



Strategic plan 2011-2013

Approved 17th January 2011

ESS works with voluntary organisations and funders so that they can measure their impact, report on the difference they make and improve their services.

Contents

Contents	2
1. Our vision	3
Why evaluation matters	3
The need for Evaluation Support Scotland.....	3
How change happens	4
2. Our achievements so far	5
3. Our principles and values	6
Principles	6
Operating values	6
4. The external environment	7
5. What we do	8
Information, Support and Workshops	9
Strategic programmes.....	9
Influencing policy and practice in the public sector	10
Setting our work in context (an internal task)	11
6. How we will do it	12
Governance	12
People	12
Funding	12
Doing things well – monitoring and evaluation	12

Our vision

The world as we would like to see it is a place where people have the skills, time and support to evaluate, reflect and learn from, their work. Where learning from evaluation, results in better services for people and communities.

Why evaluation matters

Better evaluation, and learning from evaluation, results in more effective services for people and communities.

We recognise that building skills alone is not enough. Evaluation needs to go somewhere and do something for the people and communities who use the services we support.

We think practical, proportionate evaluation is important for:

- Learning from evaluation (and acting on it) to improve services.
- Learning about what works and what doesn't for whom.
- Demonstrating the difference that a project or programme makes.
- Making well informed decisions about the best use of funding.
- Acting as a source of evidence for policy development.

The need for Evaluation Support Scotland

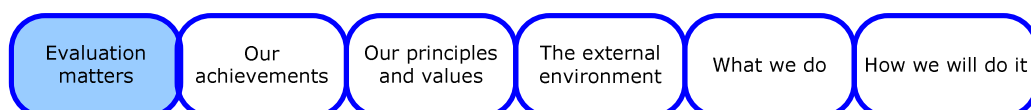
There remains a significant evaluation skills gap in voluntary organisations, funders and the wider public sector. Voluntary organisations need support to link activities to outcomes, use ICT to support evaluation, and map project evaluation to national performance and local Government outcomes.

Funders need to better understand and use the self-evaluation evidence they receive. The focus on outcomes from Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships has led to an increased need in the public sector for support to understand and make use of evaluation (and self-evaluation).

A recurring theme in the work of ESS with funders and funded organisations has been that of relationship. Improving reporting doesn't just hinge on understanding the technical aspects of evaluation - asking the right questions and providing the right information. It also depends on good relationships and communication between funders and funded organisations.

Finally there is a need to capture the learning from voluntary organisations and use it to inform policy and practice for both Government and the voluntary sector. Studies suggest that evidence is seldom used effectively in developing policy and practice and that there are additional barriers when the evidence is generated by *self*-evaluation.

There is more information about evidence of need in **Annex C**.



How change happens

ESS builds ... the self-evaluation skills of voluntary organisations and funders

This improves ... their understanding of outcomes and increases their skills, knowledge and confidence to evaluate their work

And means ... increased leadership for learning from self-evaluation, improved understanding between funders and voluntary organisations and more proportionate monitoring and evaluation processes.

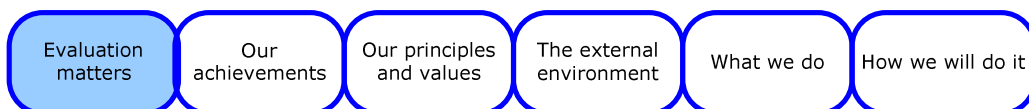
This leads to ... improved evaluation for voluntary organisations and funders.

So that there is ... More learning from evaluation and self evaluation and learning is embedded in the culture of organisations (and professions).

Where learning is acted on this means ... funders and voluntary organisations are better able to achieve their outcomes (the difference they want to make).

And the long term, overall result is... Needs are better met, services are more effective and the world is a better place.

This is set out in a diagram in our logic model at **Annex A**.



2. Our achievements so far

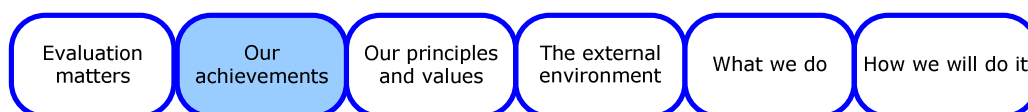
ESS was set up after three years of research and consultation on whether Scotland needed a dedicated evaluation support service and what shape that organisation should take.

Established in 2005, ESS has grown to an organisation of eight staff with a turnover of £280,000.

ESS has an excellent reputation in the sector and good relationships and networks with intermediaries, funders and Scottish Government.

Our key achievements

- We have **increased the number of organisations we work with year on year**. In 2009-10 we worked with 410 organisations (of which 357 were voluntary organisations).
 - Around **90%** of organisations we support improve their skills and knowledge to set and measure.
 - At least **6/10** organisations we support are using evaluation to learn and improve.
- Through the creation of a training strategy, new workshops and new ways of learning we've seen a **50% increase in workshops delivered** and a 96% increase in income generated.
 - Workshop participants consistently say they have **increased skills and motivation** to improve the way their organisation self evaluates after attending our workshops.
- We worked with funders, intermediaries and voluntary organisations to use self-evaluation evidence to **influence policy and practice** and **demonstrate the value** of the voluntary sector.
- Our work with individual funders and the Scotland Funders' Forum has resulted in significant joining up and streamlining of funders' reporting requirements. Our 2010 [Harmonising Reporting](#) report, endorsed by Ministers, draws together the latest best practice, tips and template to make reporting more effective for funders and funded organisations.
- We worked to improve monitoring and evaluation in **Scottish Government**. In 2008 we became the first strategic partner of the Third Sector Division.
- **Our stakeholders appreciate our approach:** respondents to our 2009 [stakeholder survey](#) agreed that we demystify evaluation (93%), help people understand why evaluation is important (92%), and ensure people use evaluation to make better decisions (78%).



3. Our principles and values

Principles

We promote **self-evaluation**. By learning how to evaluate their own activity, organisations discover what works and what doesn't and can make use of that learning.

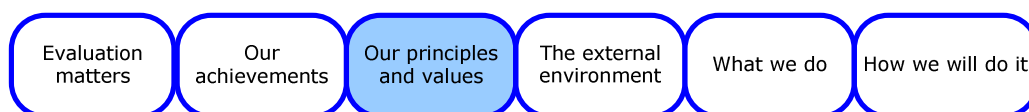
We believe evaluation should be **valuable, relevant** and **proportionate**.

What this means is that evaluation should:

- Generate **learning** to improve policy, practice and service design.
- Tell us what **doesn't work** as well as what does.
- Be build into the way people and organisations work: evaluation is **part of practice** and practice is part of evaluation.
- Be for **everyone** - all sizes and types of organisation can improve their self-evaluation processes.
- Be **supported** – organisations should have access to training and support to build their skills.

Operating values

- We are accessible. We use plain English. We are friendly. We work in a way that meets people's different needs and abilities.
- We leave organisations with the skills to continue evaluating and learning once ESS support has finished.
- We work in positive partnership with others, sharing our expertise and learning and adding value to the expertise of others.
- Our focus is on outcomes. But we do not promote a single evaluation tool. And we use different and creative ways to engage people in evaluation.
- We promote a culture of learning within ESS, including seeking feedback from everyone we work with so we learn from our successes and weaknesses and get better at what we do.



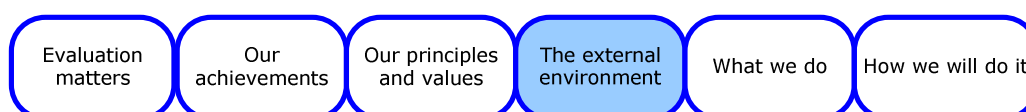
4. The external environment

The current context of UK and Scottish Government poses challenges and opportunities for ESS and for evaluation in the voluntary sector. Organisations facing funding cuts may find it hard to prioritise spending on evaluation training and support, even if this could help them understand and better demonstrate their value.

However at a UK level there is significant interest in the role of the voluntary and community sector in creating cost effective local solutions. This is likely to be a continued area of interest through the forthcoming Scottish Election. The focus on value for money, the need to demonstrate impact and an interest in payment by results may lead to opportunities for ESS. Local and National Government and other public bodies, will need cost-effective ways of measuring impact.

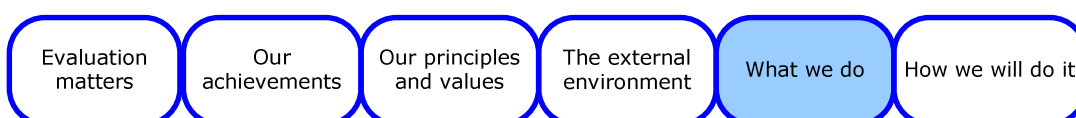
The commitment to an outcomes based approach is strongly embedded in Scottish public policy. There is a widespread wish to strengthen this further and to tackle some of the long-standing 'wicked' issues of Scottish society. This requires evidence of what works that is easily translated into practice and policy. Increased joint working within the voluntary sector and between the sector and Government offers additional platforms for organisations to communicate their learning as well as their message.

Challenge	Opportunity
Focus on value for money in public services	Evaluation needed to support decision making about which services / interventions are effective.
Interest in systemic approaches to delivering public services - measuring outcomes for people receiving multiple interventions.	Evaluation support needed to develop effective systems to track long term outcomes and to understand contribution of multiple interventions.
Predicted cuts in the Scottish Government's internal budget for social research.	Demand for quality self-evaluation expands because fewer external evaluations of projects are commissioned.
The continuing drive to measure social impact (particularly based on economic measures.)	Organisations' need skills in general evaluation- particularly clarity of outcomes and recording- before return on investment models can be applied effectively.
Cuts in statutory funding to the voluntary sector alongside increased demands for services	Organisations need to demonstrate the difference they make as they compete for a smaller pot of funding.
Demand on discretionary funders increases	May lead to an increased interest in outcomes based funding to support decision making.
Focus on local and national outcomes.	Support needed to build capacity at local and national levels to understand contribution of the voluntary sector.



5. What we do

Our **programme of work** is summarised in the diagram below. On the following pages we set out the **strategic direction** for our programme of work. The **detail** of what we do is our annual work plans and strategies (**Annex B**).



Information, Support and Workshops

We have an established suite of information and learning products for voluntary organisations and funders that we provide through workshops, tailored 1:1 support and our website. We can show from our evaluation and feedback that our approaches and products help us achieve our outcomes. This means we do not want to make major changes in these areas of work from 2011-13.

The strategic tasks are:

- ✓ **Keep doing what we do well**
- ✓ **Find new voluntary organisations, new funders and new subject areas we have not worked with before**
- ✓ **Develop new methods to reach voluntary organisations (such as 'train the trainer')**
- ✓ **Build shared understanding between voluntary sector and public sector on outcomes and evaluation (for example through area level logic modelling).**
- ✓ **Identify and meet specific gaps (including use of IT for evaluation).**
- ✓ **Improve our own evaluation of our longer term impact.**

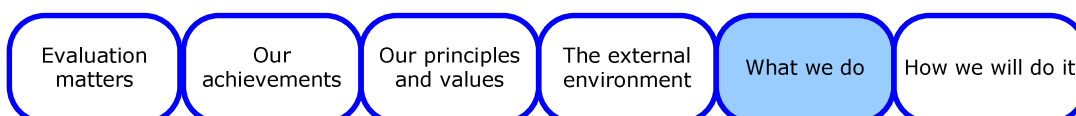
Strategic programmes

Strategic programmes involve working with small groups of voluntary organisations working in the same subject area. Strategic programmes also usually involve partnership with a subject intermediary or a funder. As well as building evaluation capacity of participating organisations, our strategic programmes generate learning about:

- Evaluation approaches, methods and tools
- Common outcomes for projects and programmes in a given subject area and how these contribute to local and national outcomes (in order to generate understanding but not to impose outcome frameworks)
- How to support decision makers to use self evaluation evidence
- Effective practice – evidence about what works for whom in what circumstances and why – and the gaps in evidence that still need to be filled

We want to take a more systematic approach to developing and running strategic programmes. The strategic tasks are to:

- ✓ **Identify and deliver more strategic programmes.**
- ✓ **Consolidate and share learning about our approach to strategic programmes**
- ✓ **Support subject intermediaries so they can share the thematic/sector learning from partnerships.**



Influencing policy and practice in the public sector

Influencing policy and practice in the public sector includes:

1. Building the skills and confidence of voluntary organisations to share their evidence of the difference they're making.
2. Identifying and addressing the barriers to self- evaluation use in policy and decision-making
3. Championing the validity of self-evaluation as a legitimate source of evidence.

Sharing evidence

Communicating and sharing evidence from self-evaluation with decision makers can be difficult for voluntary organisations. Conversely decision makers often find it difficult to source accessible, reliable evidence when they need it.

Over the last 5 years we have honed our experience of facilitating relationships between funders and funded and of supporting voluntary organisations to use self-evaluation evidence to influence policy and practice. We have built good relationships with Government, with policy and research forums and with academic communities.

Drawing from this own experience and from the academic literature we see an evolving role for ESS to:

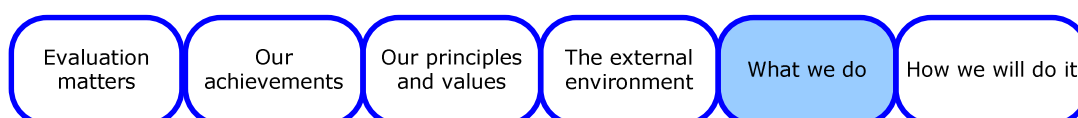
- Support **practitioners** to present evaluation evidence effectively to policy and decision makers.
- Facilitate **policy and decision makers** to access and use self-evaluation evidence
- **Promote interaction** between practitioners and policy and decision makers for example by using 'champions' to spread the word about self evaluation or running participatory events that get those generating evidence and those in policy in the same room.

Addressing barriers and championing self-evaluation

In 2008 ESS became the first strategic partner of the Scottish Government's Third Sector Division. Our work with Government and the public sector is about:

- Enabling **central and local Government** to build evaluation best practice into its funding programmes.
- Supporting the **Government (and the wider public sector)** to further improve the use of evidence in policy making.
- Supporting the **voluntary sector** to meet the demands of an outcomes focussed policy and funding environment and show the contribution they make.

While these aims remain relevant and we have made a difference -we need a more proactive approach for the future and to work more broadly across the public sector including local Government.



The strategic tasks are to:

Develop and implement a strategy to:

1. Support voluntary organisations, intermediaries and funders to communicate their learning with policymakers.
2. Champion self-evaluation as a valuable and valid evidence source for policymaking.
3. Share our understanding of how organisations learn about evaluation; develop their practice, and the change this makes.

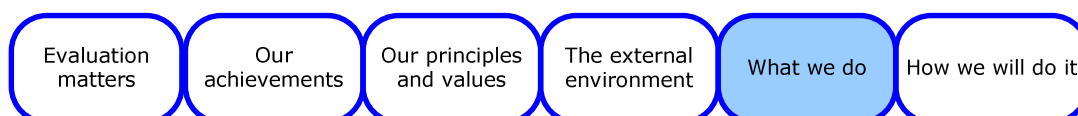
Continue building skills and understanding of officials and funders

4. Develop and implement a set of products for use with Government officials and other public policy-makers that help us achieve our outcomes. This includes embedding our 'harmonising reporting' good practice in evaluation and reporting.
5. Extend our links across the Scottish Government.
6. Make links to local Government and public bodies where we can address the barriers to evaluation and learning.

Setting our work in context (an internal task)

Over the last 5 years we have generated good general understanding of our own effectiveness in building evaluation capacity drawing on our own self-evaluation and staff review and reflection. We want to make this understanding of our effectiveness more systematic so we can get even better, explain our work more effectively and share what we know with others who are interested in organisational change. So we will:

- ✓ **Build a deeper understanding of our effectiveness through systematic and evidence informed review of our work (including reviewing relevant academic and practice literature).**
- ✓ **Share our learning with others through papers and conferences.**



6. How we will do it

Governance

ESS is a company limited by guarantee and a charity registered in Scotland. Our board consists of up to 12 trustees/directors with practical experience of evaluation and of either providing or receiving funding. Our Trustees Handbook (reviewed annually) ensures effective governance. We do not anticipate changes to our governance arrangements.

People

The ESS team of eight staff are our key resource in delivering our strategic plan. Staff are supported in line with our human resource policies and plans (reviewed annually). We are committed to staff training and development. We do not anticipate changes to the staffing structure.

Funding

Between 2005 and 2008 ESS turnover increased exponentially. Over the last 2 years we have reached a steady state with a turnover of around £280,000 a year. However the **proportion** of earned income has increased from 15% (£28,000) in 2006/07 to 56% (£156,000) in 2010/11.

We will raise funds through a mixture of earned income and grants, including funding from Scottish Government. Our approach is to

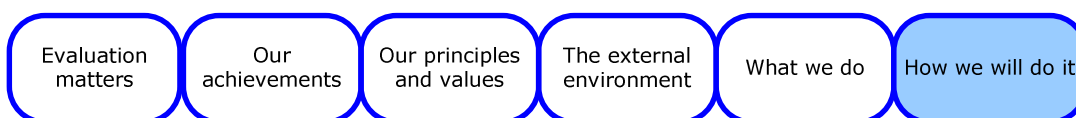
- fundraise by promoting and adapting our products and services (workshops, 1:1 support and strategic programmes)
- bid for tenders where there is strong alignment with our outcomes and values (using our 'criteria for paid work' to do so)
- apply for grants for project work - particularly to develop new ideas or products
- work with others to access new funding opportunities if doing so will help us better achieve our aims and outcomes and be cost effective
- develop new products in response to market demand

Given the economic uncertainty, we will have contingency plans in place to deal with changes in our income. Decisions will be driven by the priorities and principles in this Plan.

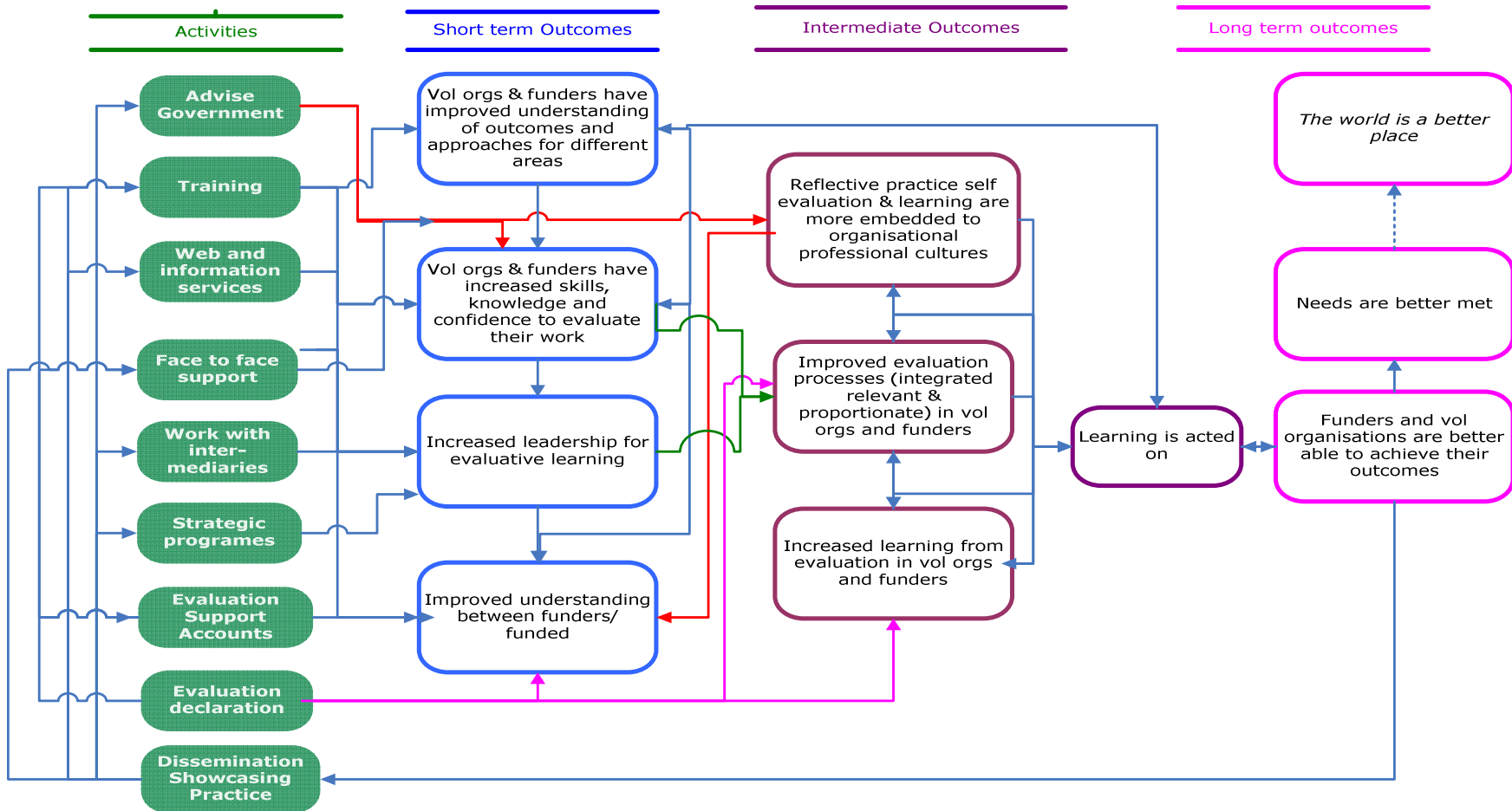
Doing things well – monitoring and evaluation

The ESS **Evaluation Strategy** sets out in detail how we review, analyse and report on the difference we are making against our short, medium and long term outcomes.

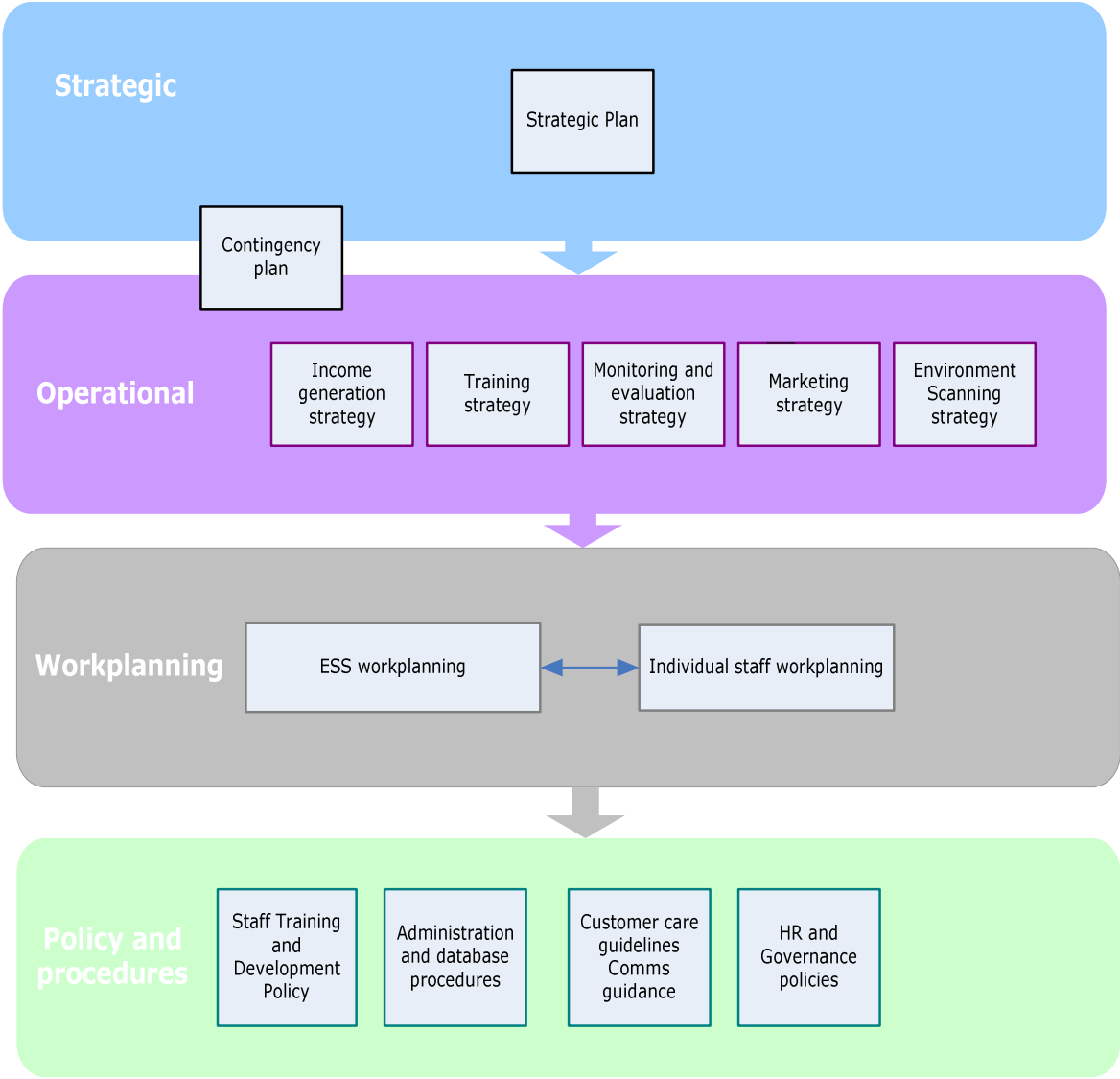
We monitor the **quality** of our customer care and the services we provide is set out in detail in our **Quality Assurance Policy**.



Annex A Strategic Logic Model



ANNEX B Strategic and operational planning- how they fit together



Further information on the need for ESS

Our understanding of why evaluation matters and of **the need for evaluation support** comes from the following:

➤ **Our own experience, consultation and evaluation:**

For example for evidence of the **need for our services** see:

- Our [biennial stakeholder survey](#)
- Our [regular conferences](#)
- Reports such as "Addressing the challenges for evaluation and learning in community-led health" [report](#) by NHS Health Scotland/ESS (2009)

For evidence of **our impact** and of how our support builds skills and in turn helps improve services see:

- Our own comprehensive self-evaluation report produced annually and summarised in our [annual report and reviews](#).
- Specific publications such as
 "Sharing the learning on Adult Voluntary Learning: Explaining the Difference"
 - summary of pilot project to explain the impact of voluntary sector adult learning organisations, ESS, 2010

 "Making the Case" – [stage 3 report](#) of ESS and Community Food and Health Scotland Early Years Self-evaluation collaborative (2010)

➤ **The 'formal' evidence:**

The case for evaluation as a tool for **embedding learning**:

- Fetterman et al (1996) "*Empowerment evaluation: knowledge and tools for self-assessment and accountability*"

The need to **for evaluation support and** building the understanding between voluntary organisations and funders:

- Arvidson (2009) "*Impact and evaluation in the UK third sector: review reviewing literature and exploring ideas*" [Third Sector Research Centre](#)
- Ellis and Gregory (2008) "*Accountability and learning: developing monitoring and evaluation in the third sector*" [Charities Evaluation Services](#)
- Brendan et al (2010) "*Measuring Up: A review of evaluation practice in the voluntary and community sector*" [Charities Evaluation Northern Ireland](#)

Effective approaches for **evidence into practice and policy**

- Sandra Nutley, Isabel Walter & Huw Davies (2007) "*Using Evidence: How Research can inform public services*"
- McCaughey and Bruning (2010) "*Rationality versus reality: the challenges of evidence-based decision making for health policymakers*" [Implementation Science](#)