



The Personal Outcomes Network Submission to the Scottish Government Consultation on a National Care Service, November 2021

Who we are

The [Personal Outcomes Network](#) is a national cross-sector group with hundreds of members from across health, social care, education, and housing support. Members work in a wide range of roles but share a common passion for developing and implementing personal outcomes approaches locally and nationally. The Network holds quarterly meetings (currently online) and offers a safe place for reflection and sharing of practice through stories, learning, resources, and evidence. The network is facilitated by a dedicated coordinating group with membership from SSSC, HIS, NES, the Care Inspectorate, Iriss, the Thistle Foundation, and Strathclyde University. We have also worked closely with colleagues in Wales for more than ten years, including through [Social Care Wales](#) (see more below).

The Network aims:

- To support workers and organisations across health and social care focus activity on the outcomes that matter to people using support
- To develop a wider and more consistent understanding of personal outcomes approaches
- To develop and embed personal outcomes approaches involved in health, social care, and related services
- To help enable national partnerships and organisations to share knowledge and experience
- To influence the future development of policy and practice in relation to personal outcomes

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the consultation on a National Care Service for Scotland. We hope that the changes involved will contribute to the creation of a social care system that is progressive, responsive, and driven by the outcomes important to supported people and unpaid carers. There is overwhelming evidence that good outcome-focused and strength-based conversations and relationship-based practice are fundamental to wellbeing. We would like to see a radical shift towards a system that pays greater heed to this evidence and places good conversations at the centre. This fits closely with the consultation intention to “change the system from one that supports people to survive to one that empowers them to thrive, with human rights at the heart of it.”

In discussions within our network, we heard members express support for a National Care Service in principle, qualified by an agreed need to focus on culture and practice, not just structures. Members of the network are committed to ensuring that what matters to people is central to how services and support are organised. However, they often struggle to maintain this in contexts that are driven by system rather than people priorities. Key barriers include outdated performance indicators and targets, eligibility criteria, and deficit-led tools and practices. Our network includes phenomenal knowledge, skills, and resources to support outcome-focused practice, and there is great potential to harness this in a revamped system. GIRFE would be welcomed by PON members if this was to more robustly support the outcome-focused practice they strive to achieve.

The National Care Service consultation has committed to take forward the following recommendations of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care around:

- ensuring that care is person-centred and human rights-based
- providing greater recognition and support for unpaid carers
- improving conditions for the workforce
- commissioning for public good, and
- more effective approaches to scrutiny and improvement of social care services.

Focusing on personal outcomes can contribute to all of these recommendations.

Adopting a personal outcomes approach means working with people to find out what matters to them. It involves collaboration to work out how best to work towards the outcomes identified. It means acknowledging individual strengths and establishing a shared sense of purpose to which everyone can contribute. Focusing on outcomes helps to avoid waste by people not being allocated services and resources that are wrong for them. It requires time for staff to have the enabling conversations with people, and this must be an essential priority for any effective National Care Service.

Personal outcomes for people through the Covid-19 pandemic

After the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the PON coordinating group worked with network members to evidence how outcomes-focused practice was being impacted by the crisis. Stories were gathered from across the network throughout 2020 and into 2021 from those working in social services, social care, health, and education as well as unpaid carers.

In collaboration with [Iriss](#), these stories were developed into [A Shared Experience](#), a multimedia resource to unpack what the crisis meant for outcomes for people and draw out implications to inform practice, policy, and recovery.

The evidence gathered by the PON demonstrated that in a time of unprecedented crisis, outcomes for people were more important than ever. The needs of systems and bureaucracy were quickly deprioritised to concentrate on what mattered to people. The workforce described pride and validation in their practice and support from colleagues and partners to focus on outcomes. Innovation, redesign, and flexibility were reported, underpinned by good outcome-focused conversations.

A Shared Experience provided a unique window into outcomes-focused practice during a public health emergency and has much to tell us about what needs to happen to put personal outcomes at the heart of support design and delivery.

Our NCS consultation

We focused on one theme for our consultation which is good outcome-focused conversations (underpinning support planning, assessment, and practice more generally).

- We held a member survey in October 2020, asking what makes a good conversation, what is supporting these in practice, and where the gaps and barriers are.
- We undertook a formal review of literature on the evidence of what difference outcomes-focused conversations make to practitioners and unpaid carers
- We held a workshop for 50 members in October 2020, including breakout rooms in which we collected views on the same questions used for our survey.

We also reviewed existing resources to support outcome-focused conversations. We reported findings of the survey, the literature review, and the review of resources in a ten-minute input to our [October 2021 network event](#) and in brief below. The key elements of a good outcome-focused conversation emerge as follows:

- Strengths-based – builds on what is already working
- Listening – time to listen, active and constructive listening, comfortable with silence, not attempting to fix

- It focuses on what matters to the person, what they are hoping for
- It is led by the person
- It is collaborative and based on partnership
- The listener is curious and open, avoiding assumptions, asking open questions
- It breaks down progress and planning into chunks (goals) and encourages people to notice what is changing and their role in it
- Include a focus on wider resources and communities, not just formal services

What is identified as supporting the conversations:

- Time to talk and build relationships
- Shared understanding of *personal* outcomes
- Practice development and reflective practice
- Peer support – allies, honest discussions with managers and peers
- Understanding and belief that it works
- Systems and processes – including supervision, paperwork
- Whole system approach – from values to practice to systems
- Courage and determination

What resources currently exist/are needed to support this:

- In addition to existing conversation (and associated recording) resources, we have a range of new resources to support outcome-focused recording, including short videos which we are currently packaging for easier access via [our website](#)
- As our review uncovered too much focus on what the conversation should not look like, we have identified a need for examples of outcome-focused, strength-based conversations and are currently seeking further resource to continue with this

Good outcome-focused conversations workshop

We held a workshop in October 2021 for 50 members of the network around good outcome-focused conversations. We heard from Midlothian HSCP about their [Midway approach](#) which blends outcome-focused and trauma-informed practice with a focus on addressing inequalities. This is being embedded across the system and is very positively embraced by staff. We heard from [colleagues in Wales](#), including Social Care Wales and a

consultant social worker, who described sustained work on outcome-focused practice in Neath and Port Talbot. The authority is bucking the national trend in reducing numbers of looked after children and child protection proceedings, which they identified as being underpinned by their outcomes work. We screened our new [4 minute video](#) which supports practice with identifying outcomes with adults who cannot verbalise what matters to them. This was very positively received.

Learning from our colleagues in Wales

In recent work with Social Care Wales (SCW), we developed [guidance on recording outcomes](#) (titled Friend not Foe) with and for diverse social care and social work practitioners. This has been endorsed by the Care Inspectorate Wales. We are currently finalising short videos for practitioners, based on the resource, as requested by them. We have just been informed by SCW that the Welsh government have linked Friend Not Foe into their qualitative data guidance, as part of their drive to change the performance cultures to be more focused on what matters to people.

Conclusion

In summary, there is a great deal of enthusiasm and commitment within the PON to share knowledge and skills in these vital areas of practice and significant potential to contribute to a National Care Service, which we hope in turn will strengthen the case for good outcome-focused, strength-based practice; essential for the sustainability of social care.

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