

# Our approach to understanding what works for Citizens Advice

At Citizens Advice we are committed to understanding what works and ensuring organisational resources are responsibly invested into effective services. What works approaches to research and evaluation prioritise evidence-based decision making, by generating and building on collective evidence, which we strive to contribute to.



We always undertake evaluations with the intention of using the information we collect to inform and shape our service design and delivery. Our local Citizens Advice network delivers advice to millions of people each year across England and Wales, whether this is delivered face to face, over the phone or via webchat. We also provide advice through our consumer helpline and our website. Our evaluative work is underpinned by our need to have a detailed understanding of how each element of our service works and how we can best meet the needs of our clients. We don't prioritise one methodological approach over all others to do this. We use a range of methods determined by balancing needs, resources and proportionality to gather, and use, the best evidence we can collect.

The diversity of our service and our clients means we recognise the importance of context when we make judgements in evaluations. We always seek to understand what works (or doesn't), for whom and in what circumstances. To do this, we often look at both the process and outcomes of service delivery. Knowing how a programme or service is implemented, and if this was as intended, helps us

understand why outcomes are achieved, or not. We draw on the expertise of people across our network, including our highly trained staff and volunteers, to understand detail and nuance. Having an internal evaluation team with an in-depth understanding of our service is beneficial in this type of enquiry.

What works approaches often prioritise evidence from Randomised Control Trials (RCTs), an experimental approach that compares the outcomes for two groups: one which has received an intervention and one which has not. This approach is often considered the best way to understand if an intervention or project has directly caused any measured outcomes, but they are very resource intensive to deliver as project delivery needs to be strictly controlled to ensure experimental conditions are followed. It is unlikely that our Impact and Evaluation team would conduct an RCT, not only due to resource constraints and the diversity of service delivery across our vast network, but because we do not deny services to clients who need support. However, we do employ quasi-experimental approaches using matched samples or pre / post testing of samples where appropriate. The size and scope of our service means we have access to a large database of monitoring information about our clients and the outcomes we help them achieve through advice and support. This is instrumental in providing us with 'baseline' information about the effectiveness and impact of our services, which we can use to measure new approaches and interventions against.

We appreciate that it's unlikely that one evaluation will provide us with all the answers about a service or programme. Our evaluative work also draws on, and informs, research and insight from other sections of our organisation and across our network of local Citizens Advice. One of the benefits of having an internal impact and evaluation team is that each evaluation we undertake adds to our knowledge base, informing both our service delivery and evaluation delivery. It is this continual reflection and refinement that helps us feel confident that our service working to achieve real and positive outcomes for our clients.

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At Citizens Advice we are committed to understanding what works and ensuring organisational resources are responsibly invested into worthwhile services. Our Impact and Evaluation team are responsible for customer insight research, assessing service effectiveness, and demonstrating the impact and value of the Citizens Advice service through evidence and analysis. When evaluating our services, this includes:

- **Evaluations of direct service delivery** - understanding what works for who and why, informing organisation decision-making and resource-use.
- **Shared outcomes measurement** - designing clear outcomes measures that can be used by the 300+ local charities that make up the Citizens Advice service
- **Equipping local Citizens Advice to undertake outcomes research** - providing guidance on theoretical and practical considerations of local service evaluation
- **Evidencing the impact and value of our work** - findings from specific evaluations help us build-up our evidence on the impact and value of the Citizens Advice service

To find out more about [what works at Citizens Advice](#), follow [@CABImpact](#) on Twitter or get in touch: [impact@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:impact@citizensadvice.org.uk)