

# The Next Three Years

*"The results were amazing... I had to decide between which breakfast TV show I wasn't going to be on."* Paul Howard-Jones, Professor of Neuroscience and Education at the University of Bristol.

**The Education Media Centre aims to make education research more accessible and so to improve policy development, practice and public understanding of education. It does so by providing journalists and other users with authoritative and independent insights from education research in response to current research news and policy developments.**

The EMC:

- **Saves time** by providing a single point of access to a wide range of research expertise.
- **Promotes well-informed education news** by offering impartial and authoritative access to experts and evidence.
- **Makes research findings more accessible and media-friendly.**
- **Raises the quality and availability of evidence for** decision-makers, teachers and the general public received through the media.
- **Encourages fresh thinking by capturing innovation and insights** that are not always part of the current policy agenda.
- **Deepens public understanding of education issues** and helps shape the best possible systems of learning, training and education.
- **Supports academics** who want to find a wider audience for their research findings.

In its first two years, the EMC launched four core services:

- ▶ **Matchmaking service** between journalists and education researchers.
- ▶ **Rapid responses** to key stories.
- ▶ **Live briefing events** at which key pieces of research are launched.
- ▶ **Press releases** on new research evidence.

In its next phase, the centre has additional plans for:

- ▶ **Training seminars** to help academics improve their media and communication skills.
- ▶ **'Meet the media'** events for academics who want to promote their research more widely.
- ▶ **'What's the evidence?' briefings** on key education topics.

**Our patrons** include high-profile figures from public life, the media and business. All of them are committed to the vision and values of the Education Media centre.

- Estelle Morris – Peer and Founding Patron
- Andrew Adonis – Peer.
- Neil Carmichael, MP - Chair, Commons Education Select Committee
- John Dunford – Chair, Whole Education.
- Greg Dyke – Former Director-General, BBC.
- Judith Judd, former TES Editor.
- Sue Littlemore – Former Education Correspondent, BBC, and former EMC Chief Executive
- Nick Pearce - Director of The Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath
- David Puttnam – Peer
- Andreas Schleicher – Director for Education and Skills, OECD
- Gillian Shephard – Peer
- Phil Willis – Peer

The EMC prides itself on its independence and its objectivity. It is committed to supporting high standards in both research and journalism, and has no political or research agenda. It is the first national media centre dedicated to education.

The governance arrangements of the centre include key roles for:

- Board of Trustees (with full operational responsibility)
- Patrons
- Advisory Network

The centre is run by journalists with a wealth of experience of working in the national media. Between us we have spent more than four decades in staff jobs at the BBC and on quality national newspapers. We also have wide experience of helping academics to reach a wider audience, and of delivering training both to academics and to journalists.

At present the EMC's staff consists of a Chief Executive and a Press Officer. Our plans for the next three years include increased administrative support and greater use of freelance support for training and media work. We also plan to strengthen our volunteer capacity in key areas such as fundraising and IT.

## Two phases of the EMC

The EMC became fully operational in the Autumn of 2013, and the initial set-up phase is now complete. We have become the 'go to' place for journalists who want to find an expert or some evidence on a particular education topic. In our first year alone, our output was used by almost every major news organisation in the UK and by some international ones, too. Among the organisations with which we have partnered to run press launches are the OECD, HEFCE and the Wellcome Trust.

### EMC: Our first two years in numbers



The centre is now entering a second phase in which it will establish firmer links with the wider educational world. In particular, it will reach out to academics who hope to achieve greater impact with their research. It will offer training, 'meet the media' events and one-to-one support to help researchers feel confident at every step when seeking a wider audience.

We also hope to build stronger relationships with a wider range of organisations engaged in education, such as third sector organisations, trade bodies and private companies.

In order to ensure independence, the EMC will continue to have a wide range of funders. Its current running costs are £85,000, and its plans for growth are modest – rising to around £100,000 in year two to allow for extra administrative support. Extra requirements for training and other events will be fulfilled through the recruitment of a panel of freelance journalists with excellent experience in covering education in the national media.

## Funding

The EMC's initial funding came from a range of bodies, including:

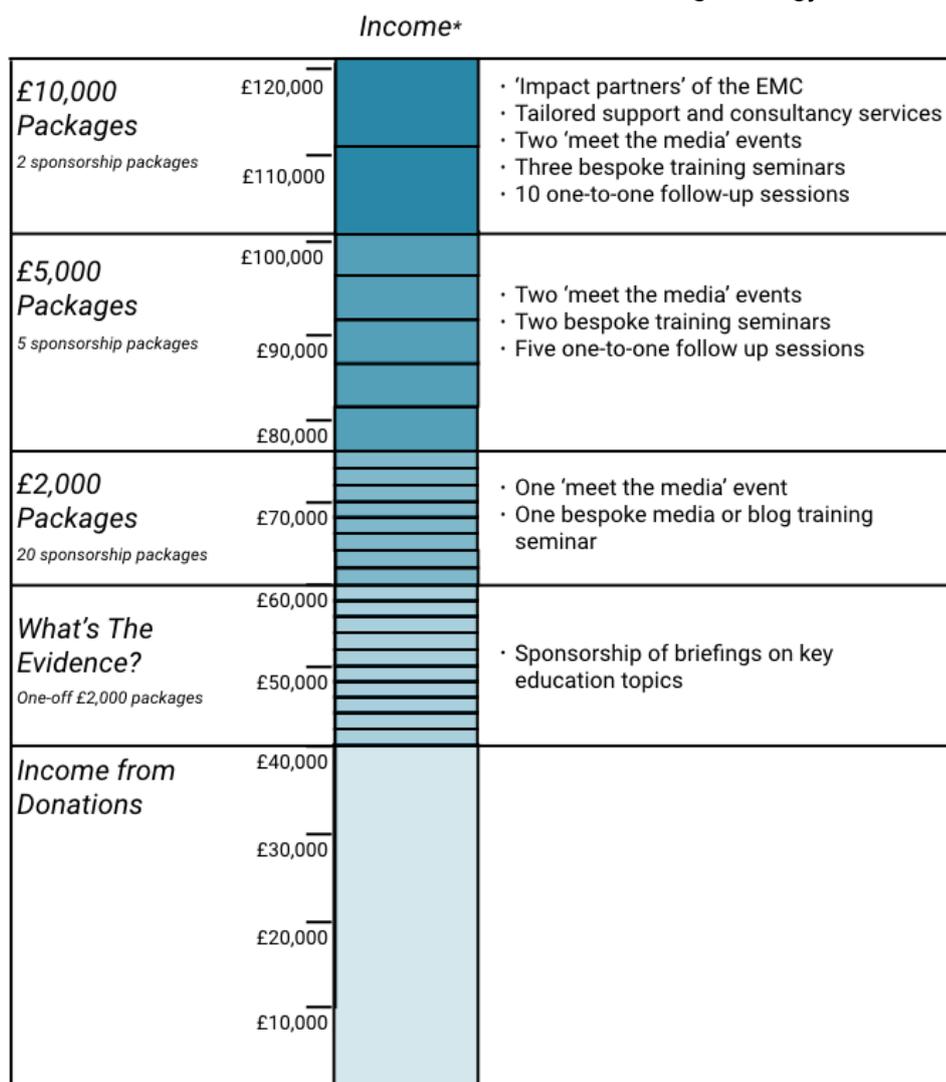
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Wellcome Trust, Economic and Social Research Council, Association of School and College Leaders, Cambridge Assessment, City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development, Communications Management, Edge Foundation, J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust, Learning and Skills Improvement Service, Million+, National Science Learning Centre, National Union of Teachers and Osiris Education.

Universities which have supported us include Durham, Edge Hill, Queen's University Belfast, Bedfordshire and Lancaster.

As it matures, the centre now needs to establish itself more firmly with the rest of the educational world. In order to achieve a sustainable funding strategy we need to reach out to a wider range of academic institutions, and to establish better links with private and third sector organisations.

The EMC's future funding will come partly from donations (25 per cent within three years) and partly from a range of sponsorship packages (75 per cent).

We will still offer our initial core services free to those who produce high-quality research, but those who choose to support us financially over the next three years will be able to choose from a range of extra benefits. These will fit within the wider funding strategy as follows:



\*Upfront costs associated with the sponsorship programme are estimated to be around £20,000.

'What's the evidence?' briefings on key education topics will be on the EMC's website and will be promoted on social media – so when a story breaks on a major topic, we can quickly direct the media and the wider public to the best evidence. A list of topics will be available to potential sponsors so they can see which areas are to be covered. To ensure impartiality and independence, the EMC and its academic advisory panel will prepare the briefings and retain editorial control.

## Why is an Education Media Centre needed?

The media has always had a vital role in linking research evidence to the real world – to policy makers, to teachers and trainers, to parents and learners – but that need is stronger now than ever. Both those who do the research and those who have need of its insights recognise the need for better communication.

Schools and other places of learning are increasingly devolved from local government, and they need accurate, useful and accessible information on what works – and what doesn't work – in education. But all too often they do not have easy access to the information they need.

**Academics are required by the research councils to consider the future impact of their work at the point of applying for funding, so those who have a clear strategy for this are most likely to be successful. And universities are required to demonstrate the research they have produced has achieved social and economic, as well as academic, impact.**

Yet many academics feel uncomfortable working with the media. Some fear their work may be oversimplified or misrepresented; others who are keen to reach a wider audience lack the relevant contacts and skills.

Meanwhile, editors, journalists and policy-makers say academic research is not always easy to access. The subject matter is not always in tune with topical issues, or it is not presented at the right time. It can be dense, relying too much on jargon or technical language. In the absence of an impartial and authoritative perspective on the state of the evidence base, education research can be 'cherry picked' to support a particular policy or political agenda.

In our fast-changing media environment, news organisations must often rely on general reporters or freelance support to cover education issues, rather than specialist correspondents. This makes easy access to clear evidence on controversial and complex education matters all the more valuable.

The EMC was inspired by and modelled on the Science Media Centre, which has a high reputation amongst journalists and the science community for making complex and controversial research accessible to journalists who want to report science news accurately, clearly and at speed.

We aim to act as a bridge between the worlds of academia and the media, ensuring the best evidence on current issues reaches those who can use it, at the moment when they need them. We enhance, rather than replacing, existing capacity – because we are seen as independent, impartial and authoritative, journalists trust us.

## EMC services

The EMC provides four core services. We do not charge for these: our decisions on which research to promote are based on newsworthiness and whether – in the view of our academic advisers – it is good research. As well as reacting to topical education issues, we stimulate new areas of debate by promoting research which might previously have gone unnoticed.

► **Breaking news reactions:** Timely, short, media-friendly quotations from respected academics on the evidence behind the news. We specialise in anticipating the news agenda so we can email experts' quotes to national journalists before their deadlines.

*When an independent commission highlighted the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged pupils going to university, we sent two expert comments to the media. They were picked up by The Guardian, The Independent, The Huffington Post and, via the Press Association, 64 local online newspaper sites.*

► **Live briefings:** Press conferences, organised and hosted by us, at which journalists hear from a panel of experts about cutting-edge education research. Among the organisations which have chosen to partner with us to communicate their evidence to the media are the OECD, Wellcome Trust, Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

*When the Wellcome Trust and EEF launched a multi-million pound research project about how neuroscience might improve teaching and learning, we hosted the press briefing. The story was covered in the The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, The Times, Financial Times and the Daily Mail, among others. The BBC's Today programme, BBC 5 Live and BBC World News all picked it up, and more than 120 articles appeared in regional newspapers or online sites.*

► **Setting the news agenda with a timely press release:** We help independent experts to make sure their evidence has the highest possible profile. By connecting academics with our contacts in the media, we aim to help foster a stronger, more evidence-based education system.

*When the government introduced a calculator ban in SAT tests, we helped academics from Oxford, Cambridge, King's College London and Cambridge Assessment to highlight research evidence which showed calculators help, rather than hinder, pupils' maths achievement. They received coverage on the BBC's Breakfast and Newsround programmes as well as on BBC 5 Live. The Daily Telegraph picked up the story along with a host of regional media, and an article on the BBC's website attracted 344 comments.*

► **Matchmaking:** We provide a bespoke service so that academics with newsworthy research findings get good, accurate coverage and so that journalists get a good story relayed to them in a straightforward, accessible and accurate form. We can advise on which individual journalists have shown an interest in a particular topic and we can contact those journalists directly on behalf of the researchers.

*When Paul Howard-Jones, Professor of Neuroscience and Education at the University of Bristol, published findings from a brain scan study on how learning through computer-based games can be beneficial, the EMC contacted journalists who already had a track record in covering this field. Having received several bids from broadcast journalists wishing to interview Professor Howard-Jones, we supported him in deciding which to accept and we liaised with all sides to ensure smooth communications about his busy schedule on the day of the launch. He appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, BBC1's Breakfast and a round of BBC regional radio programmes. Forty seven regional, local and national newspapers picked up on the story from our press release via the Press Association.*

Afterwards he wrote to thank us:

"I must commend the EMC for their help ...the results were amazing. Apart from helping me develop the story, press release and then networking the news at the correct moment .... they also held my hand when the whole thing lifted off and I had to decide between which breakfast TV show I wasn't going to be on ...it would have been far too overwhelming for me to handle on my own. ... A uniquely useful and very needed service for educational researchers."

In its next phase, the EMC will launch new services in partnership with a range of sponsor organisations.

These will include:

**'Meet the media' events:** Academics who want to work with the media but who lack contacts or experience, or who want to find out more about how to ensure journalists fully understand their findings, will be able to take part in these events. They will hear from experienced education journalists about what kinds of stories they're looking for, and they will hear from academics who've been there already. The EMC will host and will provide some clear tips on working with the media.

**Media training seminars:** These will be smaller, more tailored sessions at which an EMC journalist will take participants through the pros and cons of working with the media. There will be practical exercises and time for reflection on participants' personal concerns.

**Blogging and social media training:** This training is aimed at researchers who may be at an early stage in their careers but who would like to communicate their research to a wider audience. We will talk through the advantages and disadvantages and help to allay some fears. Participants will be invited to bring along a piece of research on which they'd like to blog, and will receive brief feedback on their work within the session.

**One-to-one follow-up sessions:** Training session participants each receive a 30-minute follow-up session with the EMC at which they can talk through their personal plans and strategy. Where appropriate, we can put them in touch with media and online organisations which may be interested in featuring their research.

**Impact partners:** The EMC is looking for a small number of impact partners with whom it will work to form closer relationships. The nature of these relationships will be agreed on the basis of need, but could include support in writing impact statements for research funding bids, for example. Partner institutions will be able to tell funding bodies they are partnered with EMC and that their research outputs have been endorsed as excellent (where relevant) by its research advisory panel. While maintaining its right to independent decision-making, the EMC will provide its partners with a priority bespoke service when they want to reach out to the education media.

**'What's the evidence?' briefings:** The EMC is producing a list of education topics which come up regularly in the news: for instance, widening participation in higher education, apprenticeships and the role of schools in fostering social mobility. We will be inviting sponsors with an interest in one or more of these topics to support them financially. Editorial control will remain with the EMC and its academic advisory board, but sponsors' interest will be noted on our website and, where appropriate, sponsors will be invited to take part in relevant events on those topics.

## What doesn't the EMC do?

- The Centre does not push any particular political, institutional or ideological agenda – the EMC's core commitment to impartiality, objectivity and having no specific research or political agenda sets it apart from other organisations.
- The EMC does not seek to replace existing press offices or organisations currently disseminating research - the aim is to enhance, rather than replace, the reach and impact from existing press office functions.
- The EMC is not a repository of research evidence and information: the aim is to improve the flow of information between the press/media/policy makers and researchers.

## Our costs

Our current costs are around £85,000 per year, and consist mainly of salaries for our two in-house members of staff. Other costs include rent, travel expenses, website hosting and IT support. Our plans for growth are modest but include provision for increased administrative support as our activities grow. They also include provision for freelance panel who will help to deliver training and 'meet the media' events.

## The risks

### **RISK: Sponsorship leading to concerns about impartiality.**

**RESPONSE:** The EMC's leadership will always be vigilant about its independence and about its political impartiality. Decisions will be made on the basis of the quality of research and its newsworthiness. Our trustees and our academic advisory panel play a major role in ensuring this is the case. The EMC is a fully independent venture and is a registered charity.

### **RISK: Overstretch of existing staff.**

**RESPONSE:** While our plans will certainly mean extra work for our existing team, particularly in the initial stages, additional freelance support will ensure that sponsorship services can be provided while protecting the ability of the EMC's core staff to work directly with media and researchers to ensure better evidence in education stories.

### **RISK: The centre is unable to attract sufficient funding to continue its work.**

The EMC recognises that it needs to build a sustainable funding strategy for the future. Its current plans involve reaching out to a wide variety of different types of organisation, both for sponsorship and for donations.

## Governance and accountability

**The Board** has governance responsibility for the EMC and guides strategic direction and outputs. It works closely with the EMC Chief Executive and has full responsibility for outcomes.

**Patrons** provide high-level support to the EMC through their expertise in politics, the media, business and educational practice. Their role is as champions for the EMC, with no operational decision-making responsibility.

**The Research Advisory Panel** is a group of research specialists who collectively have broad knowledge of the education research field. They support the EMC team by providing initial leads to

experts within different education domains, and by advising on which research is of sufficient quality to be part of the EMC's output.

### Research Advisers

- Dr Jonathan Sharples – Education Endowment Foundation.
- Richard Bartholomew – former Chief Research Officer at the Department for Education, and former Joint Head of Government Social Research
- Professor Robert Coe – Durham University
- Professor Kathy Sylva – Oxford University
- Professor Anna Vignoles – Cambridge University, Institute for Fiscal Studies , Institute of Education – University of London
- Professor Steve Higgins – Durham University

Our Research Advisers help ensure the quality and authority of the research and expertise used by the EMC.

**The Advisory Network** comprises a range of individuals from education, the media, academia and businesses who support the concept of an Education Media Centre, helped get it off the ground and continue to offer help to sustain and develop it.

### Staffing

The EMC is staffed by a Chief Executive, who is responsible for oversight and day-to-day running of the centre, and by a press officer, who deals with media releases, initial contacts from the media and reactions to breaking news stories.

#### Fran Abrams, Chief Executive



Fran began reporting on education for the *Birmingham Post and Mail* in 1988, and went on to be Education Correspondent of the *Sunday Times*, the *Sunday Correspondent*, the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Independent*. She later worked as Westminster Correspondent of the *Independent*. For the past 15 years she has been part of the reporting team on BBC Radio 4's *File on 4* programme as well as writing articles on education for *The Guardian* and a range of other publications. Her five published books include two on education: *Seven Kings*, published by Atlantic Books in 2006, and *Learning to Fail*, published by Routledge in 2010.

#### Cathy Farmer, Press Officer



Cathy Farmer is the press officer for the EMC. She has spent much of the past twenty years working for BBC News. As a World Affairs producer, she covered many of the major events of the past two decades both in the UK and overseas, working alongside the BBC's senior correspondents and reporters. She produced many live events, features and documentaries for the BBC World Service, Radio 4 and 5 Live. She has been a governor of two schools for the past 8 years, leading on SEN and curriculum issues.

## Andrew Morris, Chair of Trustees



Andrew started his career as a physics teacher following his PhD in molecular biophysics. He moved into college management as vice principal at City & Islington College, then into research management as head of research at the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA). His interest was in getting more and better research evidence into use in education. He became Director of the National Education Research Forum under its chair Sir Michael Peckham where he worked on improving the links between research, practice and policy across education. Currently he works as a freelancer with many organisations and individuals to continue this. He is an honorary senior lecturer at the UCL Institute of Education.

“When academics are so busy, it is wonderful to have trusted colleagues at the Education Media Centre to promote your research findings and informed comment to the wider media and public. A very valuable service.”

**Professor Becky Francis, Director Designate, UCL Institute of Education**

“The Education Media Centre has provided our researchers with an incredibly useful conduit into the media that saves them time and helps to ensure we get our message out clearly.”

**Anna Vignoles, Professor of Education, University of Cambridge**

“The Education Media Centre is important to me because it offers a chance for the often rather quiet voice of research to 'get heard' among the loud opinions that characterise much of public policy and debate around education and skills in England. Everyone has an opinion, but relatively few people sometimes seem to have much grasp of the facts or what they might mean. Research can help with this, but only if it is seen and heard.”

**Ewart Keep, Director, SKOPE, Oxford University**

“We all know media outlets that publish opinions only, and academic colleagues that are happy to co-operate with them. The EMC is different, and that is its appeal for me. They want to know what the current evidence says about each issue.”

**Professor Stephen Gorard, School of Education, Durham University**