



Focusing on what matters:

Scotland's outcome approach in action

November 2019

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarises learning from an event organised and facilitated by Matter of Focus: Focusing on What Matters: Putting Scotland's Outcome Approach into Action.

The aim of the event was to showcase the work of Matter of Focus clients who have embedded a meaningful focus on outcomes into their day-to-day work using our software OutNav. We also wanted to reinvigorate the conversation about what different agencies and organisations can do together to put Scotland's outcome approach into action.

This report provides a short overview of the day and reflects on the main learning points. We hope that this report will be of interest to those that attended the event, but also anyone looking to put outcome approaches into action.

ABOUT MATTER OF FOCUS

Matter of Focus is a mission-led company based in Edinburgh, Scotland.

We work with organisations, projects and programmes to explore, map, analyse and assess the outcomes that matter to them, the people and populations they care about, and their funders.

We provide tools and techniques to bring together evidence, data and evaluation to ensure that projects and programmes work successfully towards outcomes, are successful and adaptable, and can demonstrate that success to funders, service-users and other stakeholders.

We have created an innovative and easy to use software tool, OutNav, which enables public service organisations and funders to make effective use of their data and information to learn, improve and tell the story about the difference they make.

Matter of Focus is led by Dr Ailsa Cook and Dr Sarah Morton. Ailsa and Sarah are internationally renowned academics, both well known for their ability to develop practical tools backed by robust evidence-based approaches, with extensive experience of delivering practical approaches for public service organisations.

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Why talk about Scotland's outcome approach in action?

On 7 November 2019 Matter of Focus organised an event bringing together a group of people that are leading the way in putting Scotland's outcome approach into action.

WHY THIS EVENT?

Scotland has a long-standing commitment to and is a world leader in using outcomes. For the Scottish Government this helps signal what is important as a nation and is a basis for commissioning services.

There has been progress in creating a shared outcome-based vision about what matters for the country and encouraging services to think, plan and work towards outcomes. There is still a need to develop tools and frameworks to help embed this vision in the day-to-day work of organisations and services.

Taking an outcome-focused approach to public service reform is not without its critics. Working with outcome-focused services, programmes and initiatives can be difficult and complicated.

Outcomes are often misunderstood and misapplied.

— “ *At Matter of Focus we believe there are good ways of working meaningfully with outcomes, data and evidence.* ”

We wanted to host an event to showcase existing good practice and to have a conversation about how people are working together to put Scotland's outcome approach into action.

We think it is important to build a community of people that are working meaningfully with outcomes.





WHO CAME?

We invited people at the forefront of thinking and practice in working meaningfully with outcomes. More than 60 people attended from government, third sector, local government and education, funders and public bodies. People came from Scotland, Wales and England, with a wide range of communities of interest.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE EVENT?

- A presentation from Matter of Focus Co-founder/Director Ailsa Cook, drawing out some lessons based on her and Co-founder/Director Sarah Morton's experience of working alongside organisations to put outcome approaches into action. [1]
- Group conversations about what helps and hinders people in working meaningfully with outcomes.
- Short 'showcase' presentations from 14 different organisations and projects using the Matter of Focus approach and OutNav software [2]. This included sessions on strategic planning; public body reporting; evaluating training; evaluating improvement collaboratives; embedding new models of care and supporting partnership working (see Appendix).
- A keynote presentation from Professor Carol Tannahill, (Glasgow Centre for Population Health/Scottish Government) on the opportunities and challenges of implementing Scotland's outcome approach [3].
- A panel session brought expertise in outcomes from across the system: Dr Emma Miller, Personal Outcomes Network; [4] Antony Clark, Audit Scotland; Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland and Jennifer Wallace from the Carnegie UK Trust [5].

[1] See webinar version: www.matter-of-focus.com/learning-from-putting-scotlands-outcome-approach-into-action

[2] For more about OutNav see www.matter-of-focus.com/what-is-outnav/

[1], [3], [4] & [5] Slides available at www.matter-of-focus.com/outcomes-in-action

Key messages

Six key themes arising from the day's presentations and discussions.

SCOTLAND IS LEADING THE WAY ON OUTCOMES

Scotland is an international leader in working with outcomes. This is reflected in the National Performance Framework (NPF) [6] and the ambition to move away from a focus purely on GDP [7]. This was a key finding of a review in 2017 [8] and was echoed by Jennifer Wallace from her experience of working internationally around wellbeing frameworks with the Carnegie Trust [9].

What makes Scotland uniquely well placed to put an outcome approach into action is that the drive towards outcomes comes from the bottom up as well as the top down. Scotland has a very well-developed national outcomes framework in the NPF that presents a vision for a Scotland where everyone has the opportunity to flourish. This framework encourages organisations within and beyond the public sector to connect their work to the difference it makes and it is how the Scottish Government holds itself accountable to the people.

Alongside this, Scotland has a well-established personal outcomes approach that involves working with people and communities to understand what matters to them and to make progress towards this. This focus on personal outcomes is embedded in policy and goes hand in hand with efforts to be more strengths-based, community-led, preventative and person-centred [10]. Several participants reflected on the need to engage more strategically, as well as boldly, to ensure that connections are made between bottom up and top down approaches to working with outcomes.



Scotland's National Performance Framework

It was also apparent from the multi-sector nature of the event and panellists that working meaningfully with outcomes matters across sectors. Participants, showcasers and panellists represented health, education, social work and community services; local and national organisations; and both public and voluntary sectors. This gives the Scottish approach to outcomes a coherence across sectors, as well as the opportunity to develop thinking and learning between very different kinds of organisations and programmes.

[6] www.nationalperformance.gov.scot

[7] www.ted.com/talks/nicola_sturgeon_why_governments_should_prioritize_well_being

[8] www.whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/outcomes-based-approaches-in-public-service-reform

[9] www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/project/measuring-what-matters

[10] www.personaloutcomescollaboration.org/about-us



OUTCOMES CAN HELP US MANAGE COMPLEX CHANGE

At Matter of Focus we believe there is a strong case for using outcome frameworks as important conceptual tools to help manage the kinds of complex, collaborative change in challenging contexts so many people are working towards. This helps organisations and programmes find the way through complex work and promotes partnership working. It is also a way to check on progress and make sure that what services deliver connects meaningfully to what is important to people who use those services.

The idea of using outcome frameworks in this way was brought to life during the showcase presentations. Organisations demonstrated how keeping a focus on what difference they could make helped their work. For example, Health Technology Wales shared that pushing themselves to evidence the difference their work made helped bring it to life, get buy-in and enabled staff to feel connected to the bigger picture.

Future Pathways, an organisation supporting Scotland's in-care abuse survivors, showed how keeping a focus on outcomes gave space to try different approaches and track change when implementing a programme in a challenging context.

Julie Gardner's showcase presentation from NHS Lothian showed how a focus on outcomes can support a more reflective 'measurement for improvement' approach - vital to improving primary care.

Feedback showed that participants left with a renewed sense of enthusiasm for outcomes and ways of working with them. This is important as in some circles there is push back against outcomes-based approaches as being too difficult, reductionist or not helpful. However, the showcase presentations showed that this need not be the case and that the approach taken is important.



— “We shouldn't be thinking about 'achievement' and 'prove' and 'the end' - we should be thinking about 'change' and 'improvement' and making the world a better place.”
Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland

NOT ALL OUTCOME APPROACHES ARE EQUAL

The specific approach taken will determine how effective working towards outcomes will be.

Participants highlighted the need for outcome-based approaches to reflect the values and culture of organisations; make space for partnership working, learning and experimentation; and to include a focus on the process as well as the outcomes.

A light bulb moment for some people at the event was the recognition that when you are working to make changes in complex systems, it is not possible to meaningfully *attribute* any change in outcomes to your intervention. Instead you can tell a meaningful story of how your work has *contributed* to outcomes.

A contribution story has to reflect the perspectives of people in ways that are meaningful to them. It needs to be supported by a way of understanding change that makes sense to everyone involved.

People really valued the Matter of Focus framework (see below) as one way of helping them do this.

Several of our showcase presenters reflected that they enjoy working with Matter of Focus software OutNav because it enables them to take a much more complexity-informed and realistic approach to their work. Some people feel working this way is a breath of fresh air compared to other approaches that focus solely on measuring high-level outcomes without any sense of what has happened to work towards them.

— “*We're telling stories that are complex, subtle and messy; but they're true and honest and real, and there's so much learning in them.*
Julie Gardner, Thistle Foundation

The Matter of Focus framework is based on outcome mapping, using the following headings:



FIND OUT MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

www.matter-of-focus.com/using-our-headings



MEANING MATTERS

The context in which people work is important to being able to effectively put Scotland's outcome approach into action. We asked participants to highlight what gets in the way of implementing outcome-based approaches.

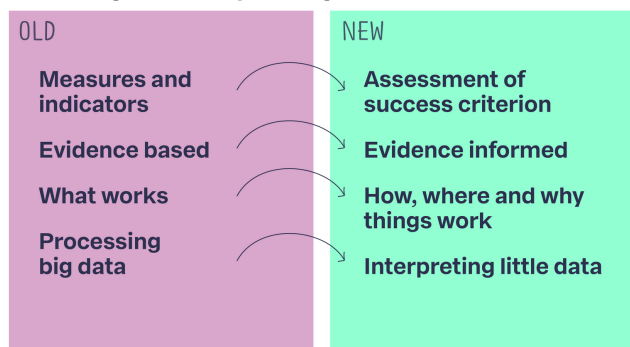
One of the biggest themes was the mismatch between the dominant managerial approaches to understand how change happens and the reality of the work being delivered. At the core of this issue was the challenge of keeping a meaningful focus on outcomes when also being asked to simply measure and attribute change to your activities.

The Matter of Focus slides below capture the tension many people experience between the new and old paradigms for outcomes and evidence. Whilst many people are being asked to focus more on outcomes, they are simultaneously being asked to account for their work in a way that is stuck in a pre-outcome paradigm.

Meanings: A new paradigm for outcomes



Meanings: A new paradigm for evidence



This tension between old and new paradigms was seen by the panellists as related to a more fundamental drive to seek simple answers to complex problems. The widespread use of Gross Domestic Product as the single indicator of a nation's success was highlighted as an example of this.

Participants reflected that the pull towards old paradigm thinking was particularly acute in the health sector where the drug effectiveness model is still dominant. People in the room shared strategies for pushing back against the demands for simplistic numbers. Panelists Jennifer Wallace and Emma Miller both highlighted how important it is to tell good stories of change. Jennifer challenged us to come up with 'convenient' stories to counteract the pull of simple numbers.

— “ *We're moving away from the idea that GDP is the only measure of progress that governments care about. Working towards multiple social, environmental and economic outcomes means embracing complexity. I think we can do that. But we need to get better at telling stories about working with complexity.*

Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust.

To help others see past the numbers, Antony Clark from Audit Scotland reflected how important it is to talk about the process as well as the outcome, what we at Matter of Focus refer to as 'putting performance measures in context'.

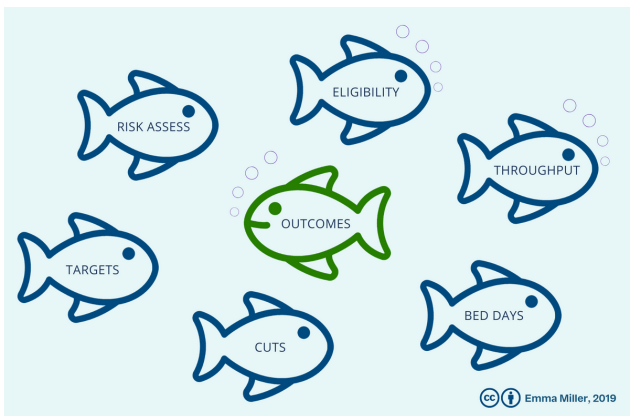
Finally, everyone was encouraged to pay less attention to numbers that we don't feel are meaningful. Sometimes simple measures are a really helpful part of the story of work towards outcomes, but on their own they can't give a good picture of what has happened.



BUILDING A COMMUNITY

One of the most overwhelming themes from the day was how important it is to be part of a community of people leading the way in working with outcomes. As one of the panellists said, leading the way in outcomes in a country that is itself leading the way can be exciting but is not always an easy place to be.

This sentiment was very elegantly captured in a slide presented by Emma Miller as swimming against the shoal:



Being able to meet, hear and learn from others working in this way was identified as very important in sustaining everyone to continue to make change in their own contexts.

— “ *I really enjoyed the day, it was like coming to the well and getting my resilience and wellbeing topped up.*

Event feedback

The breadth of the presentations at the event demonstrates the similar challenges faced across sectors and types of projects and initiatives. People agreed that system change is important in enabling us all to play our part in putting Scotland’s outcome approach into action and that everyone had a role in play in that.

— “ *What struck me is the importance of having a learning community*

There are lots of pockets of really good practice, but this is not a mainstream way of working yet – with a focus on outcomes – and so we have a collective responsibility to spread that and share the learning.

Carol Tannahill, Scottish Government

BOLDLY GO

At the end of the day we asked participants to give feedback about what they will do differently as a result of the event. People said they will go back to their workplaces feeling more confident, resilient, refreshed and committed to make the case for the changes required to put Scotland’s outcome approach into action.

— “ *I will think of ways to put learning from today into action... Be brave!*

Event feedback

Whilst we share a vision for a future where we're not swimming against the shoal, in reality people at this event are working in this way despite the system, not because of it.

To sustain and push for change we all need to be bold. In the closing discussion of the day we captured some key things we can all do more of to make this change happen, shown on page 10.



Conclusions

There is no doubt that putting Scotland's outcome approach into action is challenging and will take time.

Much of the work presented at the event, including the National Performance Framework itself, is more than a decade in the making. Whilst we have made good progress there is more to be done.

It is striking that no-one at the event questioned whether focusing on outcomes was the right thing to do. Instead people left feeling buoyed up by being part of a community of people wrestling with the same challenges and who understand their successes.

At Matter of Focus we are delighted to be able to play a role in building the community and sharing success, through events such as these as well as our software OutNav.

Returning to the fish metaphor, there is plenty to be done to build our shoal and encourage the other fish to swim with us.

So, let's work together to make a bigger splash; let's keep the conversation going, keep making the connections across the system. We will continue to build our community, do join and tell your friends. Meanwhile, if you are convening a pond we would love to come and swim in it!

— “
*You need to beat the drum
a bit more about the
great stuff that you do.*
Antony Clark, Audit Scotland

— “
*The third sector is a player in
helping to achieve the culture
change around outcomes
as well as contributing to the
outcomes themselves.*
Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland

— “
*We can all help by holding
politicians, funders or civil servants
to account for behaving in
outcomes-based ways...
we need a continual drip of
reminding people in power that we
have agreed outcomes and values
and that we should all be
contributing to them.*
*Let's see if that makes a difference,
if all of us do it together.*
Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE NOW

- **Share this report** - it's available online at matter-of-focus.com/outcomes-in-action
- **Tell your success stories** - you can use our headings to help you.
See matter-of-focus.com/using-our-headings
- **Share your work and amplify other great work** with the hashtag **#OutcomesInAction**
- **Sign up to our mailing list** at matter-of-focus.com/outcomes-in-action to stay in touch with the community.

Appendix 1

SHOWCASE PRESENTATIONS

- Embedding evaluation from the start of a new organisation (Health Technology Wales)
- Building a new partnership: bold About Dementia (Queen Margaret University and the University of Edinburgh (bold) and Age Scotland (About Dementia))
- Building the evidence base: supporting survivors of in care abuse (Future Pathways)
- Evaluating a national improvement initiative: the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (Children and Families Analysis, Scottish Government)
- Embedding outcome focused evaluation while implementing a new programme (Clackmannanshire and Stirling Health and Social Care Partnership)
- Improving outcomes through partnership between the third sector and an acute hospital (Carers of West Lothian)
- Providing education and training to staff on Section 28 of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 (NHS Lothian)
- An organisational approach to OutNav (Starcatchers)
- Planning and evidencing strategic approaches using OutNav (Penumbra)
- Measurement for improvement: reflecting on the difference we make (Lothian's House of Care Collaboration)
- Reflecting on practice: implementation of a carer coordinator - University Hospital Wishaw (NHS Lanarkshire)
- Embedding evaluation from the start of a project: involving carers in the discharge process (NHS Ayrshire and Arran)
- Tracking progress with change across a system: implementing the Carers (Scotland) Act within acute services (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)
- Understanding the collective contribution of community organisations (Edinburgh Community Health Forum)

For further information about the showcase presentations see matter-of-focus.com/outcomes-in-action