

Progressing the debate on Social Impact Bonds: *Theoretical and empirical developments in the analysis of Social Impact Bonds*

Confirmed keynote speaker: **Emily Gustafsson-Wright**, Brookings Institution

Confirmed panelists include: **Mara Airoidi**, Government Outcomes Lab; **Emma Disley**, RAND Europe; **Roger Bullen**, Triodos Bank; and a prominent fellow (name TBC) from the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab

Hosted by Newcastle University Business School; Policy Innovation Research Unit, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Government Outcomes Lab, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford and RAND Europe



Date: 11th – 12th September 2017

Location: Newcastle University London, 102 Middlesex Street, London, E1 7EZ

[Register here](#)

We are pleased to announce our confirmed speaker:

Dr. Emily Gustafsson-Wright is a fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program at the Brookings Institution and Senior Researcher with the Amsterdam Institute for International Development (AIID). She specializes in applied microeconomic research within the fields of education and health with regional foci in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Currently, her work focuses on effective delivery of social services including challenges to scaling up early childhood development (ECD), education, and health interventions in developing countries. This research encompasses innovative financing mechanisms such as payment by results, public-private partnerships and impact investing. Most recently, she published the most comprehensive global study to date on social and development impact bonds as well as a study examining the application of impact bonds to ECD in low and middle-income countries. Her previous professional experience includes working at the World Bank and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Center.

We are also delighted to announce our closing plenary session ‘US-UK in conversation: learning lessons on impact bonds from across the pond’. Panelists will include:

Mara Airoidi, Director at the newly established Government Outcomes Lab, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

Emma Disley, Associate Research Group Director, RAND Europe and leading author on the first Social Impact Bond at Peterborough

Roger Bullen, Commissioner Advisory Services Lead for Triodos Bank NV Corporate Finance who have supported the development and structuring of many of the Social Impact Bonds now operating in the UK.

A prominent fellow from the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (name TBC), with direct experience of developing US social impact bond projects

About the conference:

The jury is still out on the effectiveness of SIBs. On the one hand, cautionary narratives (Fraser et al., 2016) have tempered the initial hype and excitement. On the other, preliminary independent evaluations suggest that SIBs are starting to produce some of the expected outcomes (Gustafsson-Wright et al. 2015).

Key question marks can be traced in part to the mechanism’s shape-shifting form and also to the considerable empirical challenges associated with evaluating the application of the approach. These form the two central provocations for the second international SIB conference which builds on [last year’s conference](#) also hosted at Newcastle University in London:

‘What is a SIB exactly’? The initial applications of the SIB approach at Peterborough Prison and Rikers Island introduced specific ideas about what a SIB should look like. These models have since been challenged and debated. How is the mechanism evolving and where is the concept moving to in both thematic and configurational terms? What is the underpinning theory of change of SIBs in their varying forms? How does it compare to other forms of outcome-based commissioning? What impact might broader political shifts mean for SIBs? And how might these developments impact upon theoretical approaches available to academic analyses?

What do we now know about whether SIBs are ‘effective’ in delivering against the ‘expectations’ associated with this approach? Active SIB projects are tied to a raft of evaluation programmes which should be generating a wealth of empirical insights. What can they tell us about SIBs’ ability to deliver against their putative benefits? The vast majority of SIBs employ performance and payment metrics that rely only on the validation of administrative data; what are the challenges to implementing more robust impact evaluations? What other evaluation challenges are emerging? How can the academic community contribute to meeting these challenges?

Key contributions:

The conference will provide a forum for academics, independent researchers and practitioners to share the latest thinking and empirical findings in relation to the development of SIBs. It is also an opportunity for those intrigued by and invested in the application of SIBs to connect and exchange ideas. The conference will also include a ‘living lab’ hosted by the University of Newcastle.

Costs:

£150 (2-day full fee, including conference dinner on 11th September)

£120 (2-day full fee)

£80 (1-day full fee, not including conference dinner on 11th September) or

£50 (student fee, includes both days and conference dinner on 11th September)

Cost includes: lunch on both days as well as a wine reception on the evening of **Monday 11 September**. Spaces will be limited so we encourage [early registration](#).