

Scottish Approach to Change

National Symposium – Final Report

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

March 2026

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Executive summary

Executive summary

Scotland's health and care system does not lack intent or expertise when it comes to change. The challenge is often more fundamental – those leading it are navigating a range of methodologies, frameworks and expectations that can feel disparate and disconnected from the realities of work. The result is often a gap between the ambition for transformation and the success of delivering it on the ground.

The Scottish Approach to Change ('the Approach'; see Figure 1), developed by Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), is a response to this challenge. It brings together established disciplines – such as quality improvement and service design – into a single, coherent approach that is intended to be both rigorous enough to operate in complex systems and accessible enough to be used by a wide range of people, not just specialists. It is not designed as a prescriptive set of steps, but as a way of thinking and working – it's an approach that emphasises behaviours, relationships, learning and meaningful involvement as much as process.

Recognising the scale of this ambition, HIS commissioned an external review to help 'stress-test' the Approach. This culminated in a national symposium in February 2026, bringing together 50 participants from across the health and care system, including practitioners, system leaders, academics and third sector representatives. Participants were

invited not to endorse the Approach, but to challenge it – to explore what is helpful, what needs to be strengthened and what could get in the way of it being successfully adopted and making impact across the system. The process was designed to surface both consensus and tension, drawing on 'deep democracy' principles to ensure less-heard perspectives were included alongside dominant views.

The symposium saw active and constructive engagement from people who want this to succeed. Participants recognised the value of the Approach, particularly its emphasis on people-led change, its alignment with the non-linear and complex nature of change and its potential to create a shared language across sectors. Importantly, the Approach was widely understood not as a 'framework to be implemented', but as an approach which encourages a shift in mindset and behaviour as much as offering advice on key steps. It is seen as a 'different' way of approaching change.

At the same time, participants were clear about what will be required for the Approach to succeed in practice. This includes ensuring it is practical and usable in real-world conditions; supporting people to understand how to apply it through examples, learning and peer exchange; and enabling ownership to sit genuinely across the system.

Executive summary

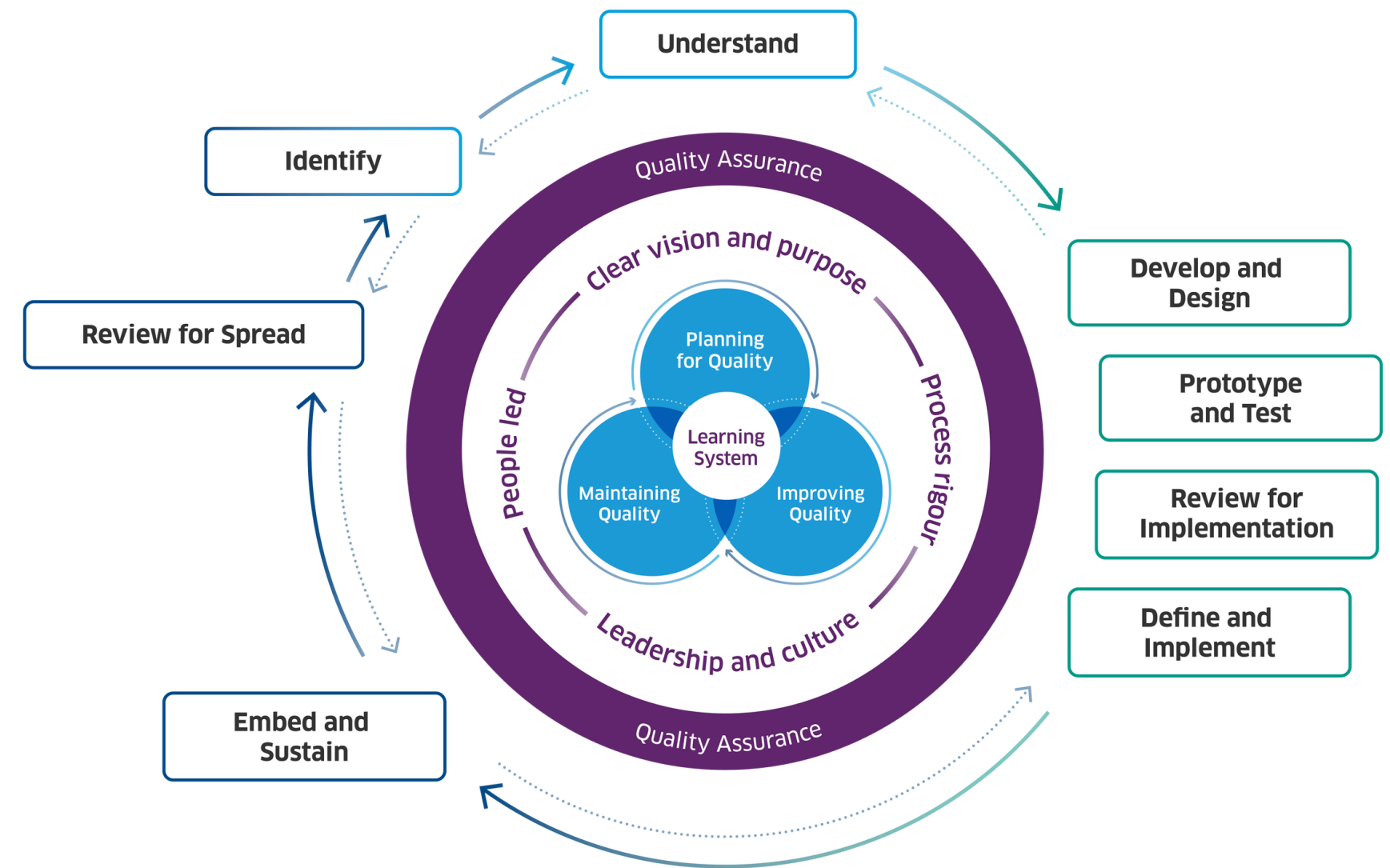
It was also stated that the Approach must avoid encouraging ‘tickbox’ compliance, and rather become a real, lived ‘way of working’.

Participants also highlighted a set of important tensions that will shape how the Approach is taken forward in practice. These include balancing flexibility with usability, ambition with system constraints, and shared ownership with coherence. Alongside this, there was a clear articulation of what ‘success’ would look like – this included the Approach being routinely used to shape change, learning being shared openly and a shift in ownership and agency across the system.

The evidence from this process shows that the system is not waiting to be convinced of the need for a different approach to change – but it is looking for clarity, consistency and leadership in how that approach is taken forward and embedded. The ‘key asks’ in this report reflect what participants said would be needed for the Scottish Approach to Change to be adopted and impactful. Alongside these, a set of provocations is included to support further reflection on more complex challenges.

The opportunity now is significant. The policy context is aligned, the appetite across the system is clear and the foundations of the Approach are strong. The task ahead is to take visible, sustained action which supports the Scottish Approach to Change to become actively used and owned across the system.

Figure 1: The Scottish Approach to Change Framework



Executive summary – headline findings from the symposium

There is strong system appetite for a different approach to change

Participants did not need convincing of the problem. There is clear recognition that current approaches to change are often fragmented, technical and sometimes disconnected from realities of practice. The Scottish Approach to Change is seen as a credible, timely response.

The Approach is understood as a shift in mindset and behaviour

The Approach is valued as a way of thinking and working, rather than a set of steps to follow. Its emphasis on behaviours, relationships, learning and meaningful involvement was highlighted as a strength and point of differentiation.

The emphasis on people-led change and leadership and culture is both welcome and challenging

Participants strongly supported this focus. However, it represents a significant shift from how change is often experienced, and will require practical guidance, system support and changes in how power and decision-making operate.

The Approach reflects the reality of change in complex systems

Its emphasis on non-linearity, learning and iteration resonated strongly. Participants valued that it reflects how change actually happens, including more complex forms of change such as redesign and decommissioning.

Success will depend on translation into practice

There is strong alignment in principle, but participants agreed and were clear that success depends on whether the Approach is:

- easy to understand and use for all people working in the system;
- demonstrably valuable in practice;
- supported by the right conditions (e.g. time, capacity, leadership, incentives);
- genuinely owned across the system.

The system is ready but looking for clarity, consistency and leadership

The system is looking for clear signals about how the Approach should be used, how it connects to existing work and how it will be supported and sustained.

Executive summary – key asks for stakeholders to consider

For Healthcare Improvement Scotland

1. Communicate the ‘value proposition’ of the Approach more strongly

Clearly articulate the value of using the Scottish Approach to Change for different users and contexts. This can be supported by case studies and narratives that answer: “What difference did using the Approach make compared to not using it?”

2. Continue testing and refining the Approach

Ensure the Approach remains clear, accessible and easy to understand for a wide range of audiences. Continue simplifying language, explaining key terms and providing resources through multiple channels. Consider a plain language review with likely users who are ‘under pressure’.

3. Provide further guidance on how to use the Approach

Develop clear ‘entry points’ and specific guidance for different contexts. This should support those working under pressure to understand where to start, how to apply the Approach and what ‘good’ looks like in their situation – without making it overly prescriptive.

4. Develop and share case studies, including where things didn’t work

Prioritise case studies that show how the Approach has been applied across different contexts and the value it added in practice. Include complex and high-pressure change, and complement formal case studies with shorter ‘learning logs’ which capture what was tried and what was learned.

5. Continue to build and convene the learning community

Continue evolving the Approach through learning from practice and strengthen the learning community by capturing and sharing insights, and supporting peer learning, networks and communities of practice. HIS should act as a ‘convenor’ rather than an owner of learning.

6. Model the principles of the Approach

Ensure the ongoing development and rollout of the Approach reflects the same principles it promotes – openness to feedback, collaboration, iterative development and being meaningfully people-led. Make learning visible and involve a wide range of voices.

7. Publish a theory of change, measurement framework and formal evaluation

Develop and share a theory of change and measurement framework which sets out what ‘success’ looks like over time, how impact will be assessed and how learning will be used. A transparent evaluation process will be welcomed.

8. Design a dedicated ‘middle management’ engagement process

Create a specific engagement process for middle managers, recognising their critical role in translating strategy into practice. Provide space to explore pressures and what support is needed to apply the Approach effectively.

Executive summary – key asks for stakeholders to consider

For system leaders and national partners

9. Support a consistent narrative about how change should happen

Reinforce the value of the Scottish Approach to Change and align messaging across the system. Review existing frameworks and expectations to reduce confusion and ensure the Approach is not undermined by conflicting asks and expectations.

10. Help create the conditions for teams to lead change

Recognise that success depends not only on the design of the Approach, but on whether people have the conditions to apply it in practice. This includes time, capacity, capability, supportive leadership and alignment of priorities.

11. Promote cross-sector collaboration

Position the Approach as a shared framework for collaboration across health, social care, the third sector and wider public services. Use existing networks and routes to support adoption.

12. Consider how performance is managed

Be deliberate about how the Scottish Approach to Change is referenced in performance and governance systems. Avoid reinforcing compliance or 'tick-box' behaviours, and ensure alignment with its principles.

13. Make ownership visible and safe

Actively signal that organisations and individuals are trusted to adapt and apply the Approach in their own context. Support this through leadership approaches, messaging and actively creating space for learning and challenge.

For organisations and practitioners

14. Use the Approach, name it and share the learning

Apply the Scottish Approach to Change in practice, reflect on what is learned and share insights, including what was difficult or did not work. Teams are invited not only to use the Approach, but contribute to the wider evidence-base.

About the symposium and why it matters

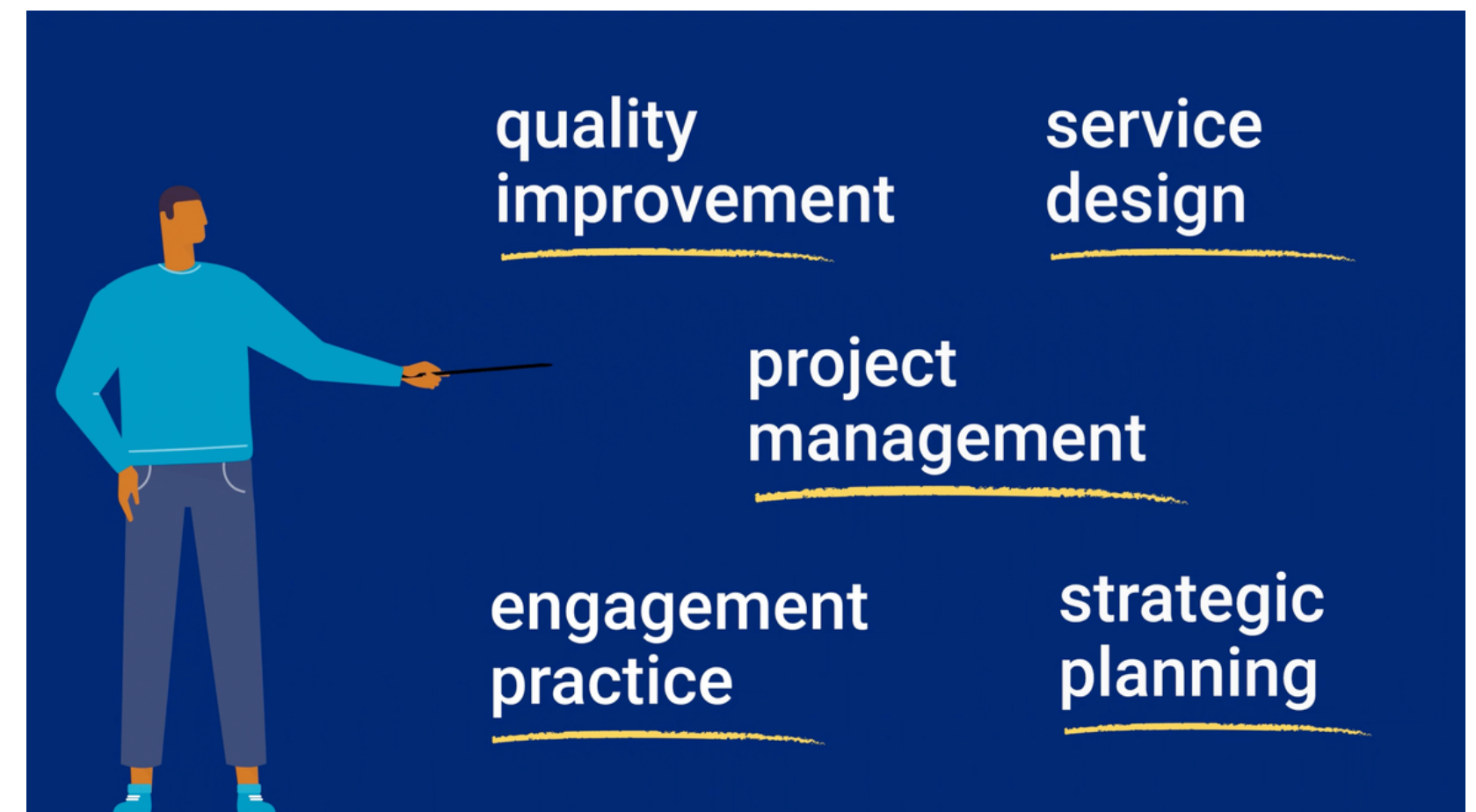
The challenge: why change needs to work differently

Scotland's health and care system is under significant pressure. With increasing demand, complexity of need and workforce constraints, there is a growing recognition that meaningful reform is required to ensure services remain sustainable, equitable and person-centred. National policy published by the Scottish Government, including the Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework and Scotland's Population Health Framework, reflects this ambition – setting out the scale and urgency of change required across the system over the coming decade.

However, change in health and care has often proven difficult to deliver in practice. This is in part because guidance around change is frequently experienced as disparate, too technical or disconnected from the realities of delivering change on the ground. Those leading change are navigating multiple methodologies (see Figure 2) and expectations, which, while individually valuable, can feel difficult to make sense of and apply.

At the same time, change has too often been experienced as something 'done to' people who are using services, and staff who are delivering them, rather than 'with' them. This can limit ownership, and reduce the impact and sustainability of the change. The result is a gap between the ambition for transformation and the reality of how change is delivered, experienced and embedded across the system.

Figure 2: A range of the change methodologies used across the system, shown in the Scottish Approach to Change digital resource



The intervention: The Scottish Approach to Change

The Scottish Approach to Change ('the Approach'; see Figure 3), developed by Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), is a response to this challenge. It brings together a range of established methodologies, for example quality improvement and service design, into a single, coherent and accessible approach to support more effective, people-centred change across Scotland's health and care system.

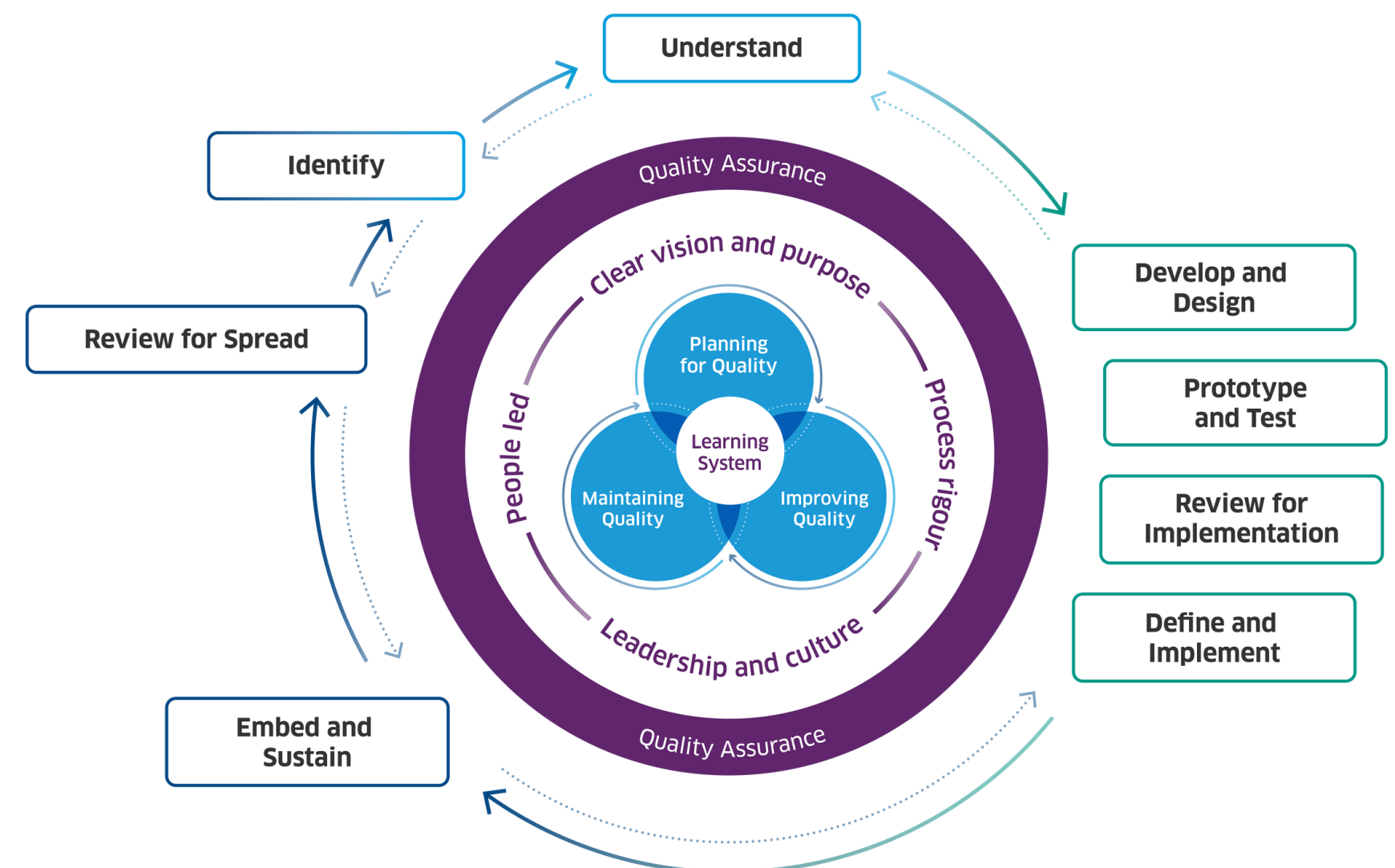
The intention is not to replace existing methodologies, but to provide a unifying framework that helps people navigate complexity more effectively. The Approach aims to simplify and connect what already exists, making it easier for those leading change to understand how different elements fit together and how they can be applied in practice.

A central feature of the Approach is its recognition that successful change depends not only on technical methods, but also on behaviours, relationships and ways of working. It emphasises clear vision and purpose, leadership and culture, rigour of process, shared learning and meaningful involvement of staff, communities and people with lived experience – the key 'enablers' of change. In this sense, it represents not just a set of tools or steps, but a shift in how change is understood and approached across the system.

The Approach is also positioned within a wider national policy context. It is recognised as an integral part of delivering the ambitions set out in

the Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework for example, supporting the kind of system-wide, people-centred change required to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities for people in Scotland. As such, its success depends not only on its design, but on how it is understood, adopted and applied across the health and care system.

Figure 3: The Scottish Approach to Change Framework



Stress-testing the Approach: the role of the symposium

Recognising the scale of this ambition, HIS commissioned an external review to provide a constructive, independent perspective on the development of the Scottish Approach to Change. This included an initial phase of document review and stakeholder interviews, followed by a national symposium held in February 2026.

The symposium brought together approximately 50 participants from across Scotland's health and care system (and some from England), including system leaders, health and social care practitioners, third sector representatives and academics. Participants brought a wide range of perspectives, reflecting both strategic and delivery roles, and spanning health, social care, education and the voluntary sector. Many had direct experience of designing, testing or implementing change within the system.

The design of the symposium was intentional. Rather than acting as a showcase or launch of the Approach, it was designed as a space for open, critical and constructive dialogue. Participants were invited to explore what is helpful about the Approach, where it may need to be strengthened and what could enable or hinder its success in practice. This included surfacing areas of alignment and tension, real-world constraints and risks that could undermine the Approach if not addressed.

Feedback from participants indicates that the symposium was well received. It was rated highly overall (4.5 out of 5), with participants valuing the opportunity for honest, cross-system dialogue and the chance to contribute to shaping the future of the Approach. There was a strong appetite to remain involved, alongside an expectation that insights from the day would be reflected in how the Approach is refined and taken forward.

The design and experience of the symposium itself was also seen by some participants as reflecting the principles of the Approach – bringing together and hearing a diverse group of voices, including those not typically involved in such discussions.

This report draws together the learning from the symposium. It reflects not only what was said explicitly, but also some underlying themes, tensions and opportunities that emerged through discussion. In doing so, this report aims to support the continued refinement of the Scottish Approach to Change, and contribute to its successful adoption.

The report is intended primarily for the HIS team, but it is also encouraged for it to be made available to participants of the symposium and anyone with an interest in the process of the Scottish Approach to Change's development and iteration.

Key findings and discussion

Key findings and discussion

The symposium generated a rich, extensive set of insights about the Scottish Approach to Change – what it offers, what it requires and what could enable or limit its success. This section brings those insights together into a set of key findings. It is intended to provide a clear and coherent synthesis of what was heard during the symposium, offering interpretation of what those perspectives mean for the ongoing development and application of the Approach.

A more detailed, high-fidelity account of the discussions – organised by the original questions explored during the symposium – is provided in [Appendix 1](#). This includes the full range of perspectives, examples and nuance captured on the day. The purpose of this current section is not to replace that detail, but to distill and make sense of it.

The findings on the following pages reflect a synthesis of discussions across three questions explored during the day:

- 1 What is helpful about the Scottish Approach to Change?
- 2 How can the Scottish Approach to Change be strengthened?
- 3 What are the key risks which could get in the way of success?
And how do we guard against those risks?

Figure 4: Photo from the symposium



Key findings and discussion

1. The Approach is seen as a credible, necessary response to current challenges

Participants did not need convincing of the problem the Approach is seeking to address. There is recognition that current approaches to change are often experienced as individually valuable but sometimes disparate and difficult to apply on the ground in a coherent way.

In this context, the Scottish Approach to Change is seen as both credible and timely. Its ambition to bring together multiple disciplines into a coherent approach was welcomed. Participants recognised this as reflecting the complexity of the system and providing a potential foundation for more aligned ways of working across organisations and sectors.

The Approach is also seen as well aligned with the wider policy context and system reform agenda, which strengthens its legitimacy and creates a sense of 'timeliness'.

However, this alignment also sharpens the need for clarity. In a system already with many initiatives and competing demands, participants raised questions about how the Approach 'connects to existing work' and 'when it should be used' for example. This suggests that the primary challenge is not building belief in the need for the Approach, but refining its usability and the conditions to help it be adopted.

2. The Approach is understood as flexible and enabling a shift in mindset and behaviour, but some 'practicality' questions remain

Participants described the Approach as a way of thinking and working, not simply a set of steps, and thought this was useful. Its emphasis on behaviours, relationships, learning and involvement is a strength and point of differentiation from other methodologies. This resonated strongly with how participants understand change – i.e. as iterative, relational and context-dependent rather than 'linear' or 'predictable'. The Approach was seen as helping to articulate this more realistic understanding of change and to provide a shared language for it.

At the same time, participants were clear that this positioning creates a practical challenge. Approaches that are intentionally non-prescriptive require interpretation, and this can create uncertainty about 'how to begin', 'how to apply the Approach in different contexts' and 'what "good" looks like in practice' – especially for those without a background in improvement or change methodologies.

There was therefore a call for additional ways of providing that practical support – such as clear entry points, examples, prompts and learning resources – not to make the Approach too rigid or prescriptive, but to make it easier to engage with. There is a question around what is the right balance to retain flexibility and integrity of the Approach while providing enough structure to support confident use.

Key findings and discussion

3. The emphasis on people-led change and leadership and culture is supported, but will require more guidance

The focus on being 'people-led', alongside the explicit emphasis on leadership and culture, were among the most strongly endorsed aspects of the Approach. Participants welcomed the recognition that meaningful change depends on involvement and relationships, rather than being driven solely by technical or 'top-down' processes.

The language used was also important. Terms such as 'people-led' were seen as more inclusive and less paternalistic, signalling a shift towards greater respect for the perspectives of staff, communities and people with lived experience.

However, participants were equally clear that this represents a significant departure from how change is often done in practice to date. They described environments shaped by hierarchy, performance pressures and risk aversion, where opportunities for meaningful involvement and shared ownership are often practically limited.

As a result, the ambition of the Approach extends beyond introducing new guidance. It implies a shift in how power, leadership and decision-making operate within the system. Participants highlighted the need for more practical support to enable this shift, including deeper guidance on involvement, how to navigate power dynamics, building trust and

supporting cultural change. The success of the Approach will depend not only on what it promotes, but on how far the system is able to create the conditions for these ways of working to emerge.

4. The Approach reflects the reality of change in complex systems and could be even more explicit about this

Participants responded positively to the way the Approach reflects the non-linear, iterative and uncertain nature of change – for example in its 'cyclical' imagery. The emphasis on learning, reflection and adaptation was also welcomed, as progress is often uneven and requires revisiting earlier assumptions and decisions.

There was also recognition that the Approach does not assume all change is inherently positive or improvement-focused. Participants valued that it can support a range of types of change, including those involving difficult trade-offs, service redesign or decommissioning.

There was also an emphasis in the discussion on the emotional and relational dimensions of change, such as conflict, uncertainty, trust and, in some cases, trauma, which are often underrepresented in formal models but are central to how change is experienced.

Acknowledgement of these concepts and truths could be 'dialled up' in the Approach.

Key findings and discussion

5. Practical usability can be improved in various ways

A significant proportion of discussion focused on the practical usability of the Approach. Participants appreciated that a lot of effort has already been made in ensuring this accessibility, and they agreed that the Approach is already broadly very clear. However, they offered advice on ways to make it even more so.

This included the clarity of language, with a preference for even more plain English and concerns that some existing terminology may be too technical (such as “Quality Assurance”). It also included the need for more guidance on ‘how to get started’, ‘how to apply the Approach in different contexts’ and ‘how to navigate different stages of change’.

Participants emphasised the importance of practical examples and case studies, particularly those that reflect a range of settings beyond acute healthcare. There was also recognition that different users will require different levels of depth and support, suggesting a need for layered, modular and potentially more personalised ways of engaging with the Approach – for example through AI-enabled technology.

6. Demonstrating ‘value’ will help with adoption

Participants were clear that it will be helpful to showcase the Approach’s ‘value in practice’ more strongly – in case studies and other learning material – by providing examples of how the Approach has been applied across different contexts and evidence of the difference it makes.

Participants were interested in the ‘measurable outcomes’ but also in how the Approach supports better decision-making, enables more effective collaboration and helps teams navigate complexity. And, importantly, ‘how would these things have been different if the Approach hadn’t been used?’

There was also recognition that evidence of impact should take multiple forms. While formal evaluation and measurement are important, participants emphasised the value of storytelling and informal sharing of learning.

Key findings and discussion

7. Ownership must be shared across the system

Participants agreed that the Approach should be owned collectively across the system, rather than being perceived as belonging to a single organisation. Ownership was seen as something that must be developed through its use, co-development and adaptation of it, and shared learning. This may include supporting organisations and teams to interpret and apply the Approach in their own context and share the learning back, and allowing it to spread through networks, communities of practice and trusted individuals or champions.

At the same time, participants recognised that this introduces a tension. For the Approach to function as a unifying way of working, there must be some consistency in how it is understood and a central 'learning community', and so it can benefit from having an organisation such as HIS be the leader of this work. However, for it to be owned across the system, it must also be open to interpretation and adaptation. This raised a question about the role of HIS in maintaining coherence and providing support, while enabling distributed ownership.

8. System conditions will affect the application and impact of the Approach

Participants emphasised that the success of the Approach on the conditions in which it is implemented as much as its actual design. These conditions include, for example, time, funding and capacity to

engage in change work, access to learning and support, alignment of organisational priorities, and leadership and culture.

Participants also highlighted the role of governance, performance management and incentives, noting that these can either enable or undermine the principles of the Approach. There was a concern that, if misaligned, these conditions could drive 'superficial' adoption.

9. There are risks that could limit success if not addressed

Participants identified a number of risks that could limit the success of the Approach. Several of these related to the wider system context, including limited resources and capacity for change, competing frameworks diluting focus, shifts in political priorities and the possibility that early examples of the Approach being used 'don't work' and undermine confidence. Other risks included people experiencing 'change fatigue', the role of middle management in enabling or blocking adoption and the potential for tokenistic use of the Approach.

The risks were accompanied by practical suggestions for mitigation, including demonstrating clearly the 'value-added' by the Approach to achieve change in different contexts; maintaining long-term commitment which transcends political cycles to allow enough time for the Approach to be applied and impact to be realised; and continuing to engage with and learn from the system. These insights can help HIS and partners to proactively design for these risks.

Key findings and discussion

10. What success looks like in practice

Participants outlined the difference they would like to see the Scottish Approach to Change making – i.e. what ‘success’ would look like – if it is working well in practice:

- The Approach is being used routinely to shape real change, across different contexts and levels of the system – and perhaps beyond health and care.
- The Approach is helping leaders take a more targeted, strategic approach to deciding ‘when and what’ to change across the system.
- Learning is actively shared across teams, organisations and sectors, with openness about what is and isn’t working.
- There is visible evidence of impact, including how the Approach supports better decisions, outcomes and ways of working.
- Senior leaders and national organisations are seen to be applying the Approach in their own work.
- Collaboration across organisational and sector boundaries is strengthened by the Approach.
- There is a real, felt shift in power, ownership and agency, with more people able to influence and lead change in their own context.

The next section of the report sets out a series of ‘key asks’ and ‘provocations’ which reflect what participants identified as necessary to support adoption and impact of the Approach.

Figure 5: Photo from the symposium



What needs to happen next: Key asks and provocations

Key asks

Building on insights gathered from the symposium, this section defines specific 'asks' for HIS, its partners, system leaders, organisations and practitioners. These can be read alongside the 'provocations' that follow.

For Healthcare Improvement Scotland

1. Clarify and communicate the 'value proposition' more strongly

Clearly articulate the value of using the Scottish Approach to Change for different audiences. Go beyond describing what the Approach is, to describing what it enables in practice – in terms of improved outcomes, reduced pressure, better decision-making, more effective use of resources, etc. Supported this with case studies and narratives that explicitly answer: "What difference did using the Approach make compared to not using it?"

2. Continue testing and refining accessibility and clarity

Ensure that the Approach remains clear, accessible and easy to understand for a wide range of audiences, and those who have no background in management or improvement. See [Appendix 1 part 3A](#) for more detail. This may involve:

- continuing to simplify language;
- providing explanations of key terms;
- providing resources through multiple channels not only online.

One suggestion is to lead/commission a plain language review with, for example, frontline staff, community workers and third sector practitioners – i.e. people who will use the Approach under pressure. After the review, publish and share what changed in the Approach as a result.

3. Provide additional practical guidance on how to use the Approach

Emphasise clear entry points and practical guidance on how to apply the Approach in different contexts. This should support those working under pressure to understand where to start, how to apply the Approach and what 'good' looks like in practice – without making it overly prescriptive.

HIS could support this by developing:

- simple guides and prompts on 'how to get started';
- a 'get started in 30-minutes guide' – if they only have 30 minutes, what is a low-effort/high-value read to get them started?
- examples of how the Approach can be applied to different types/stages of change;
- short learning resources illustrating how teams have used the Approach;
- guidance on navigating relational and emotional realities of change, including conflict, trust-building and working in complexity.

Key asks

4. Develop and share case studies – even ones about failure

Prioritise the development of case studies – even now, at an early stage of the Scottish Approach to Change being used – which show how it has been applied across different contexts, and the value it has added.

Different contexts may include, for example:

- Change involving different types of collaboration (e.g. operational service improvement, cross-organisational change, community-led initiatives, system-level transformation)
- Perspectives from varying functions (e.g. commissioning, operations)
- Change of different sensitivities (e.g. complex, high-pressure and politically sensitive change like service redesign or decommissioning)
- Change at different scales (e.g. local, regional, national)

Often the most impactful accounts are the ones which show where it was hard or it did not go as planned, and what was learned as a result.

Alongside formal case studies, consider 'learning logs' which are shorter, rougher accounts of what was tried and what happened. Create a mechanism for teams to share these. And encourage this in the 'middle' of their change, not waiting for the end-result.

5. Continue to build and convene the learning community

The Scottish Approach to Change should continue to evolve, aided by its learning community. HIS can continue to be a helpful agent in:

- capturing learning from organisations using the Approach ('gathering learning');
- sharing insights across the system ('sharing proactively');
- enabling peer-to-peer learning ('connecting up').

If not already, HIS should also consider tapping into existing networks and communities of practice, and convening regular learning events – providing opportunities for people to exchange insights.

There is an appetite for a network of 'champions' – trusted individuals within organisations who can introduce and demonstrate the Approach organically. However, champions would need proper support and resources to maintain this, as well as tools and confidence that HIS will 'back' them when things get difficult.

Though HIS will continue to play a key role in the learning community for the Scottish Approach to Change, they should consider how to ultimately be a 'convenor' rather than an 'owner' of the learning. This might look like, for example, not 'branding' learning stories or events, or at least co-branding them with particular organisations involved. There is an ask to continually look at how HIS can 'give away' the ownership and let it organically get taken on by other agents in the system.

Consider how the learning community can support decentralised activity, where organisations and networks are enabled to lead their own

Key asks

learning, with insights gathered and shared across the system. This may involve a more distributed or 'hub and spoke' model rather than entirely central coordination.

6. Model the principles of the Approach

Ensure that the ongoing development and spread of the Scottish Approach to Change reflects the same principles that it promotes. This includes openness to feedback, collaboration across the system, iterative development based on learning, making learning visible and being people-led – i.e. sharing power where appropriate.

Engaging a wider range of staff, partners and people with lived experience should help shape the Approach going forward, including via place-based engagement ('going to' people).

HIS should publish what it is testing and learning as it develops the Approach – including what is not working – and continue to involve others in its development.

Consider also developing 'adaptation guidance' which is a simple account or set of principles on what teams can change/flex about the Approach without losing its coherence – helping them feel confident to 'make it their own'.

7. Publish a theory of change, measurement framework and formal evaluation

Publish a draft theory of change and measurement framework as a working document that is open to review. The theory of change could set out what 'success' looks like at six months, two years and five years, how the Approach's impact will be assessed, and how HIS will use the learning.

There should be transparency about resourcing – such as what HIS is funding directly and what it is asking others to resource. There should also be clarity on what 'minimum viable adoption' looks like for an organisation starting out.

A formal process and impact evaluation of the Approach which anyone can read would also be welcomed.

8. Design a dedicated 'middle management' engagement process

Managers, as a critical group in helping to translate leadership vision into change on the ground, will be key to successful application of the Approach. Consider designing and running a specific engagement process for this group – a facilitated space in which middle managers can name the pressures they face and work together on how the Approach can specifically help them. What do they need from HIS and senior leaders which they do not currently have?

Key asks

For system leaders and national partners

9. Support a consistent narrative about how change should happen

System leaders should reinforce and endorse the value of the Approach, helping teams understand how it supports better outcomes. However, in addition, a consistent narrative is required. National bodies should audit what they are currently 'asking' of organisations in terms of policy, performance requirements and strategic direction, identify where those asks conflict with what the Scottish Approach to Change is asking, and be willing to remove or align the things which may create that conflict. This means some existing work, and some existing ownership, may be subordinated to the Approach.

10. Help create the conditions for teams to lead change

The success of the Scottish Approach to Change depends not only on its design, but on whether people across the system have the conditions to apply it meaningfully in practice. There is acknowledgement that agency at the grassroots / organisational level is needed, but at the same time recognition that many teams are currently operating under pressure, with limited time, capacity and headspace to engage in change effectively. Participants described the challenge of "trying to change the system while also operating it". What support can be provided by system leadership to free up resource for teams to play their part?

There was also a clear call for greater investment in capability. While the Approach is intended to be accessible, participants highlighted that applying it effectively still requires support and guidance. Without this, there is a risk that its use remains concentrated among those with existing expertise.

Having the right conditions is not only about resources, but also culture and leadership. Participants emphasised the need to move away from overly permission-led, risk-averse environments towards cultures that support more experimentation, shared ownership and learning. This includes creating space for teams to test, adapt and reflect, as well as ensuring that leadership behaviours and system / structural factors reinforce rather than undermine principles of the Approach.

This points to a broader role for system leaders. Beyond promoting the Approach, what can be done to help shape conditions in which it is used? This could include, for example:

- protecting time within roles for reflection and improvement activity (e.g. repurposing existing 'QI time');
- embedding the Approach into appraisal and team discussions;
- embedding the Approach within existing training, induction and leadership development pathways;

Key asks

- aligning local priorities so that teams can adopt the Approach without competing demands;
- consider creating funding or commissioning processes/opportunities to support early adoption and momentum;
- reviewing how performance, governance and reporting expectations are framed, to ensure they reinforce genuine adoption rather than 'tick-box' compliance.

There was recognition that not all of these levers are easy or quick to change, but that they nevertheless remain influential over people's ability to adopt the Approach practically and meaningfully.

11. Promote cross-sector collaboration

The Scottish Approach to Change has the potential to support greater collaboration across sectors – including health, social care, the third sector and communities, as well as wider public services e.g. justice and education. System leaders can encourage this by positioning the Approach as a framework to support projects or initiatives which bring organisations together to address shared challenges. Opportunities for the Approach to be piloted in this way could be proactively sought out.

Participants highlighted the importance of aligning with organisations such as NHS Education for Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council, the Care Inspectorate and relevant sector networks, and using

established routes such as training, induction and professional development to embed the Approach.

12. Consider how performance is managed

Consideration should be given to how the Approach is referenced within national and local performance management, governance and reporting processes. Participants highlighted a risk that formalising expectations around demonstrating 'use' of the Approach could unintentionally reinforce a compliance mindset, encouraging 'tick-box' behaviours rather than meaningful application.

HIS and the Scottish Government should provide clear and consistent messaging on how the Approach will and will not be used within performance frameworks, and avoid introducing requirements that create additional reporting process rework and burden. Connected to this, system leaders should also consider how incentives such as funding and commissioning align with the principles of the Approach.

13. Make 'taking ownership' viable

Actively signal that organisations and individuals are expected and trusted to adapt and apply the Approach in their own context, and share power in ways that they might not have before. This requires particular leadership behaviours, messaging and protection from risk. There is also inevitable challenge, discomfort and uncertainty as power and

Key asks

ownership are shared more widely across roles or partners. Organisations may need to be supported with these cultural and leadership shifts.

For organisations and practitioners

14. Visibly use the Approach and share the learning

Teams and organisations should apply the Approach in their own work, reflect on what they learn and share insights with HIS and others, with honesty about what was difficult as well as what worked. Trying it out could be staged and involve 'sandboxing' – i.e. applying it on a small scale before rolling it out on a wider scale. Organisations are therefore not only invited to use the Approach, they are also invited to contribute to the evidence-base.

Figure 6: Photo from the symposium



Provocations

Alongside the key asks above, the process also surfaced more 'exploratory' questions which may help elucidate what matters the most, helping to inform future decisions and action.

Inward reflection for HIS and the Scottish Government

1. What if success means letting go of control?

To help the Approach be adopted, there is a balance between central direction and coordination and allowing organic, grassroots momentum. What is the right balance? To what extent is there appetite to 'let go' – allowing the Approach to be interpreted, adapted, rebranded or even 'broken' if this helps it to spread? Is the goal consistency, or energy and movement – and can both coexist?

2. What if the Scottish Government needs to be the first user – not just the sponsor?

What would it look like for national organisations, including the Scottish Government and HIS, to visibly apply the principles of the Approach in their own work? How are these behaviours being modelled today? Should leaders more overtly demonstrate how they are applying the Approach themselves, alongside asking others to do so?

3. What change is required within HIS?

The Approach asks the system to change how it approaches change. What does that mean for HIS itself? What would it look like to embody

the principles of the Approach as a leader in the system, in how decisions are made and power is shared? Is HIS prepared to be changed?

4. What if HIS is not the right organisation to lead the movement?

Is there an opportunity for HIS to act less as owner and more as convenor or enabler – supporting others to lead, share and evolve practice? Are there other parts of the system better placed to host and grow this work?

5. What if the biggest risk is turning this into a performance tool?

How might reporting and accountability expectations shape how the Approach is used in practice? Should the Approach explicitly resist being formalised into traditional performance metrics or reporting requirements?

On the system

6. What if the system conditions mean the Approach cannot be fully realised?

If the primary barriers to effective change sit in capacity, funding, policy, culture and system pressures, i.e. beyond the direct control of organisations and teams, how should HIS respond? What is the role of the Scottish Approach to Change in this context: to enable change, or also surface and advocate for the conditions required to make change possible? What levers are available to influence those conditions, and

Provocations

how able is HIS to advocate for change?

If progress is slow as a result of these wider constraints, how will this be interpreted, and how can HIS guard against the Approach being perceived as 'ineffective' when the limiting factors sit elsewhere?

7. What if resistance or non-adoption is the most valuable data you have?

Where is the Approach not landing and why? What feels uncomfortable or unrealistic? How is resistance being actively surfaced and used to shape the next iteration?

Looking longer-term

8. Is success for the Approach for it to ultimately be invisible?

Is the goal for people to actively 'use' the Scottish Approach to Change, or for its principles to become embedded to the point that it no longer needs to be referenced?

9. What if this fails in five years?

Which of the risks identified in this report would you wish you had prioritised? Which are currently being acknowledged but not actively designed against?

10. What if the next government doesn't continue the Approach?

The Scottish Approach to Change sits within a supportive policy environment today but that may change. What would need to be true for the Approach to be embedded deeply enough to survive a shift in political priorities? Is that level of embedding achievable within the current timeframe?

Closing reflections

Closing reflections

The Scottish Approach to Change represents a significant and timely opportunity to strengthen how change is understood and enacted across Scotland's health and care system. The findings from this process suggest that there is strong endorsement for it and appetite across the system for the Approach to succeed.

The Approach should be taken forward with confidence. At the same time, there was recognition of the challenge ahead to ensure the Approach can be truly understood, applied and sustained in practice in a system under significant pressure. Suggestions were provided to help with this challenge, which are represented in this report.

Many of the themes raised will not be 'a surprise' to HIS. However, this process has added depth, clarity and nuance to those insights, and grounded them further in the lived experience of people working across the system.

The symposium also demonstrated the value of creating spaces where people from different parts of the system can have robust conversations about change. There is an opportunity to build on this through the learning community work, creating more opportunities for people to come together.

The themes and recommendations captured in this report will be taken forward by HIS to further develop the Scottish Approach to Change and its resources, learning opportunities and engagement with partners across the system. However, success will depend not only on the Approach and what HIS does next, but also on the willingness of others to engage with it, share learning, influence and continue the conversation. The insights and asks in this report for all stakeholders, not just HIS, are therefore of equal importance.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the HIS team for their openness and commitment throughout this process. Their inquiring approach and willingness to invite challenge from a range of voices has been key to this work. It reflects their clear commitment to supporting colleagues across the system and improving outcomes for the people of Scotland.

If you have any questions about the symposium or this report, please contact: hello@thefuture-works.org

Thank you

This report was produced by The Future Works, an independent consultancy which supports organisations to navigate complex change and build better organisational cultures. The Future Works works across the public, private and third sectors, specialising in organisational culture, leadership, systems change and people-centred transformation.

The team members who delivered this work were:

- Lydia Paris
- Heather Shearer, PhD
- Meg Wright, PhD
- David Jones
- Naheem Bashir, PhD
- Francesca Pagni

Appendix 1: Detailed description of what we heard at the symposium

The symposium used several questions to structure the day's discussions:

- What is helpful about the Scottish Approach to Change?
- How would you like to see the Scottish Approach to Change making a difference (what 'success' looks like)?
- How can the Scottish Approach to Change be strengthened?
- What are the key risks which could get in the way of success? And how do we guard against those risks?

Together, the discussions around these questions created a picture of what participants think the Approach already offers, what it needs to become, and what could get in the way of it being a success. Each question is addressed in turn in this appendix as the evidence-base for the 'key asks'.

1. What is helpful about the Scottish Approach to Change

i. It offers a clear and accessible way of talking about change

Participants appreciated the effort to articulate change in clear, simple, accessible language, which felt different to other methodologies. They noted that the Approach has the potential to make 'change' more understandable to a wider range of people.

The possibility of developing a shared language for change across organisations and sectors was also seen as valuable. It was felt this could help bring different professional groups together when working on complex system challenges.

Participants also highlighted the Approach's potential to 'educate' people about the nature of change itself – helping to set realistic expectations about what change involves, how it unfolds over time and what is required to sustain it.

ii. The 'people-led' and 'leadership and culture' enablers

The emphasis on being 'people-led' was appreciated by participants. The Approach creates space to recognise the perspectives of staff, communities and people with lived experience, rather than positioning change purely as a 'top-down' process. It feels positive that a nationally-endorsed approach is explicitly supporting more bottom-up, people-led ways of working.

It was highlighted that meaningful change will depend on meaningful involvement, shared understanding and shared power, and that the Approach has the potential to support this shift, though there are systemic challenges which have prevented this in the past, so more guidance on the 'how' would be welcomed.

1. What is helpful about the Scottish Approach to Change

The choice of wording (i.e. 'people-led') was important to participants as well, feeling less paternalistic than a term such as 'patient-centred'.

There was also appreciation that the Approach explicitly foregrounds 'leadership and culture' as a key enabler, rather than being secondary to process or method.

iii. Bringing together different disciplines and approaches

Participants recognised that the Scottish Approach to Change draws on multiple methodologies including quality improvement, systems thinking and various other approaches. This integration of different methods was seen as helpful because it reflects the reality that change in complex systems requires multiple perspectives and tools.

Rather than positioning one method as dominant, it was clear to participants that the Approach is providing a unifying framework. It does not attempt to 'replace' existing frameworks, but allows them to coexist while making the tensions between them more visible and easier to navigate.

iv. Emphasis on learning and the non-linear nature of change

'Learning' being placed centrally in the Approach resonated strongly with participants and feels like a welcome difference. The idea that change should involve ongoing reflection, testing and adaptation was seen as consistent with how complex systems actually operate.

Participants also welcomed the idea that the Approach positions change as iterative and cyclical – often with 'two steps forward then one step back' – rather than being a linear, one-off project. This is reinforced by how the Approach is deliberately non-prescriptive. It was seen not as a



'People-led' feels less paternalistic than 'patient-centred' – it recognises people's agency.

Symposium participant

1. What is helpful about the Scottish Approach to Change

‘solution’ or top-down set of instructions, but as a tool to support critical thinking and action.

Participants also saw potential for the Approach to support strategic decision-making, particularly in complex or high-stakes situations where trade-offs and difficult choices are required.

It was noted that the Approach does not (and should not) assume all change is inherently ‘improvement’, recognising that some change involves trade-offs, service redesign or even decommissioning.

v. Potential to support collaboration across the system

Participants highlighted that the Approach could support more cross-sector collaboration. If widely adopted, the Approach could help different organisations approach change from a shared foundation, helping to reduce siloed working.

Participants also noted that the Approach felt ‘setting-agnostic’ – i.e. not overly rooted in health services – making it feel relevant and accessible across public services.

The timing of the Approach being developed and its alignment to wider system reform was also seen as significant. This endorsement from HIS and the Scottish Government adds to its weight.

vi. It feels bold, different and necessary

Participants described the Approach as feeling like a bold shift. Its ambition to reshape how change is understood and led across the system was seen as both necessary and distinct from previous methodologies.

2. What success should look like in practice

i. Routine application and shared learning

Participants want to see the Approach being used widely and routinely across a range of contexts, with learning being actively shared and integrated. They said they would like to see:

- “The Approach being used consistently to shape real change”
- “Learning being fed back across teams, organisations and sectors”
- “A culture where reflection and pattern-spotting become part of everyday leadership practice”
- “Greater openness, honesty and visibility about what is and isn’t working”
- “People-led approaches being the norm”

The Approach should enable a shift towards more effective, people-led change and a more learning-oriented system. Applying the Approach and sharing insight becomes standard practice.

ii. Evidence of impact

Participants want to see examples of how others are using the Approach and the difference it is making. This was not framed as a call for ‘formal measurement’ only, but for evidence of all kinds that can be shared and used to influence.

What would be useful is a body of evidence from across the system – coming from different contexts, scenarios, organisations and functions (e.g. finance, commissioning, operations) – demonstrating how the Approach contributed to improved outcomes, decision-making, capacity, ability to have difficult conversations, ability to work through complexity, and so on. The evidence could be in the form of storytelling as well as ‘hard data’ to illustrate impact.

To aid this, users of the Approach should be encouraged to define outcomes early and track progress over time.



We would see the Approach being used consistently and effectively to shape real change.

Symposium participant

2. What success should look like in practice

iii. Application at senior levels of the system

Participants would like to see the Approach being used consistently across all levels of the system, particularly by senior leaders and national organisations. They would like to understand how senior leaders are applying the Approach in their own work and decision-making, and how it is being adopted across government departments and national organisations.

iv. More strategic and selective change

Participants would like the Approach to support more deliberate and strategic change – helping to ensure problems are properly understood and enabling decision-making to be more selective and proactive about where and how change is applied.

v. Stronger collaboration

Participants would like to see the Approach enabling more effective collaboration across organisational and sectoral boundaries by providing a shared language and practical guidance for more integrated approaches to change.

vi. A shift in power, ownership and agency

Participants would like the Approach to support a more fundamental shift in how power operates within the system:

- Devolving leadership of change to all levels
- Increasing access to improvement capability beyond traditional 'expert' roles
- Involving and integrating people's experience and insight in the change

2. What success should look like in practice

- Moving away from overly permission-led cultures towards greater trust and autonomy
- Embedding shared ownership and involvement as standard practice

They described this as a move towards a system where people feel greater agency in shaping change.

vii. Support with amplifying learning

There was a role identified for national organisations in supporting learning:

- Gathering and sharing learning from across the system
- Amplifying examples of practice and impact
- Connecting people and organisations to support peer learning
- Acting as 'enablers' rather than 'owners' of the Approach

viii. Alignment with wider system activity

The Approach should not sit in isolation, but be connected to wider initiatives, policy, guidance and priorities. It should be clear how it integrates with broader system reform.

ix. Visible evolution

Participants would like to see the Approach continuing to evolve in response to learning. They think this evolution should be visible and open.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

We addressed three different ‘provoking questions’ in this section of the symposium, to help participants think about how to strengthen and support adoption of the Approach:

How can we ensure the Scottish Approach to Change is:

- A. Easy and practical for people working under pressure to use?
- B. Effective and relevant in a complex system?
- C. Owned by people and organisations across the health and care system?

A. Ensuring the Approach is easy and practical to use

Ai. Keep the language simple and accessible

‘Language’ was one of the most frequently discussed issues. Some participants felt certain terminology was too technical or rooted in improvement or management language, e.g. ‘Quality Assurance’ and ‘Prototyping’. There was strong support for maintaining plain language and avoiding jargon to ensure accessibility for people working in any context.

Some specific terms were highlighted which may benefit from simplification or clarification:

- ‘Prototype’ – perceived as technical. Alternatives suggested were ‘test’ or ‘pilot’.
- ‘Process rigour’ – perceived as too abstract.
- ‘Quality Management System (QMS)’ – perceived as healthcare-centric.
- ‘System’ – described as an ambiguous term, with different meanings depending on context.
- ‘Quality Assurance’ – perceived by some as too technical / sector-specific, and in tension with the ethos of the Approach.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

Aii. Provide clear guidance on 'how to get started'

Participants asked for explicit framing upfront to emphasise context-specific guidance on 'how to get started', including:

- simple step-by-step guides;
- 'where and how to start' prompts;
- short explainer videos;
- practical examples of how others have used it.

There was also, however, recognition that the Approach should be understood as guidance on new ways of thinking and working in relation to change, rather than being simply a set of steps to be followed. Even using words like "implementing" the Scottish Approach to Change could inadvertently cause people to think about it too much as 'two-dimensional'. Emphasising what the Approach is, and what it isn't, through careful language in supporting materials will help avoid this.

Aiii. Amends to structure and guidance in the Approach

Some participants suggested specific enhancements to the Approach to further support its use in practice. This included suggestions such as:

- making the 'why' of change more explicit at the outset;
- explaining the nature of change and how it can be challenging and overwhelming
- strengthening the focus on how to identify and measure outcomes and impact;
- providing clearer guidance on how the Approach supports scale and spread;
- and considering whether an earlier step focused on identifying the need for change (particularly in contexts where change is 'proactive' rather than 'reactive') would be helpful.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

There was also interest in understanding where leadership and strategic thinking most clearly sit, and how the Approach supports both reactive and proactive change. These reflections were not about making the Approach more prescriptive, but about ensuring it provides sufficient structure to support application in a wide range of contexts.

Aiv. Develop case studies and showcase impact

Participants emphasised the importance of real examples showing how the Scottish Approach to Change works in practice. Examples need to be relatable and reflect a range of settings, including those beyond acute healthcare (e.g. care homes, community services and third sector contexts), as well as different stages and types of change (e.g. from decommissioning services, to national cross-sector system change, to grassroots projects).

There was a specific call to make the 'value-add' of the Approach very clear and tangible for those using it – i.e. "What's in it for me?" – in terms of impact, money saved, ease of the change process, outcomes for the team and service users, and so on.

Participants expressed interest in understanding how the success of the Approach will be assessed. This may be achieved through 'hard measures' and a formal evaluation process, but also clear case studies and examples which show how the Approach has supported meaningful change and improved outcomes.

It will also be helpful to describe how the Approach supports working within complexity – including the need for patience, reflection and pattern recognition over time for example.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

Av. Build local champions and networks

Many discussions highlighted the importance of trusted individuals within organisations who can introduce and demonstrate the Approach. Local champions or ambassadors were seen as a practical way to help the Approach spread organically through professional networks, organisations and existing communities of practice.

Avi. Socialise the Approach in a range of ways

Participants also noted that not everyone in the system can easily access online resources or training platforms. Ensuring that the Approach is communicated through multiple channels will be important for reaching a full range of people working across health and care.

There was support for proactive, in-person (and online) engagement – including ‘roadshows’, workshops and training sessions – to introduce and explore the Approach in a people-led and interactive way.

An opportunity was also identified to bring together people trained in improvement and change methodologies and help them to immerse in and learn about the Approach as a unifying framework. They could then support and coach others, and spread its use across the system.

Avii. Embed into existing infrastructure and systems

Participants emphasised that for the Approach to become part of everyday practice, it will need to be embedded within existing infrastructure across health, social care and the voluntary sector. This could include integration into national platforms and standards (e.g. Turas), training and workforce

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

development programmes (e.g. NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Social Services Council), and induction pathways for new staff. There was also emphasis on using existing networks and structures to cascade the Approach, particularly into social care and the third sector.

Alongside formal routes, informal connectors are also key – i.e. trusted individuals, networks and communities of practice – to supporting spread and adoption. There is a need for both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ infrastructure to enable the Approach to take root across the system.

Aviii. Provide more personalised, layered ways to engage

Participants highlighted their desire for a more personalised user experience with the Approach. While simplicity is important, they recognised that different users will require different levels of depth and support depending on their role, experience and context. Suggestions included:

- more interactive digital resources that guide users based on their starting point
- clearer signposting to the most relevant tools, examples and learning resources
- modular training or learning pathways (e.g. short modules on specific aspects of the Approach)
- access to support such as champions, networks or coaching
- AI-enabled tools to support more tailored navigation of the Approach

Participants noted that some level of expertise or confidence may still be required to apply the Approach effectively, and therefore clarity on available support, learning community and development pathways will be important.

There was also interest in more nuance within key concepts (e.g. what ‘people-led’ looks like in different contexts and to different degrees), to help users apply the Approach appropriately.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

B. Ensuring the Approach is effective and relevant in a complex system

Participants recognised that the Scottish Approach to Change will need to operate within a system that is complex, resource-constrained and changing. The following reflections focus on how the Approach can be useful in these conditions:

Bi. Acknowledge the realities of the system

Participants highlighted the pressures facing health and care services, including workforce shortages, financial constraints and increasing demand. There was a sense that the Approach will need to acknowledge these realities more explicitly, ensuring it doesn't feel disconnected from the everyday experience of those delivering services.

They also emphasised the importance of acknowledging the human and relational dimensions of change more explicitly. This includes recognising that change involves emotions, conflict, uncertainty and, in some cases, trauma. Can the Approach place greater emphasis on relationships, trust-building and the ability to navigate difficult conversations? This may include incorporating more guidance on areas such as negotiating conflict, taking a trauma-informed approach and how to create conditions for people to engage meaningfully in change.

Participants highlighted that leadership working "in concert" within and across organisations is fundamental to point out, and that the Approach should set clear expectations that change work will always generate learning – and that this is a normal and necessary part of the process.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

There was also discussion about the role of incentives in supporting adoption. Some participants suggested that linking funding or resource allocation to the use of the Approach could help increase engagement and momentum, particularly in the early stages of spread.

Finally, participants emphasised the need for system leaders to create the time and space required for people to engage with the Approach in practice. This may include repurposing existing improvement time within roles, aligning priorities to reduce competing demands and/or ensuring that expectations around delivery allow for reflection, learning and adaptation.

Bii. Ask people to embrace complexity

Participants recognised that complex systems are non-linear and unpredictable. In this context, many felt the Approach should reinforce that change does not follow a neat sequence of steps. Instead, the Approach should be more explicit in supporting people to 'start where they are', test ideas and adapt as they learn, rather than inadvertently suggesting they must follow a 'set' process.

Biii. Recognise that not all change is improvement

Some participants noted that some changes involve difficult decisions, such as service redesign, reconfiguration or decommissioning. Participants suggested that the Approach should explicitly acknowledge that it can support both positive and challenging change, including situations where decisions must be made quickly or under significant constraints.



In this complex system, it would help to encourage people to 'start where they are'... What are their low hanging fruit?

Symposium participant

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

It will help to demonstrate, through examples, case studies and guidance, how the Approach can be applied across a range of scenarios and scales. This includes not only improvement-focused change, but also more challenging contexts such as service redesign, decommissioning or crisis-driven change. Applying the Approach in more complex or 'difficult' forms of change may require additional time, support and adaptation – this should be explicitly acknowledged.

Biv. Clarify who it is for and when to use it

Participants highlighted the importance of being clearer about the scope and applicability of the Approach. This includes who it is intended for, in what contexts it should be used, and where it may be most valuable.

There was also discussion about whether the term 'Scottish' could be interpreted as a limitation or barrier for some audiences, particularly those working across UK-wide or cross-border contexts.

Bv. Strengthen the role of lived experience

Participants emphasised that the voices of people who use services and communities should remain central to the Approach. While it emphasises this already, there was a strong view that this element should be strengthened and reflected in how the Approach is adopted and shared.

Participants also emphasised that 'people-led' should be understood broadly, encompassing not only people who use services, but also staff, communities, commissioners and partners across the system. Amplifying these perspectives was seen as critical to ensuring the Approach reflects the range of experiences that shape change.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

Participants highlighted the importance of actively engaging with communities in change, including physically going into communities and creating opportunities for dialogue about why change is happening and how people can be involved. This includes when developing and refining the Approach itself.

C. Ensuring the Approach is owned across the system

Participants were asked what it would take to ensure the Approach feels co-owned across the system, rather than being perceived as 'belonging' to HIS.

Ci. Agreement on shared ownership being important

Firstly, participants strongly agreed that the Approach should be seen as a collective endeavour, owned by organisations and practitioners across the system.

Ownership must be actively co-created with those who will use the Approach, as well as with people and communities who experience services. This includes continuing to involve a diverse range of voices in shaping and evolving the Approach, and ensuring that lived experience is central to it. There was a strong sense that ownership cannot be 'imposed', but must be developed through genuine engagement, co-design and ongoing dialogue with the system.

Participants also emphasised that ownership will be strengthened where people can clearly see the value of the Approach in practice – through tangible examples and sharing.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

Cii. Connect it to existing work

The Approach should align with existing initiatives, frameworks and networks. Aligning it with work that organisations are already doing will help it feel relevant and reduce the risk that it is seen as an 'additional' requirement.

Participants also highlighted the importance of building on existing expertise and energy within the system. This includes engaging practitioners, leaders and organisations who already have experience of change and improvement. They also suggested learning from other initiatives that have successfully operated across sectors, such as Leading to Change.

Ciii. Visible leadership and endorsement

Participants emphasised the role of 'visible' leadership in supporting adoption of the Approach. Senior leaders demonstrating how they use the Approach in their own work will help build trust and signal that it is an important part of how change should happen.

However, visible leadership needs to extend beyond a single organisation. There was a strong call for cross-sector endorsement, with national and system partners – e.g. SSSC, Care Inspectorate and the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland – jointly supporting and communicating the Approach to ensure it is seen as relevant across health, social care, the voluntary sector and wider public services.

This includes ensuring that leadership messages are delivered through trusted organisations and networks in different parts of the system, and considering how the Approach is positioned so that it feels accessible and owned 'beyond' HIS.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

Civ. Enable grassroots adoption

Alongside leadership endorsement, participants stressed that the Approach should enable grassroots ownership. If teams feel they can adapt and apply the Approach within their own context, it is more likely to become embedded in everyday practice.

They noted that ownership needs to be actively encouraged and supported through clear messaging and visible examples. This includes signalling that people and organisations are expected and trusted to adapt and apply the Approach in their own context, and sharing stories where this has been done successfully.

There was also recognition that individuals and teams may need support, confidence and permission to take ownership, particularly where this represents a shift from more traditional, top-down ways of working.

Linked to this, participants highlighted that shifting ownership more widely across the system will involve changes in power and decision-making. This may create discomfort or uncertainty, and will require space for discussion, support and learning at all levels, as people adapt to new ways of working. Ensuring that individuals feel safe and supported to take ownership – including when things do not go as planned – was seen as critical.

There was also emphasis on embedding the Approach into existing ways of working, rather than introducing it as something 'separate'. This may include integrating it into existing projects and routine activities such as team meetings, improvement discussions, appraisal conversations and existing performance or partnership forums.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

The role of trusted individuals and influencers across different parts of the system was also highlighted. Engaging respected practitioners, leaders and networks to endorse and advocate for the Approach will build credibility and encourage uptake.

There was a strong sense that the success of the Approach will depend on how it is allowed to spread across the system freely and organically. For a movement-based approach however, individuals, teams and organisations may need to interpret, adapt and even 'misrepresent' the Approach. This raises questions about how much HIS feels able to 'let go' and how much central coordination they need to retain.

Cv. Spread through decentralised routes

Participants emphasised that for the Approach to gain traction, the Approach and the learning from those applying it will need to be captured and shared through a variety of channels and formats. This may include formal training, informal networks, peer-to-peer learning and perhaps local 'show and tell' sessions.

There was support for a mix of in-person and digital approaches, including roadshows, communities of practice, learning events like the symposium, case studies, and integration into existing learning environments. Importantly, there was also a view that this should not be centrally controlled. Participants encouraged HIS to enable and support others to share learning in their own contexts without it being tightly branded – to help create ownership and momentum across the system.

3. How the Scottish Approach to Change can be strengthened

Cvi. Recognise and encourage adoption

Participants suggested that visible forms of recognition could support wider adoption of the Approach. This could include mechanisms such as pledges, endorsements, 'badges' or other forms of recognition that signal commitment to using the Approach.

It was noted that any such mechanisms should be designed carefully to avoid becoming overly formalised or exclusive, and should support rather than constrain organic adoption.

Cvii. Manage performance thoughtfully

There was discussion about how the Approach may be interpreted if linked to national performance management or reporting expectations. If organisations are asked to demonstrate the 'use' of the Approach in a formalised way, this might help with 'adoption' on the surface but could risk reinforcing a compliance mindset rather than meaningful application. It would also create work for teams in updating training and reporting processes. Clarity from HIS and Scottish Government on how the Approach will (and will not) be used in this context will help avoid unintended consequences.

Participants also noted, on a positive note, that alignment with inspection and accountability mechanisms may positively influence wider application of the Approach, reinforcing the idea that "people do what is inspected" – although care will be needed to ensure this does not drive superficial compliance.

4. Key risks which could limit success and how to guard against them

A. Key risks

During the final session of the symposium, participants were invited to imagine a future where the Scottish Approach to Change had totally failed to gain traction or have impact. This exercise surfaced several key risks:

Ai. The Approach 'sits on the shelf' if we don't know its relevance

Participants warned that the Approach could risk becoming another framework that is discussed but rarely used in practice if people struggle to see how it applies to their everyday work. So showcasing relevance is key.

Aii. Change fatigue across the system

Many people working across health and care are already navigating multiple reforms and initiatives. If the Approach is perceived as an additional demand, engagement may be limited. Participants also noted the importance of achieving momentum early on. If uptake is too slow, there is a risk that the Approach does not reach a 'critical mass' of adoption before attention shifts elsewhere.

Aiii. Lack of middle management engagement

Participants identified middle management as a critical group for successful adoption. Without their engagement and support, it may be difficult for teams to apply the Approach in practice.



The risk is people think this is another thing to 'implement' — when actually it's a way of thinking about and approaching change.

Symposium participant

4. Key risks which could limit success and how to guard against them

Aiv. Tokenistic adoption

There was concern that organisations might adopt the language of the Approach without meaningfully applying its principles, resulting in superficial or tokenistic use.

Participants also noted that senior leaders may face competing incentives, such as financial targets or performance requirements, which could limit their ability to prioritise or align with the Approach. Without alignment between the principles of the Approach and what leaders are held accountable for, there is a risk of low or superficial (“tick-box”) adoption.

There was also concern that the scale of leadership and cultural change required to adopt the rest of the Approach fully may be underestimated. If the behavioural and cultural shift is not explicitly addressed and supported, the Approach risks being limited in its impact.

Av. Insufficient resources and support to enable adoption

Participants noted that embedding a new way of approaching change requires time, capability and infrastructure. Without adequate support, the Approach may struggle to gain traction, which may be difficult given the financial and capacity realities across the system. This includes constraints within the voluntary sector and challenges in finding funding to support change activity. Models such as ‘hub-and-spoke’ were suggested as resource-efficient ways to enable learning and spread of the Approach.

4. Key risks which could limit success and how to guard against them

There was also a concern that too much responsibility could be placed on local teams to adopt the Approach without sufficient support from 'higher up' in the system. Participants suggested that clear signals, expectations and enabling conditions from national and system leaders will be welcomed to help local organisations play their part.

Avi. Competing frameworks or approaches dilute focus

Participants noted a risk that new or competing frameworks could emerge, creating further fragmentation. Without clear alignment, there is a danger that the Scottish Approach to Change becomes one of many approaches rather than the unifying framework it is intended to be.

Avii. Changes in political priorities or national context

Participants highlighted the risk that shifts in political leadership or priorities could disrupt momentum or reduce support for the Approach. This includes the possibility that wider system reform evolves in a way that deprioritises the Approach and/or that it is not sustained across political cycles.

Aviii. Early or high-profile use undermines confidence

Participants noted a risk that if the Approach is applied to a high-profile or contentious change that is perceived to 'fail', this could undermine confidence in it. This highlights the importance of how early applications are chosen, supported and communicated.

4. Key risks which could limit success and how to guard against them

Aix. The Approach is perceived as health-centric rather than system-wide

There was a risk identified that the Approach could become dominated by a single sector, particularly healthcare, limiting engagement from social care, the voluntary sector and wider public services. Participants emphasised that if it is not clearly positioned and adopted as a whole-system approach, it may struggle to gain traction beyond healthcare settings.

Ax. Failure is not recognised as part of learning

Participants reflected that change in complex systems will inevitably involve 'failure'. There is a risk that unsuccessful attempts are viewed negatively rather than as valuable learning, which could discourage experimentation and honest reflection. Supporting a culture where learning from failure is expected and valued will be critical to the success of the Approach.

4. Key risks which could limit success and how to guard against them

B. Advice to mitigate the risks

Participants offered constructive advice on how these risks could be addressed:

Bi. Maintain long-term commitment

Participants emphasised that meaningful change takes time. Sustained commitment from national bodies and system leaders will be important to ensure the Approach continues to develop and allow its impact to be demonstrated. This includes maintaining commitment even where early attempts do not deliver desired results. Participants encouraged a mindset of curiosity and learning, where challenges or lack of uptake are explored and understood, rather than leading to the Approach being abandoned or replaced prematurely.

Bii. Demonstrate value through practice

Seeing the Approach applied in real contexts and communicating the value of its impact was seen as one of the most powerful ways to build confidence and wider application. Participants encouraged HIS to demonstrate the Approach through real projects and case studies. There was also a strong emphasis on clearly articulating the tangible 'value added' by the Approach.

Biii. Continue listening and learning

Participants valued the open, reflective nature of the symposium and encouraged HIS to continue engaging widely – e.g. through the learning community, further events similar to the symposium and other methods – and listening to feedback as the Approach evolves. Consider the right mechanisms to gather, share and learn from practice happening in different parts of the system.

4. Key risks which could limit success and how to guard against them

Biv. Reflect the principles of the Approach in how it is rolled out

Participants suggested that the development and rollout of the Scottish Approach to Change should itself reflect the principles of the Approach – including being people-led, and centring learning and collaboration. Participants also reflected on how the Approach is positioned and communicated, suggesting that framing it as something ‘hosted’ by HIS – rather than ‘owned’ – may help reinforce shared ownership across the system.

Bv. Support implementation through resource and evaluation

Participants highlighted the importance of understanding and supporting the resource requirements associated with applying the Approach in practice. This includes considering how funding, capacity and capability can be aligned to support its use, and whether targeted investment may be needed to enable early adoption and spread. There was also a call for robust and ongoing evaluation, including assessing impact over time across different parts of the system, understanding the resource implications of implementation and a financial assessment – important both for learning and for demonstrating value.