

## What can RCTs bring to social policy evaluation?

21 November, 5.00-6.30 pm, at the Royal Statistical Society, London

Tea/coffee available from 4.30. Wine reception follows the event.

What is the value for social policy evaluation of the randomised controlled trial (RCT), a model of experimentation drawn from the natural sciences? Will this initiate “a revolution in the production and use of evidence”, to quote Ben Goldacre, or do different circumstances call for different approaches? What are the issues in the use of RCTs for evaluating social policy? Our two very experienced and knowledgeable speakers will cover the major themes and nuances of this important debate:

### **Leon Feinstein** director of evidence at the Early Intervention Foundation

*“Local autonomy, diversity of practice and differences of skill and interest are among many factors affecting evidence-based decision-making. Yet tending towards the analytically grounded, methodological frame of the RCT can add greatly to policy-making and implementation. So while there is no simple automatic application of RCT evidence to social policy, how can we nevertheless use standards of evidence that emphasise reducing bias in estimates of impact to tackle barriers to evidence-based policy making?”*

### **Jeremy Hardie** LSE, author, economist and lecturer

*“Evidence Based Policy has come to mean, as exemplified by the Nudge Unit’s recent creation of four new Evidence Centres, the use of RCTs and similar statistical techniques to authenticate conclusions such as ‘It Works’. Such techniques provide a very robust conclusion that the intervention caused an improvement on average in that population, there, and then. How generalisable and hence reliable are such conclusions? What role does expert judgement, usually at the bottom of the EBP evidence hierarchies, have to play in good decisions?”*

There’s time for an audience Q&A, and the event is chaired by **Patrick Sturgis**, professor of research methodology at Southampton University and director of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods.

The Cathie Marsh memorial lecture is a long-standing annual event named in honour of an inspirational social scientist. It attracts a large audience of practicing social researchers, statisticians, policy-makers and advisors. It is organised jointly by the Social Research Association and Royal Statistical Society.

*Places are free, but limited:  
Register on the [SRA website](http://www.the-sra.org.uk)  
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