conference, Cyprus, 11-13th Nov 2009



Indicators and Evaluating Outcomes For children

Richard Thurston

Head of Research for Children,
Education, Lifelong-learning
& Skills,

Welsh Assembly Government



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Overview

- Evidence based policy making – the vision
- Evidence based policy making – the reality
- Encouraging utilisation
- Monitoring and evaluating child wellbeing in Wales



Evidence based policy making – the vision



“It’s really quite simple - this is how you use evidence in policy making.”

- **We need evidence to...**
- Identify and anticipate issues and trends
- Inform policy and delivery options
- Evaluate whether policies and programmes are effective or not
- Ensure stakeholders and citizens have a voice in policy making and evaluation



Indicators & evaluation

Monitoring indicators of wellbeing:

- Provides a national benchmark
- Balanced picture across areas of children's lives
- Highlights key trends
- Raises awareness of the issues
- Prompting action

Evaluating policy impact on wellbeing:

- Demonstrating efficacy and value for money
- Capturing impact linked to policy
- Increasing knowledge about how to affect change
- Providing evidence for accountability



Evidence based policy – the reality?



“...there is nothing a government hates more than to be well informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more difficult...”

John Maynard Keynes



Reasons why evaluation is under-utilised (Michael Bamberger - World Bank, 2007)

- Lack of ownership
- the goal definition game
- evaluation seen as a threat
- timing
- poor communication
- lack of flexibility
- methodological credibility
- resource constraints
- Fit with national evaluation approaches
- capacity of commissioning agency
- relevance
- access
- political ethics
- a government's perception of evaluation



Encouraging utilisation

- The importance of a conducive policy environment
- The timing of the evaluation
- The role of the evaluation
- Building relationships with stakeholders
- effective communication of the evaluation findings



Evidence based policy making in Wales



The intentions of devolution and the role of evaluation

“... a process not an event”

- accessibility
- representativeness
- legitimacy
- openness
- participation
- innovation
- inclusiveness
- accountability



Evidence & Devolution: challenges & opportunities

- New policies designed in Cardiff not London
- competing pressures & lack of political experience
- ad hoc use
- limited professional capacity
- small country and close proximity
- joining-up policy & research
- addressing a range of interests & demands
- avoiding focus on narrow approaches
- addressing data deficits
- poor reporting & application of evidence
- increasing incentives

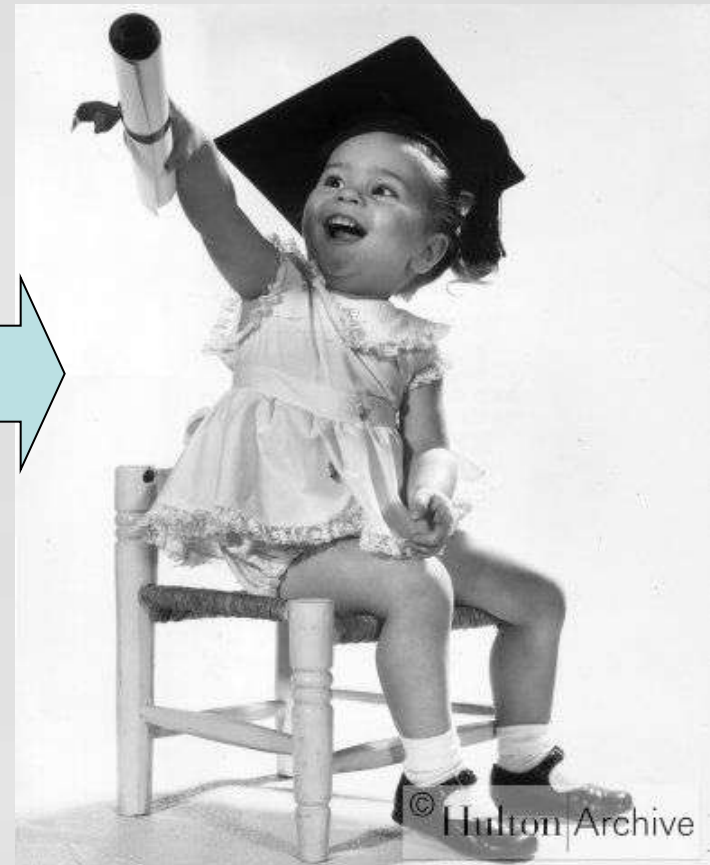
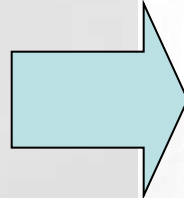
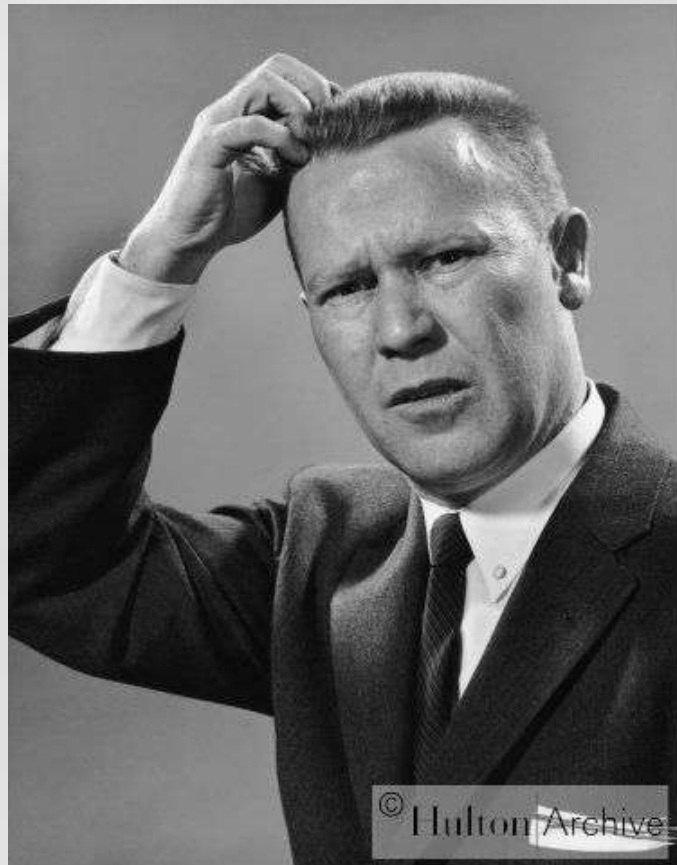


The utilisation of evidence - some lessons from a small country

- Understanding fit with political values helps understand challenges and opportunities
- Government analysts play an important brokering role
- Carrots are important for healthy evaluators but not enough by themselves



From unconscious incompetence to consciously competent



Children & Young People in Wales

- 641,000 children & young people under 18
- Deaths among CYPs is falling
- 9% of children speak Welsh fluently
- Vast majority of children over five are White British
- Some 29% of children in Wales live in poor households (c180,000)
- Child poverty fell between 1988 and 2007 but not starting to rise again
- 40% of poor children live in lone parent families, while 45% live in workless households



Policy for C&YP in Wales

- Adoption of UNCRC as the basis of all its policies and programmes for C&YP
- Integrated planning and Children (Children Act 2004)
- Children and Young People's Partnerships, plans and participation
- Extending Entitlement (11-25) to participate in education, employment & communities
- National Service Framework for CYP & maternity services
- Children's Commissioner for Wales
- Seven Core Aims



Welsh Assembly Government's Seven Core Aims

- Early years
- Education, training and learning opportunities
- Health, freedom from abuse and victimisation
- Access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- Ensuring children are listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised
- Safe home and community
- Ensuring no child or young person is disadvantaged by poverty



The children & young people's well-being monitor for Wales

- Provides an analysis of children & young people's well-being in relation to seven core aims
- Based on UNCRC
- Reports progress on WAG child poverty targets in context of wellbeing
- Multi-dimensional picture
- Reliable and up-to-date information
- Identifies evidence gaps
- Fulfils UK and Welsh Govt commitments



A performance measure should be...

- **Relevant** to what the organisation is aiming to achieve
- able to **Avoid perverse incentives** - not encourage unwanted or wasteful behaviour
- **Attributable** – the activity measured must be capable of being influenced by actions attributable to the organisation + clear where accountability lies;
- **Well-defined** - with a clear, unambiguous definition so that data will be collected consistently + easy to understand and use
- **Timely**, producing data regularly enough to track progress and, and quickly enough for the data to still be useful
- **Reliable** - accurate enough for its intended use, and responsive to change
- **Comparable** with either past periods or similar programmes elsewhere; and
- **Verifiable**, with clear documentation behind it, so that the processes which produce the measure can be validated.



Child poverty indicators in Wales

- Reporting via the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and the C&YP Well-being Monitor
- Indicators organised in relation to national policy and UNCRC themes (7 core aims)
- Indicators linked to an outcomes measurement framework for local authorities



Issues with indicators

- Conflicting intentions (policy vision vs accountability)
- How broad to set indicators - Poverty or wider well-being?
- Who to compare with – international, national/regional, local?
- Data quality and timing issues.
- What does it mean when indicators change?



Evaluating outcomes for children and young people

- Mapping programmes
- Synthesising evidence from evaluations
- Developing evaluation methodologies
- Individual programme evaluation
- Complexity and systemic approaches
- Developing the evidence infrastructure



Embedding evidence in policy making

- Looking ahead
- In at the start
- Clarity on both sides re role of evidence
- Effective communication
- Working with other specialists
- Maximising capacity - making more of available evidence
- Maximising capacity – working with the external research community
- Maintaining core values (trusted, objective, professional, expert, approachable, respected)



That's all folks!



Contacts and weblinks:

email:richard.thurston@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Welsh Assembly Government:

www.wales.gov.uk/research



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government