

# Social research for policy making

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# What Ministers say: Michael Gove on using research

‘I want to see more data ..... to show what works, clearer information about teaching techniques that get results, more rigorous, scientifically-robust research about pedagogies which succeed and proper independent evaluations of interventions which have run their course. We need more evidence-based policy making, and for that to work we need more evidence.’

***2010 speech to headteachers at the National College for Leadership Annual Conference***

# David Willetts (Science Minister) on evidence-based policy:

‘I certainly believe (in evidence-based policy).....but there’s more to it than sitting in an endless evidence seminar’.

RCT is the gold standard. I’m very keen on payment by results. This encourages providers to assess what works themselves. I think you can get a long way if you draw on evidence and then link it to an argument, a narrative.’

*Q: Will you commit to stopping programmes if evidence shows they don’t work?*

‘Yes, we will’

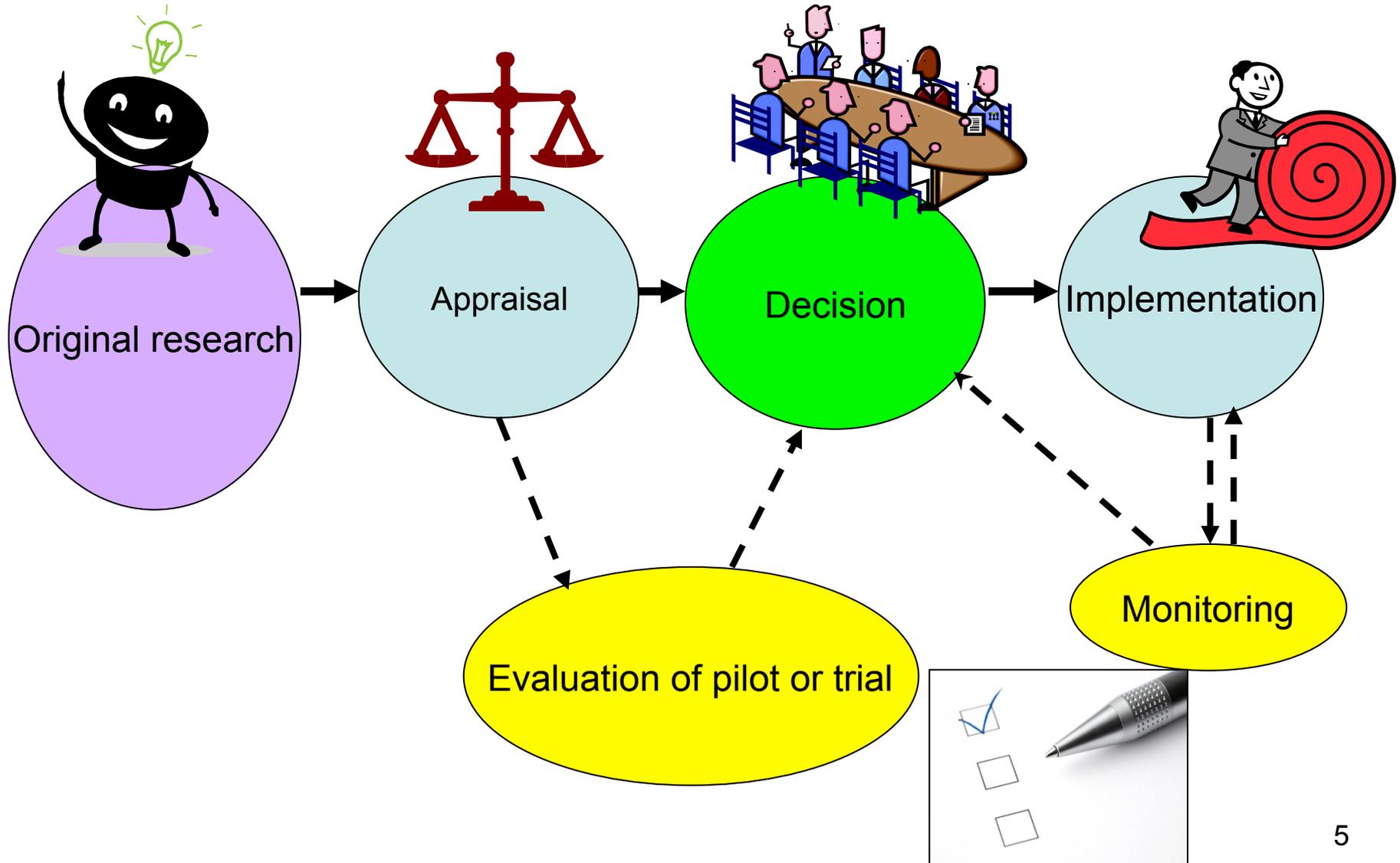
***Interview on Radio 4s ‘More or Less’ programme (2010)***

# And an insider's view.....

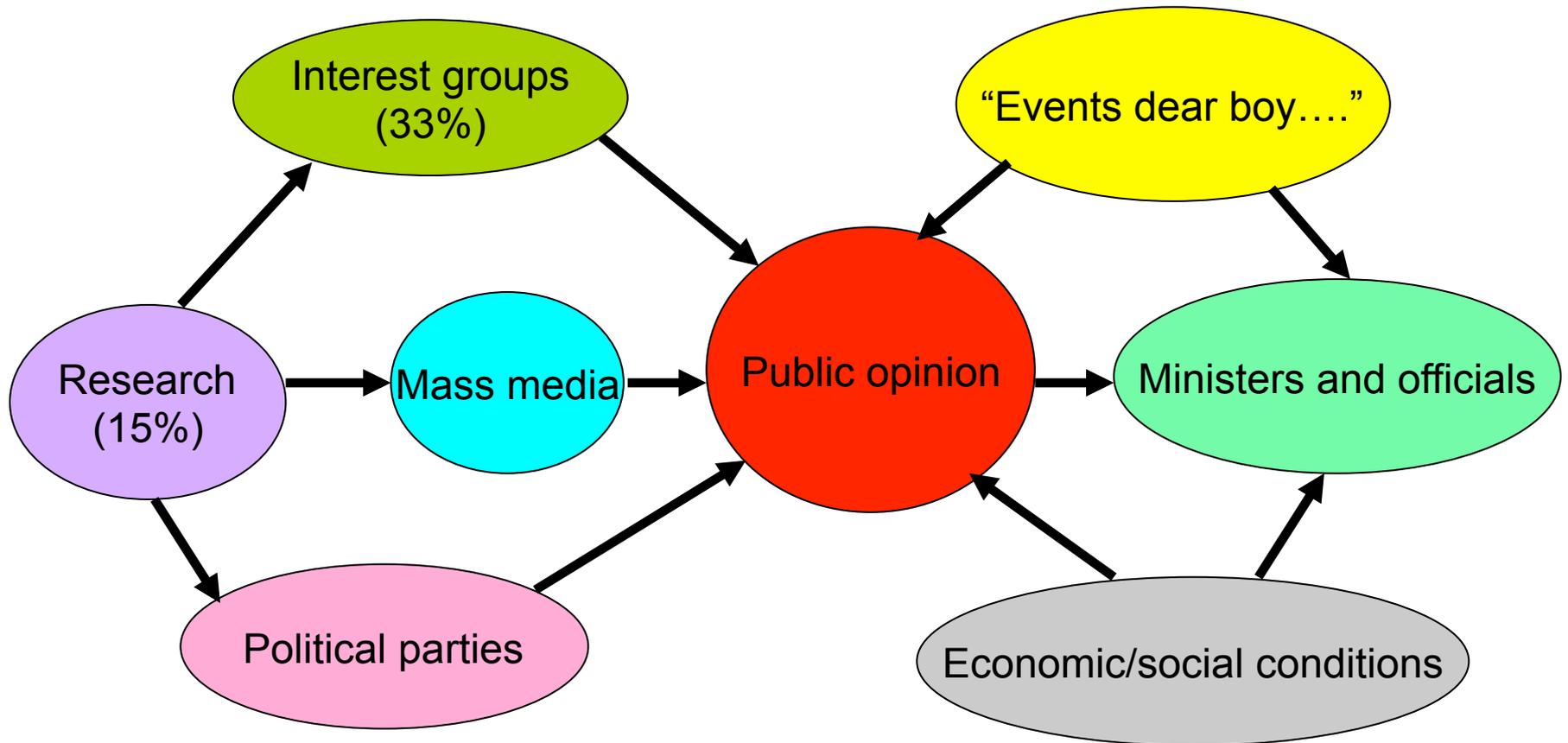
'The Coalition government will require a stronger case to be made for what you want to do as you have to persuade the other party. With less money, national roll-outs will be too expensive so smaller-scale pilots are more likely. Perhaps we will see a new golden age of evidence-based policy in government.'

*David Halpern, formerly of Tony Blair's Strategy Unit and now of the Behavioural Insights Unit (Cabinet Office) and Institute of Government*

# Research impact: linear view



# Research: a mediated impact



# Limitations on impact

- Research one of many of inputs to policy process
- Knowledge is cumulative: shouldn't rely on a single study
- Wider applicability may be uncertain
- Lost in translation.....
- Self-justification and confirmation not change of mind or direction

# Challenge vs confirmation?

*“If a man is offered a fact which goes against his instincts, he will scrutinise it closely, and unless the evidence is overwhelming, he will refuse to believe it. If, on the other hand, he is offered something which affords a reason for acting in accordance to his instincts, he will accept it even on the slightest evidence”*

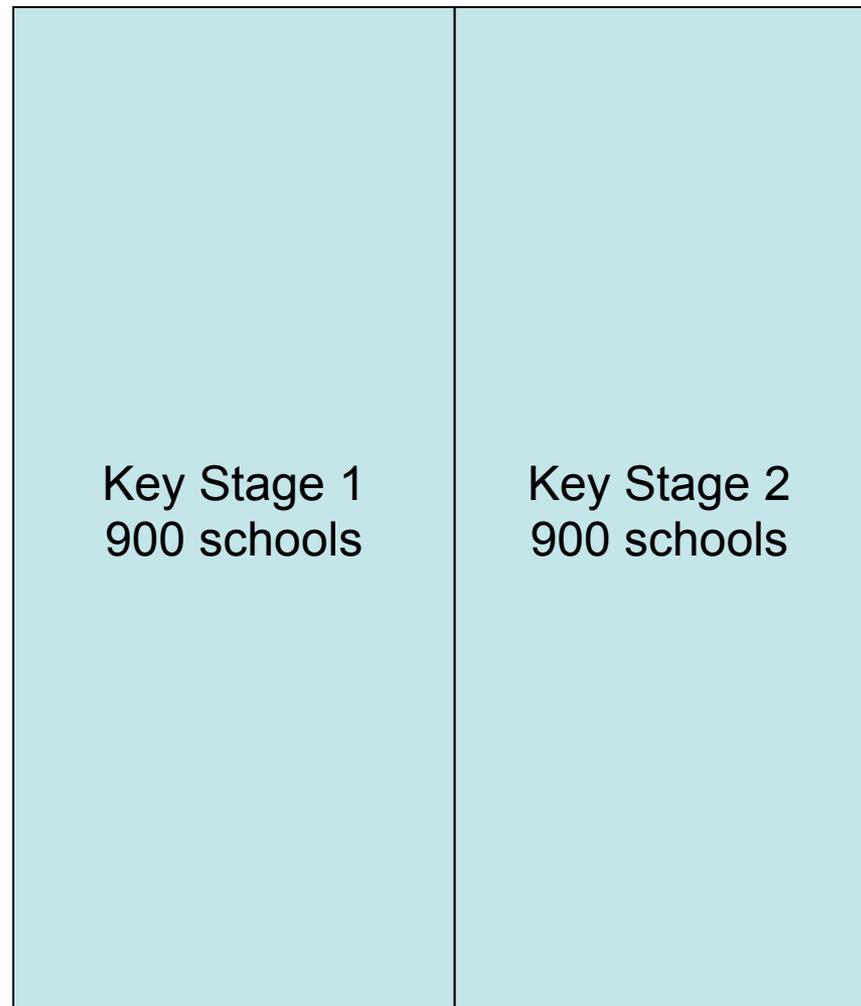
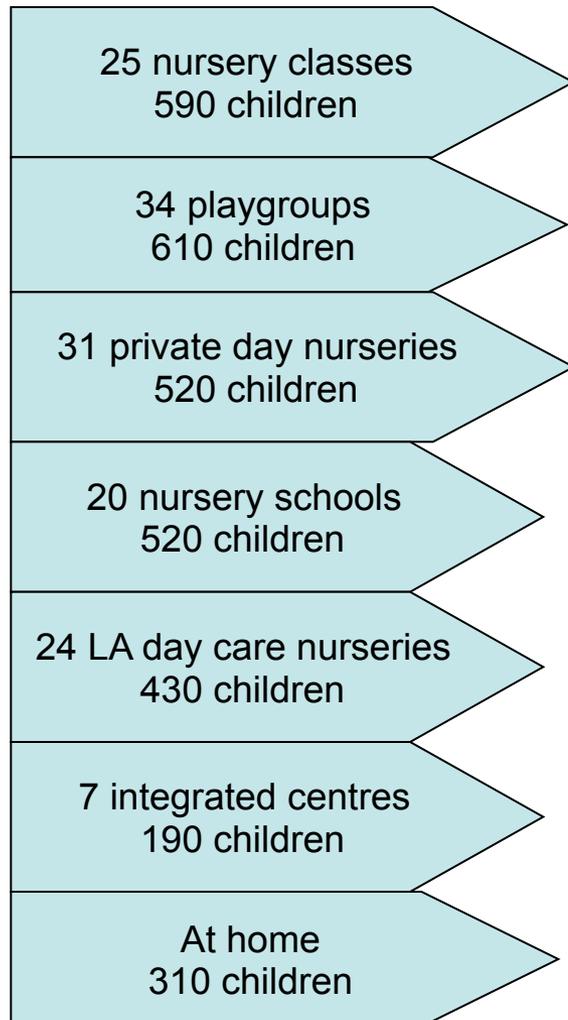
Bertrand Russell

# Factors affecting influence

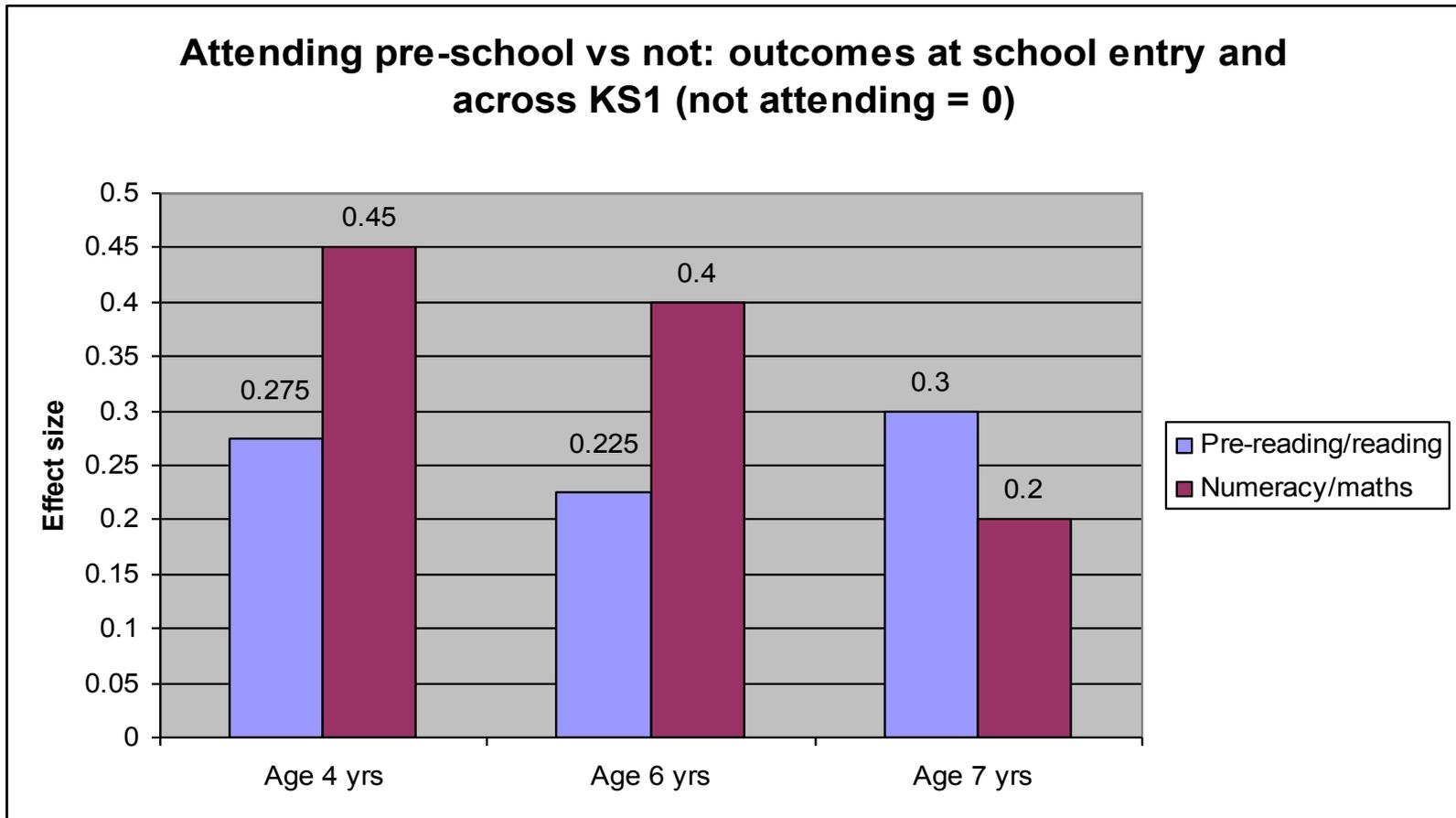
Variable	Description	Controllability
Comprehensibility	Clear, crisp messages	High
Credibility	Rigorous method	Moderate to high
Trust	To be cultivated	Moderate to high
Framing	Economic and scientific frames work best	Moderate
Fragmented government	Multiple veto points	Low
Quality of legislative debate	Failure to rebut false evidence is damaging	Low
Economic conditions	Weak economy, high budget deficits	Low
Scholarly consensus	It's absence limits use	Low to moderate

# Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE)

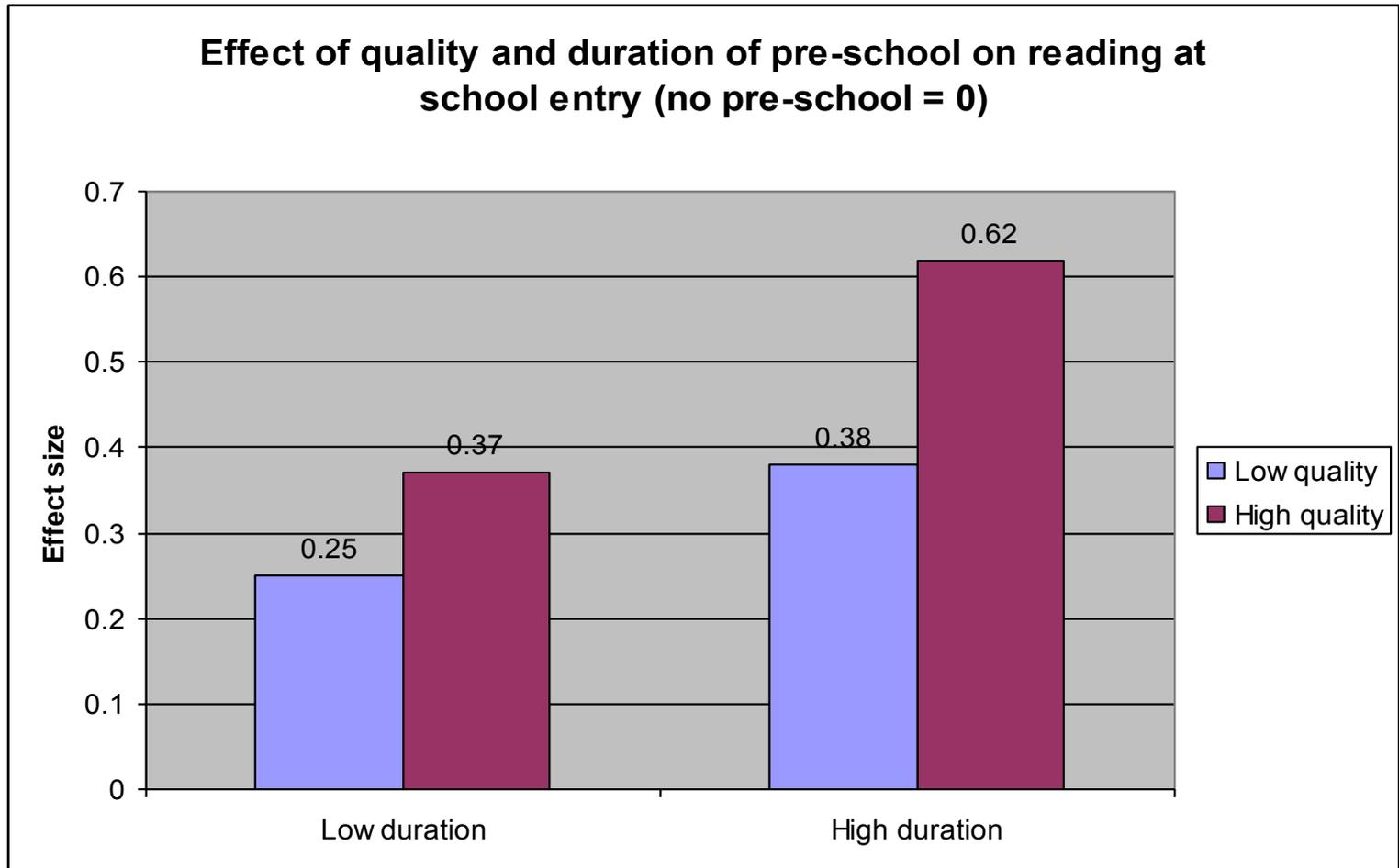
3+ yrs → Reception → 6 yrs → 7 yrs → 10 yrs → 11 yrs



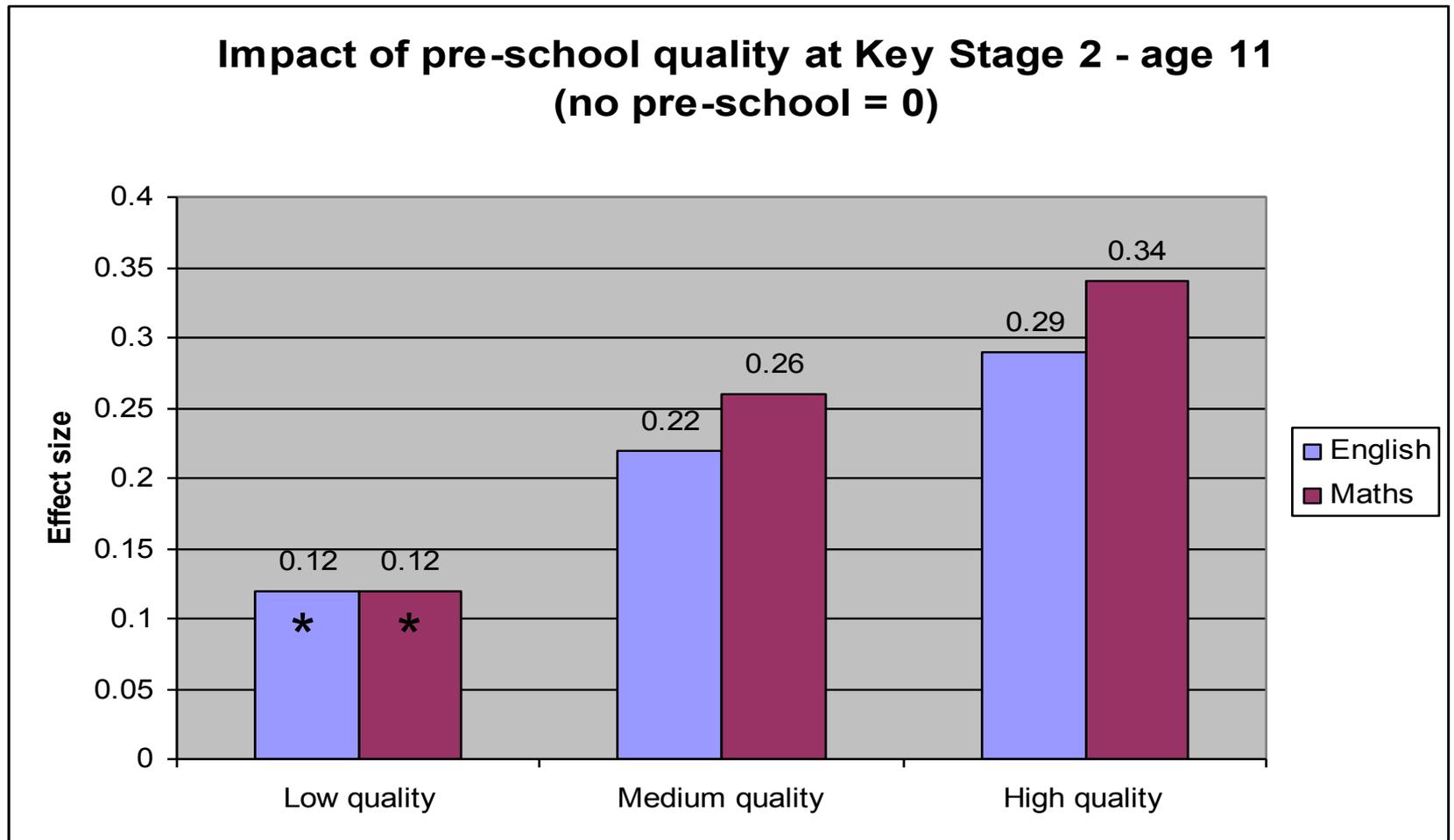
# Pre-school makes a difference



# and it's quality that matters



# .....and the effects persist



\* Non-significant difference

# Key messages from EPPE

- Pre-school makes a difference to later outcomes – it's worth investing in
- High quality makes the difference – it's worth investing in
- The effects persist to at least Key Stage 2
- Especially beneficial for disadvantaged
- Home-learning environment matters too

# EPPE : factors affecting influence

Variable	Description	Score
Comprehensibility	Clear, crisp messages	√ / ?
Credibility	Rigorous method	√
Trust	To be cultivated	√
Framing	Economic and scientific frames work best	√
Fragmented government	Multiple veto points	?
Quality of legislative debate	Failure to rebut false evidence is damaging	?
Economic conditions	Weak economy, high budget deficits	√
Scholarly consensus	It's absence limits use	√ / ?



## GSR:

- Provides government with objective, reliable, relevant and timely social research
- Supports the development, implementation, review and evaluation of policy and delivery
- Ensures policy debate is informed by the best research evidence and thinking from the social sciences

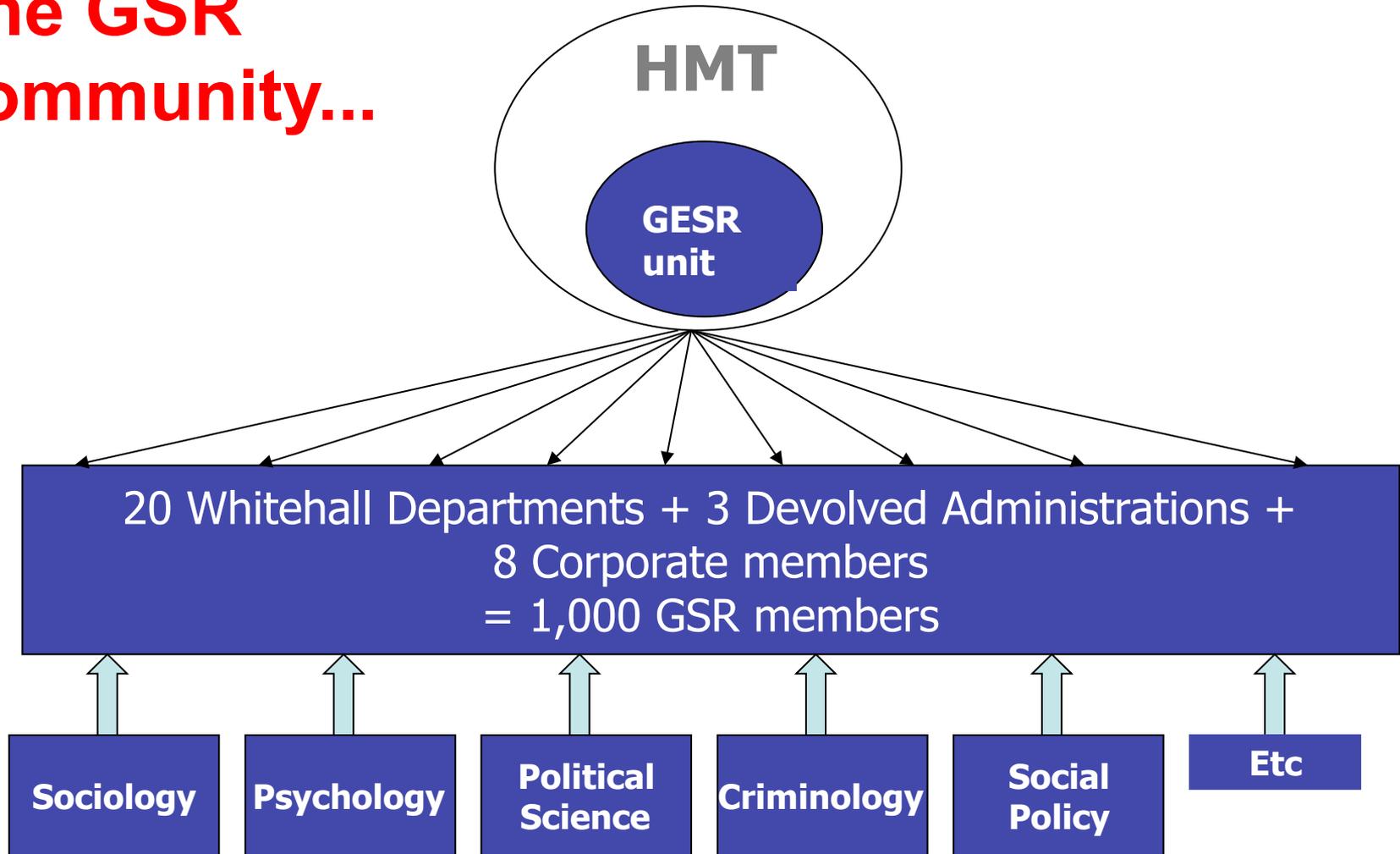
# Origins: Social Research in Government (1)

- Origins of social research within government can be traced back seventy years to the establishment of the Government Social Survey in 1941 - set up to conduct systematic research on the impact of war-time rationing on the public's diet, health and morale.
- The project built on the 'Mass Observation' experiment started in 1937 and was overseen by the Minister of Information Duff Cooper. The popular press at the time invented the name 'Cooper's Snoopers' for the researchers undertaking the survey.

# Origins of Social Research in Government (2)

- Claim for the earliest presence of a social research unit within a Whitehall policy department lies with Home Office.
- In March 1957 the newly appointed Conservative Home Secretary R.A. Butler was preparing for a Supply Debate on prisons. He was struck by the lack of information to enable him to justify new expenditure on prisons and penal policy.
- In his opening speech in the debate he said he intended to give first priority to expanding the Home Office's research programme. The next day Sir Frank Newsam, the Permanent Secretary, told the Treasury that the Secretary of State said the Home Office must have a research unit. The Treasury agreed to this on 21 March 1957.

# The GSR community...



# Social Researchers in Departments: numbers

1-10	11- 20	21- 30	31-50	51 - 70	71 - 100	100 – 130	Over 130
Cabinet Office	DEFRA	BIS (inc. ACAS)		CLG	Home Office	DWP	ONS (348 members)
DCMS	DfT	DfE		Welsh Assembly Govt	MoJ	Scottish Govt	
DECC	DoH	HMRC					
HMT	Food Standards Agency						
Health & Safety Executive	National Policing Improvement Agency						
Legal Services Research Centre							

# Joining up the 'analysts'



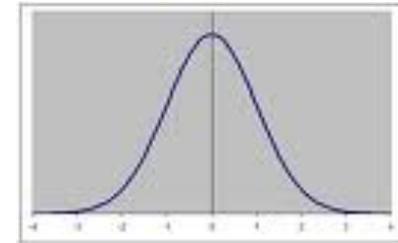
**Economists (1,200)**



**Scientists and engineers (1,500)**



**Operational researchers (400)**



**Statisticians (1,400)**



**Social researchers (1,000)**

# What we actually do...

- Research design
- Primary research – data collection and analysis
- Data analysis
- Commissioning and managing
- Consultancy
- Knowledge management
- Challenge

# GSR roles

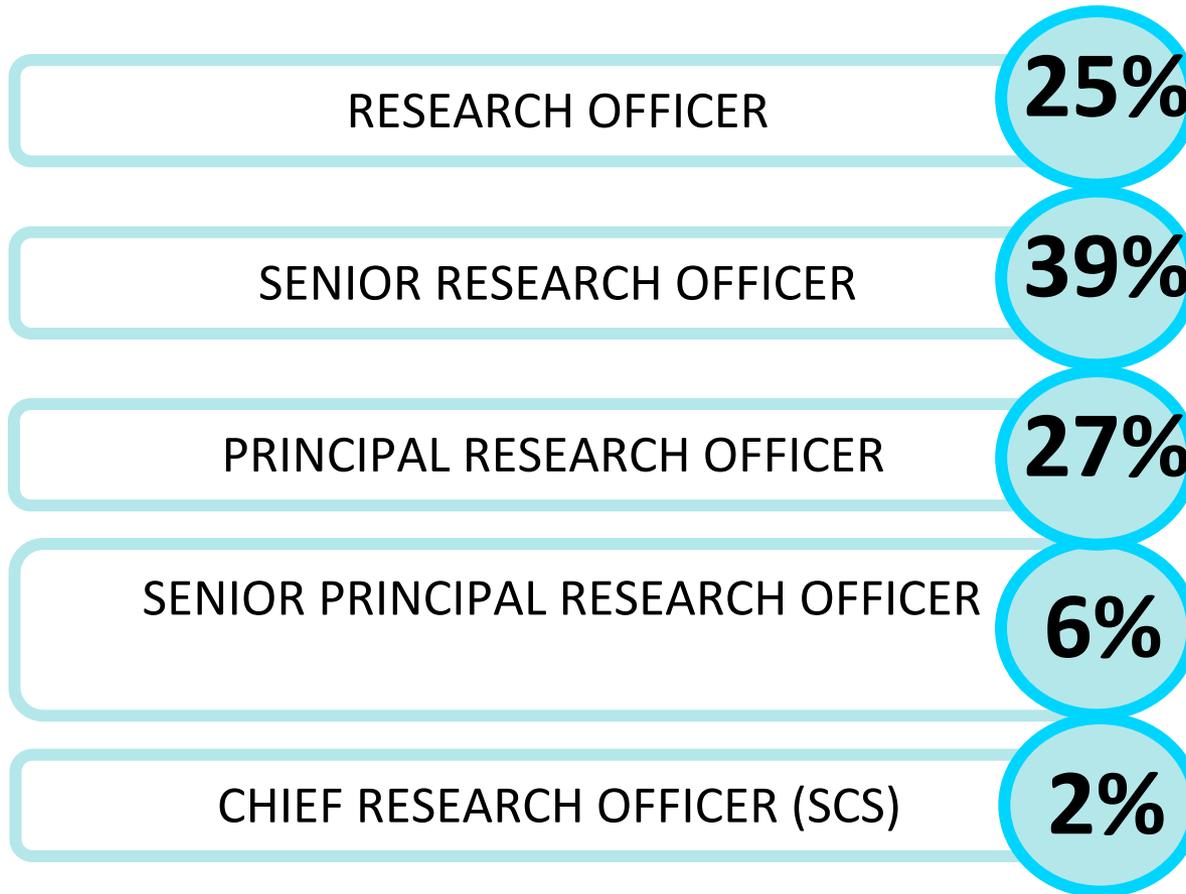
Customer  
liaison

Technician

Professional

Knowledge  
broker

# Structures



# How researchers are organised

- Different departments have different organisational set ups
- But all Departments in which GSR members work have a Head of Profession (HoP)
- There are two joint heads of service:
  - Richard Bartholomew (based at DfE), and
  - Jenny Dibden (based at DWP)

# Key skills for success

- Flexibility
- Can-do attitude
- Intellectual curiosity
- Intelligence - academic yes, but emotional too
- Resilience
- A good sense of balance

# Finding out about GSR

[www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr](http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr)



*Analysis for Policy*

# Current DECC vacancies

## Senior Research Officers

£34,713 to £41,851 = SEO equivalent

London

Full time, Permanent + Fixed Term

- Leading a range of research projects, you' ll make a crucial contributions to policies that affect the lives of everyone in the UK. You' ll help us understand how new products, technology and initiatives designed to reduce carbon emissions will impact on people, their homes, organisations, business and industry.
- The Department for Energy and Climate Change tackles twin challenges. We investigate ways to keep the nation' s energy flowing, while protecting the global environment. It' s dynamic, fast paced and incredibly important work. And you' ll play a key role. As a core member of a growing team of dedicated experts, you' ll carry out research that has a direct impact on innovative policies. You' ll be instrumental to our efforts to cut emissions, and your research will cover all kinds of topics. You might find yourself specialising in supporting policy design and development or in policy evaluation.

**Closing date: 13th June 2012**

[http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/about/jobs/research\\_offic/research\\_offic.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/about/jobs/research_offic/research_offic.aspx)

# Getting in touch: Economic and Social Research Council website

[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/collaboration/  
contact-government.aspx](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/collaboration/contact-government.aspx)

- If you are a researcher interested in working with government organisations you can find out more about the research they are involved in and contact them using the details below.
- After receiving your email some government organisations may ask you to complete a form in order to find out more about your enquiry.

Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

Email: [adam.cooper@decc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:adam.cooper@decc.gsi.gov.uk)

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