

The National Care Service- making it work

November 2021

The opportunity

The proposal for a [National Care Service \(NCS\)](#) is an opportunity to get things right for supported people in Scotland. Done right, it will represent the biggest shift in how social work and social care is planned, organised and delivered for decades. Done poorly, it will represent another surface change, disrupting and destabilising an already stretched system; weary workforce and frustrated supported people and their families.

So how do we create the conditions for our ambitions to stick, spread and scale to create the best possible outcomes for people, workers and communities?

The situation

Social work and social care support are complex.



They are **complex in the best sense**, in that they seek to support the whole person as an individual in all their complexity of life, relationships, challenges, aspirations and hopes.

They are **complex in the worst sense** in that increasing demand and financial pressures has allowed the core of support to be overshadowed by concerns about managing resources; making savings and delivering tasks rather than developing relationships to support people to flourish.

These drivers have led to a **proliferation of unintended consequences**. These include a range of issues such as excessive bureaucracy; complex, and sometimes conflicting, legislation; dysfunctional procurement and commissioning processes; under-resourcing; excessive process and reduced worker autonomy.

The ultimate, and most important, effect of these consequences is that **social work and social support are not working for the people who need them**.

We think social work and social support needs to **fundamentally change if it is to meet the needs and aspirations of the people of Scotland** and to ensure those who use that support are neither disadvantaged nor disempowered by the system.

Similarly our social work and social care support workforce need the **right conditions to do their best work**, freed of a focus on finance, process and paperwork to make room for relationships led support.

The problem

However Scotland's improvement response to date has been primarily to intervene in a linear way. We have reached for 'silver bullets' - models and answers that seem like the right thing to do. We have tried to implement these with the best of intentions but have not delivered the change and improvement we want to see.

While the linear approach works to some degree with complicated processes (like surgical process improvement) it is far less successful in dealing with complex interrelated 'messy' systems like social work and social care support.

No matter how much we invest; or how hard we work, if we keep approaching improvement in this way we won't move the needle on reform. This is not about bad intent, or lack of commitment, it is simply that *'a bad system will beat a good person, every time.'* (Deming)

The alternative

So given this degree of complexity what kind of improvement will get us from where we are now to fully realising the ambitions of the [Independent Review of Adult Social Care \(IRASC\)](#) and National Care Service?

We need to:

- Escape the inertia of the system as it is. (1-3)
 - Provide a long term, accessible, varied and co-ordinated improvement support offer, co-produced with those with lived experience of using social work and social support. (4-6)
 - Feedback on the ground learning to policy and practice quickly and pragmatically. (6-7)
 - Recognise, acknowledge and address the inherent challenges of reform (8-9)
1. **A change approach** is required that takes thoughtful co-ordinated action across different parts of the system and across all levels of our work, stretching from the direct support relationship between a worker and a supported person through to the most strategic of interventions at a national level. This then creates a critical mass or tipping point for change in practice.
 2. **Actions to support change** include identifying and amplifying 'pockets of the future' (areas of work where the change we want to see is already in place); making space for new ideas through purposefully retiring old structures, behaviours and cultures; connecting growing and amplifying networks of

changemakers and specifically seeking and supporting innovation and innovative cultures across social work and social care.

3. As a whole we need to **pay attention to where change actually happens**. Experience of significant change efforts such as Self-directed Support (SDS) and integration has shown us that the tools we reach for in driving change have their limitations. Changing legislation and structures and producing frameworks and standards are not enough to make reforms sustainable. A key success factor in large scale change is the informal networks of committed people and organisations. This means our focus needs to be here, as well as on underpinning plans and structures.
4. We require a **range of types, styles and approaches to improvement and innovation** providing a wide toolkit to address different levers for change. We know that successful change and improvement work often relies on individual relationships and organisational 'fit' rather than a specific single method or approach.
5. The approach must ensure that design, monitoring, innovation and improvement of social care support **is co-produced with those with lived experience**.
6. A robust co-ordinated system is needed to **capture learning quickly and pragmatically** and to align improvement efforts across Scotland. To retain the diversity of support required for successful change this would be best delivered as a cross-organisational Alliance with common outcomes, goals and purpose, rather than the creation of any single improvement body underpinning the NCS.
7. We need to **take a realistic policymaking approach** to the further development of NCS related legislation and policy. Realistic policymaking integrates policy development and implementation into a single phase; closing the policy-implementation gap and giving policymakers real time feedback about how change is working (or not working) in practice.

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8. There must be a recognition that **social work and social care support is substantially different** to healthcare in its core purpose; how it is organised; its culture and way of working. This means that approaches successful in health are unlikely to be effective within this very different context.
 9. Finally we need to recognise that **large scale change is extremely challenging**. Evidence from health, social care support and other sectors show that most large scale change and improvement initiatives fail to deliver their goals, at the scale and in the time required. The more complex the change, and the range of organisations, sectors and professions involved the more difficult it is to make improvement 'stick and spread'. This is not to say that improvement is impossible but rather a note of realism on the investment; perseverance and time required for real reform.

The risks

The key risks of the NCS taking on responsibility itself for improvement in health and care services lies primarily in how this responsibility is taken on.

It would be a positive move should the NCS seek to coordinate, support and facilitate a range and diversity of improvement and innovation support; acting to capture real time learning and feed this back to both policy and practice.

If the NCS instead focusses on a top down implementation of a uniform approach to improvement; particularly of approaches uninformed by complexity or dismissive of the unique context of social work and social care support ; there would be a significant risk to effective change and ultimately better outcomes and lives for people who use care and support in Scotland.

The role of Iriss

There is no one single improvement or capacity building body currently capable of addressing the challenges and creating an improvement approach which will serve the varied and complex needs of the NCS.

Space, resources, and the right context and culture for innovation will be critical to the success of any approach.

As recognised within the IRASC review, Iriss' unique contribution to the wider improvement offer is in this space; assisting people to find the answer to the key question of 'are we doing the right thing?' where 'the right thing' is unknown, unclear, not yet developed, or where the situation is highly complex- just like this one.

Contact us

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