

# Understanding intermediaries impact

## A scoping study

### Executive summary

This paper outlines the findings of a scoping study by Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) about how third sector intermediaries measure and report on their impact. We carried out desk research and spoke to intermediaries. This study was **not** an evaluation of intermediaries.

By 'intermediary' we mean a third sector organisation whose members are other third sector organisations and whose role (partly or wholly) is to represent and support those members.

SCVO's list of intermediary functions is helpful for understanding what intermediaries do (although not every intermediary delivers all functions and they don't all deliver the functions in the same way). The list is: representation and policy influencing, communication and networking, information and support, organisational development and capacity building, intelligence and evaluation, promoting good practice and funding.

We must stress that many intermediaries are doing a good job setting, measuring and reporting on some or most of their outcomes. Most intermediaries have clear outcomes and some have sophisticated evaluation frameworks. The main outcomes are for the organisations or people they work with **directly**: member organisations, and also policy-makers and funders. Outcomes for people are often one or more steps removed from intermediaries' direct activities. They can show a connection but cannot attribute a direct link.

We found 4 broad outcome areas that were common to many intermediaries:

- Increase capacity or organisational effectiveness of members / the sector
- Improved policy and practice
- Increased understanding of people's needs or of the sector's work
- Improved connectivity/collaboration between members (and others)

Intermediaries have methods in place to measure some of their outcomes. But even those intermediaries with robust evaluation frameworks face challenges in measuring outcomes around policy influence and improved collaboration. Wider published evidence base has some measurement ideas but no overall framework.

There seems to be a diversity of approach amongst Scottish Government officials about what intermediaries should measure. Some appear to want evidence of a direct impact on end beneficiaries. For their part, officials say further work on understanding and evidencing the impact of intermediaries would be helpful.

The next step is for ESS to coproduce with intermediaries a **resource** to help them explain what they do, identifies the types of outcomes that intermediaries deliver and provides some guidance on how to measure outcomes. We also think there is space to build better understanding between Scottish Government (and other funders) and intermediaries about their role and value.

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Why we undertook this work

The Scottish Government Third Sector Unit asked Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) to consider a new project to improve understanding of the outcomes that third sector intermediaries achieve and how they measure and report on those outcomes.

We thought that third sector intermediaries would welcome the opportunity to shine a positive light on their impact and to improve their capacity and tools to demonstrate that impact. However, we agreed that it was important to check with intermediaries if this was something they would find helpful and to let them identify what's working well and the challenges. So we decided to undertake a scoping study, before any further work.

This report outlines the findings of the scoping study. We will present them to a seminar of intermediaries and officials, to get their feedback and reflections.

### 1.2 Our approach

The work to create this report involved:

1. **Desk research** to pull out learning from previous ESS work with intermediaries on measuring their impact and to find out if other people had done any relevant work we could learn from.
2. **Speaking to** 13 intermediaries to find out how they currently measure their impact, to identify the drivers for and challenges around measuring impact, and to establish if there is appetite for further work.
3. **Speaking to** 5 Scottish Government officials about what Scottish Government values about intermediaries and what further evidence they need about impact.

### 1.3 Report content

In this report we:

- Define what we mean by an intermediary and the broad functions that intermediaries might play
- Describe what we have found out:
  - How intermediaries current measure their impact or outcomes
  - Who is asking for outcomes
  - Types of outcomes
  - Typical activities towards those outcomes
  - Challenges and gaps in measuring outcomes
- Consider next steps and how ESS could help

Please note: We use the words '**impact**' and '**outcomes**' interchangeably in this report. In both cases we mean "the **difference** intermediaries make".

## 2. Defining the territory

### 2.1 What is an intermediary?

For the purposes of this piece of work we are using the following definition: that a national intermediary is a third sector organisation whose members are other third sector organisations and whose role (partly or wholly) is to represent and support those members. To be clear, our work did not include third sector interfaces. Nor did we include funders or regulators.

### 2.2 Who are they?

There are 60 national intermediaries in Scotland<sup>1</sup> which 'form part of the third sector infrastructure'<sup>2</sup> and 'exist to support the work of other third sector organisations (TSOs)'<sup>3</sup>. Some intermediaries are generic and support all TSOs, whilst others support TSOs working in particular fields or policy areas. SCVO published a directory of intermediaries in August 2016 which categorised the different fields intermediaries supported as follows:

- General support
- Children and young people
- Community Development
- Culture
- Disability
- Environment
- Equalities and rights
- Health
- Housing
- International
- Learning
- Mental health
- Minorities and faith
- Older people
- Social care
- Sports
- Volunteering
- Women

SCVO convenes the Intermediaries Network.

### 2.3 What do intermediaries do?

Intermediaries carry out a mixture of some or all of the following functions:

- Representation and policy influencing
- Communication and networking
- Information and support
- Organisational development and capacity building
- Intelligence and evaluation,
- Promoting good practice

Intermediaries represent and raise the profile of their members' interests. Campaigning work is often the driver for the intermediary to be set up initially. Communication and networking are important functions as this is how intermediaries can understand the concerns of members they are representing and how they communicate key messages back to members.

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<sup>1</sup> SCVO Policy briefing 'An introduction to Scotland's national third sector umbrella bodies and intermediaries', August 2016

<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Government website](#)

<sup>3</sup> [SDEF Access Panel Conference](#) 2015 Speaker Gareth Allen, Scottish Government

Giving information and support, capacity building and promoting good practice, through training and events, are very common functions. Some also support members to develop an evidence base or support members to research, monitor and evaluate.

A few intermediaries have additional functions:

- Run quality schemes or particular service. Museums Galleries Scotland facilitates a standards/recognition scheme and Volunteering Scotland manages the Disclosure Scheme
- Support fundraising, such as Age Scotland supporting its charity shops.
- Managing and distributing funding (often for Scottish Government) such as the Health and Social Care ALLIANCE self-management fund.

In practice, different intermediaries take different roles and approaches. Some mostly focus on providing a platform for members voices and policy influence (for example Build Environment Forum Scotland, Scottish Environment Link, Coalition of Community Providers Scotland, Voluntary Health Scotland). Others mostly focus on supporting the capacity of members and raising profile of the sector (for example Befriending Networks, Youth Scotland).

Some also deliver a range of 'non-intermediary' functions such as front line services for individuals and communities. For example Age Scotland runs a public helpline and has guides and fact sheets, public awareness campaigns and commercial products. Youth Scotland offers a variety of activities, events and projects for young people, Children in Scotland delivers the *Enquire* helpline and *Resolve* - an advocacy service for parents.

There is diversity in terms of the roles and functions adopted by intermediary bodies. It is not therefore surprising that the overall purpose can be unclear, or that different members and stakeholders recognise different elements of the role.

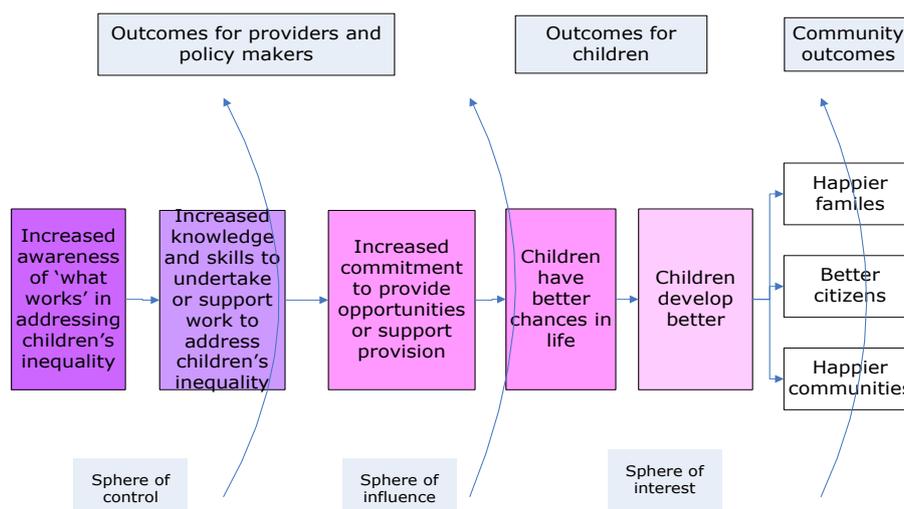
In addition some of the intermediary role/purpose can seem quite nebulous e.g. communication and networking, building collaboration and partnerships. This in turn means it can be difficult for members and others to fully recognise the impact of what they do (although they may understand the part that relates to them). As one intermediary said:

“We need a clear way of describing what we do”

### 3. Understanding intermediary impact – what do we mean?

#### 3.1 Spheres of impact

For most intermediaries, most of the time the main difference they make is on the organisations and people they work with directly – that is their members and also other organisations they work with directly such as policy-makers or funders. Intermediaries have less control over the outcomes that come from the work of those organisations or influencers. The made up example below for a fictional children’s intermediary illustrates this chain of influence over outcomes



Intermediaries can demonstrate outcomes in their 'sphere of control'. It is much harder to demonstrate outcomes outside that sphere of control. But sometimes they are under pressure from some funders or politicians to do so.

Two intermediaries mentioned the additional challenge from an extra layer of influence. NIDOS works in partnership with organisations in other countries that in turn support local organisations and groups. SCVO works with and through other intermediaries.

#### 3.2 Gaps in the broader evidence base

ESS reviewed our previous support for intermediaries. We looked for UK research about measuring intermediary impact and we looked at intermediaries' own websites. Annex 1 summaries some of what we found. The headlines are:

- **There is some limited evidence of impact in others' research:** This tells us that intermediaries are valued by their members, particularly for representing them, capacity building and for information/ communication.
- **Impact reporting varies:** some intermediaries publish impact reports but most publicly available reports are activity reports with only a little impact evidence including statistics or quotes from stakeholders.
- **There is no overall outcome framework for national intermediaries.** Most research in England identified challenges that intermediaries have in evaluating their impact but, while there are examples of individual good practice, we found no common solutions about measuring impact.

## **4. What we found out about evaluating impact**

### **4.1 How intermediaries currently measure their impact**

Most intermediaries we interviewed have identified clear outcomes. In other words they have written down the changes they want to achieve, for whom and in what way. Some have gone further and developed logic models. That is a simple visual depiction of what they do and how this makes a difference, in the short medium and long term.

There is variety in how the outcomes are written (see below). Some outcomes are written broadly, for example 'increasing the capacity of members'. Some outcomes were expressed more specifically to take account of the specific context.

While most intermediaries are clear about the outcomes they want to achieve, the practice of measuring those outcomes varies.

Some had invested significant time and effort in developing evaluation frameworks and processes to collect data to demonstrate progress toward outcomes. For other intermediaries, their capacity to measure impact was limited to reporting on outputs (for example, number of events, number of consultation responses). Two intermediaries had commissioned external agencies to measure impact.

Some intermediaries are multi-functional organisations and deliver both 'intermediary activities' and services directly to individuals /communities. These intermediaries struggled more with measuring impact. They found it more difficult to distinguish the contribution of their 'intermediary functions' from direct service delivery in achieving their overall outcomes.

Even those intermediaries that had clearly defined outcomes, and had developed more robust evaluation frameworks and data collection systems said that there remain challenges in measuring some outcomes.

### **4.2 Who cares about intermediary impact?**

#### *Funders*

For the majority of intermediaries that receive Scottish Government funding, reporting systems have been shaped by the requirements of the funding department. Although the picture is changing, Scottish Government has traditionally been more interested in outputs. Even where there is a general focus on outcomes, measurement is still by output indicators.

In practice, the approach to agreeing outcomes and checking progress depends on the particular civil servant. Some are more focussed on outcomes than others. Some prefer conversational approaches to managing performance and understanding progress. Others rely on more formal reports.

Where Scottish Government has appointed an external fund manager to distribute and manage funding, there is often a more formalised process for setting and reporting on outcomes.

More generally we got the sense that Scottish Government would like greater clarity about the purpose and impact of intermediaries. In some policy areas, there is more than one intermediary body and it's not always clear how the roles and functions fit together.

Some intermediaries also receive funding from other funders for specific projects. These require separate reports about the project outcomes.

### *Members*

Some intermediaries have a very diverse membership. Members join for different reasons and have different interests. One intermediary noted

“As a broad generalisation the representative role is more important to bigger organisations, the support role is more important to smaller organisations, who probably have less interest in and understanding of the policy connect and therefore less interest.”

What this means is that different members may be interested in different intermediary functions and outcomes. In addition their interests may not coincide with what funders want to know.

Some intermediaries reported that their members were not particularly concerned with the intermediary's impact overall. They just looked at the intermediary's ability to meet specific needs of their own organisation. If the intermediary does not 'add value' for members, they leave.

“They vote with their wallet”

Where members join because they want to see a change in policy/practice, they want to see a positive change in policy and practice but may be less concerned with issues of attribution and exact measurement.

“Members understand why we are here, and understand the impact we make. If they didn't, they probably wouldn't join.”

### *Intermediaries' Boards of Trustees*

The extent to which board members are interested in impact measurement varies considerably.

Some organisations reflected that their boards, understandably, were primarily concerned with performance management. They have, or want, a dashboard of measures that includes outcome measures but also measures about HR, compliance, service quality and sustainability of funding.

Three intermediaries had sophisticated evaluation frameworks that separate performance management and impact measurement. In these organisations, there was clear recognition of the accountability of the board for impact.

## **4.3 Types of intermediary outcome**

We found 4 broad outcome areas that were common to many intermediaries:

- Increase capacity or organisational effectiveness of members / the sector
- Improved policy and practice

- Increased understanding of people’s needs or of the sector’s work
- Improved connectivity/collaboration between members (and others)

The grid below contains examples of outcomes for these four areas. This is an example of the way similar outcomes are defined by different intermediaries. It is not a definitive list of all outcomes.

<p><b>Increased organisational (member) capacity or effectiveness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater access to good quality information, and support for fundraising and running an organisation</li> <li>• Voluntary sector providers have information, knowledge and skills they need to deliver high quality support</li> <li>• Social firms are better informed, encouraged, networked and supported</li> <li>• Workforce is more competent/ skilled</li> <li>• TS leaders have improved knowledge, skills and confidence to develop themselves and their organisations</li> <li>• Youth groups have increased capacity to deliver high quality youth work</li> <li>• Increasing the capacity of members to:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Influence policy</li> <li>○ Evaluate and continually improve</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Improved policy or practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scottish public policy and implementation are improved by the expertise and evidence from the Link Network</li> <li>• Commissioning and procurement is focussed on and enables high quality sustainable care and support</li> <li>• Regulation and scrutiny of care and support is proportionate and drives improvement</li> <li>• Members have increased opportunities to engage directly with policy makers</li> <li>• The voice of voluntary health and care organisations is listened to more consistently</li> <li>• Health and care policy making and implementation reflects what people and communities want</li> <li>• Influencers have increased understanding of the impact of their policies and practice on individuals and communities</li> <li>• Our influence and contribution to policy development is enhanced</li> </ul>
<p><b>Increased understanding of people’s needs or of the sector</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the profile and awareness of befriending</li> <li>• The profile and impact of social firms is enhanced and the value they bring is better recognised and understood</li> <li>• Others have increased understanding of the contribution that third sector leaders make to improving services</li> <li>• The role of the third sector in the economy and in addressing peoples’ needs is clearer</li> <li>• Voluntary health organisations are more visible and heard</li> </ul>	<p><b>Improved collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members have the opportunity to influence, are well connected across all sectors and make improved links with those who can help them achieve their outcomes</li> <li>• Voluntary sector providers have productive relationships with their partners in the statutory sector and elsewhere</li> <li>• The sector is better informed and connected</li> </ul>

#### 4.4 Types of intermediary activities towards these outcomes

We also found a range of common activities across different intermediaries although some may use the same activity to achieve different outcomes. For example an intermediary might run an event to share learning or to gather information from the network to feed back to local and national influencers, or both. Websites provide a range of resources some of which are about understanding the policy context and others about developing good practice.

Common activities are:

- Websites
- Newsletters
- Social media activity
- Workshops/ training
- Events (topic based, networking, sharing good practice, consulting with the sector to gather views to feed into policy process.)
- Information line or one to one support
- Mentoring programmes
- Resources and publications
- Briefing papers
- Facilitation to explore issues/solve problems
- Responding to consultations
- Commissioning or undertaking research

#### 4.5 Evaluation methods

The table below gives some examples of the evaluation methods that intermediaries use to measure outcomes achieved from particular activities

Activity	Methods to measure outcomes
Websites Including resources and publications	Web hits and downloads
Social media	Analytics
Newsletters	Number of newsletters and items opened
Workshops	End of workshop questionnaire and follow up
Events including network events	Event evaluation
One to one support	Note support given, any action agreed
Helpline	Monitor enquiries and support given
Mentoring and/ or longer CPD	Measure against goals More intensive self-assessment and re-assessment Some CPD is accredited
Briefing papers and responses to consultations	Tracking changes in policy
Research	Monitoring dissemination activities and follow up

In addition, intermediaries commonly use a **members' survey** to assess the value and impact of their services overall. Some also collected informal feedback whilst working 'in the field'.

## 4.6 Measurement challenges

### Understanding the impact on third sector organisations

A number of the above methods can give numbers using services, a sense of the focus of activity and some initial feedback on very early outcomes. But unless the work is more in depth (such as mentoring or more extensive CPD), it can be difficult to understand the impact on the member organisation or on other stakeholders. Some comments included

“We can ask ‘what did you learn?’ at events to get a proxy of impact but can’t say what the impact of individual learning has on the [member] organisation”

“Do members even recognise the impact of connecting/ being better informed?”

“For the advice line we can track the number of referrals/ signposts, but not the impact of the person getting the advice they need.”

### Staff capacity and skills

Intermediaries identified staff capacity as being limited, particularly in smaller organisations.

“We don't have time with a small staff team to do detailed analysis of everything we do, we only do detailed analysis of events to feed into other discussions.”

Staff skills and motivation was also mentioned by some

“We’ve got much better at this since x joined us: she’s helped us to draw up logic model and be much clearer about our outcomes and how we measure them.”

“[in a larger organisation] It takes time to get staff on board, it’s a slow process, an uphill struggle. We are learning as we go along and need to keep refreshing the message.”

### Capturing stories or examples

Sometimes intermediaries look for case examples or capture more qualitative feedback. One person noted

“How do we better capture the stories of people and organisations? We have been with this using social media and writing case studies. But how does it fit with more formal reporting requirements against numbers and set outcomes?”

### Low member response

Intermediaries rely to a great extent on their members to tell them about impact. Many use member surveys to collect data but report that response rates are low as many members do not have the capacity to respond.

“We used to do a members survey, but stopped last year due to a low response rate.”

“Feedback from members is a huge challenge. We get a poor response from the annual survey.”

In practice some members are more engaged with the intermediary than others and some intermediaries have more engaged members overall

- Some may be primarily interested in particular back office services or offers (such as cheap insurance)
- Some may be very interested in the policy influencing role,
- Others are focussed on support to skill up staff or improve the processes of their organisation
- Others are keen to see the profile of their sector or particular intervention increased

For those with more engaged members feedback is easier, although member capacity to respond is still an issue.

### Attribution

Attribution is an issue, particularly for long term outcomes, where the context is changing and where more than one player or activity contributes to change

“A key challenge is how to evaluate policy influence when it is long term and difficult to attribute to one org. don't know how to evaluate except in terms of activity, for e.g. they can show they talked to a minster and that policy changed or more supportive, but not that it was this discussion that made the difference.”

“Policy work is a challenge, not least because the external factors are constantly changing”

“When you are in a policy area for a long time you can see the change/progress, but it can be hard to see that in the short term”

### Important, but nebulous outcomes

Some outcomes are trickier to measure.

“It's hard to measure how much we have raised the profile. We can say what we've done, but not what impact it has”

“How can you show that you've built a movement, especially since this involves working in collaboration and you can't/don't want to attribute to individual organisations?”

### Different stakeholder requirements

Different stakeholders of intermediaries want different things in terms of impact measurement. Some funders are interested in impact for end users. Some funders are primarily interested in outputs. Members are interested in impact on their own organisation or their sector. There is a need for clarity around 'what is the impact of an intermediary?' before you can start to think about how/what to measure.

#### 4.7 Impact measurement in summary – positives and challenges

Outcome area	What's working	Challenges
Increased organisational (member) capacity or effectiveness	<p>Methods to evaluate workshops and events</p> <p>Can measure hits and use analytics for websites and social media</p> <p>For more in depth work with organisations it is easier to measure and follow up</p>	<p>The contact is with the individual member of staff/ volunteer</p> <p>It's easier to measure the immediate impact on their skills, knowledge, understanding, behaviour</p> <p>It's harder to measure the impact on organisational effectiveness</p> <p>It's hard to get feedback from members</p>
Improved policy or practice	Can measure activity and products	<p>It's difficult to chart progress in the short and medium term</p> <p>In the long term attribution is an issue</p>
Increased understanding of people's needs or of the sector	Can measure activity and products	It's tricky to get the right indicators of change.
Improved collaboration	Can measure activities and products	<p>It's hard to get feedback from members</p> <p>The outcomes from collaboration can be diverse and hard to track</p>

## 5. Conclusion and next steps

### 5.1 Is there a need to help with impact measurement?

The purpose of this scoping study was to find out, briefly, whether intermediaries need and want support to explain and measure their impact. The answer is yes.

We must stress that many intermediaries are doing a good job setting, measuring and reporting on some or most of their outcomes.

But intermediaries would like help to improve how they explain and measure their outcomes. The intermediaries we approached were keen to talk to us which shows this is an agenda worth pursuing. They welcomed the opportunity to better explain their role and to think about how they could realistically demonstrate impact. Indeed some said the conversation with us had in itself been helpful in clarifying outcomes and measurement.

A key audience for understanding intermediary impact is Scottish Government. One of our interviewees summed up a concern expressed by several:

“Government don't always understand the role of the intermediary. We are constantly being asked to give our views by different departments, but because it's diffused across government it's not recognised.

We had short conversations with 5 Scottish Government officials (from health, inequalities, children and young people and Third Sector Unit). Some themes are noted in annex 3 in more detail, but here we broadly note that those officials largely felt that further work would be helpful. They were willing to share their experiences of trying different approaches to funding and understanding the impact of third sector intermediaries.

In addition SCVO told us that members of their intermediaries' network have reported that they feel their role and case for funding could be clearer and that it's sometimes difficult to explain their role to stakeholders. They have said they want help to measure their own impact and to make the case collectively.

### 5.2 What next?

We asked the intermediaries we spoke to how we at ESS could help (if at all). The most common answers were

- Develop a simple framework or model to explain the role of intermediaries and the outcomes that come from that
- Help to develop proportionate monitoring and evaluation systems for collecting and reporting evidence of impact
- Provide a space for peer learning
- Develop resources and guidance
- Ensure that all Government departments are bought into this work and some status is given to this work
- Raise awareness with government departments and funders of the challenges in measuring impact to moderate their expectations.

## 5.1 Issues for future work

We have highlighted a number of challenges for intermediaries in measuring impact:

- Different funders/stakeholders are interested in different outcomes, but there are also diverse views from Scottish Government/funders about the impact that intermediaries should measure. Some stakeholders are interested in the impact of intermediaries on the members/sector whereas others want to see the impact of intermediaries on the individuals/communities who are the ultimate beneficiaries.
- There is a need for clarity around 'what is the impact of an intermediary' before intermediaries can start to think about how/what to measure.

We have identified some similarities in intermediaries' functions and broad outcomes. However:

- Intermediaries are working in different context and their outcomes will reflect different challenges.
- Intermediaries have different levels of engagement with their members, and have different levels of resources and capacity to gather data. They need measurement systems that are appropriate to their scale /capacity.

Given the differences in size and functions and focus of each intermediary it is not clear if one framework would work for all intermediaries.

Even where intermediaries have developed robust evaluation frameworks (with clear outcomes and processes for collecting data), there exist challenges in measuring some outcomes. It is difficult to measure 'influence on policy' and difficult to demonstrate the impact of 'building collaboration and partnerships'.

## 5.2 What we propose

There are two related but distinct tasks:

1. To work with Scottish Government officials (and possibly other funders) so they can articulate clearly the value they need intermediaries to achieve and help them understand what outcomes are realistic and relevant to measure and report on. This work is needed because there is no point in ESS only helping intermediaries to create robust outcome frameworks and measurement tools if key funders do not accept what is realistic.
2. To work with intermediaries to produce a **resource** and guidance that helps them explain what they do, identifies the types of outcomes that intermediaries deliver and provides some guidance on how to measure outcomes. This work needs to draw on the materials ESS has already produced (and other work if appropriate) on:
  - evaluating policy influence
  - evaluating collaboration or partnership
  - supporting multifunctional intermediaries disentangle the outcomes from their intermediary functions from their wider outcomes.

Our preferred model for working with the sector would be to create a **learning set** of a small number of intermediaries with diverse interests to coproduce and test out resources and so build a movement of measurement support that is by the sector, for the sector. But there may be other models such as shorter life working parties to focus on particular types of outcomes. We also need to think about whether Scottish Government officials are directly involved in a learning set or receive support and make input in other ways.

We suggest that we work up our next step delivery options in a little more detail and present them along with the overall findings of this study for comment by intermediaries at a seminar

## **Annex one: Evidence of impact of intermediaries from ESS's work**

Over the last few years ESS has worked with a few intermediaries to help them to measure and report their impact. The following are three examples:

### **Health intermediaries**

In 2011 ESS worked with three health intermediaries: Community Food and Health Scotland (CFHS), Community Health Exchange (CHEX) and Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) on a Change Programme that resulted in the creation of a logic model and using outcomes to plan for change. The model has short, medium and long term outcomes.

### **Intermediary carers' organisations**

In 2016 ESS worked with Scottish Government Carers Branch and Carers intermediary organisations to develop logic models to describe their theory of change. Organisations involved were Carers Scotland, MECOPP, Carer's Trust, Young Carers' Services Alliance, Crossroads and Coalition of Carers Organisations.

Each organisation developed their own logic model that mapped to an overall logic model and national outcomes. Outcomes were identified for carers, professionals working with carers and carer support services, communities, policy-makers, funders and commissioners, public services. The intermediary organisations taking part in this piece of work found it challenging to think in terms of outcomes for other organisations and support services rather than those that directly benefit carers. There will be a further feedback in mid-2017. In the meantime organisations are collecting evidence against their outcomes as documented in their logic models.

### **Third sector interfaces**

As part of the *Stitch in Time?* programme (ESS's programme to support the third sector to collect and present evidence about its contribution to Reshaping Care for Older People), ESS supported the Third Sector Interface in Midlothian to evaluate its work. The case study on ESS website gives an example of how an intermediary can evaluate their work, although this is a local, not a national intermediary.

Voluntary Action Scotland (VAS) [Common Services framework](#) has five Common Outcomes all TSIs work toward (ESS played a small role in developing this framework). VAS collated the information from all 32 TSIs into an impact report – [Collaborating for Community Impact – the third annual report](#) into the activities and outcomes of Scotland's 32 third sector interfaces 2014/15.

## Annex Two: Evidence from others

In 2006 in England, there was an evidence review by Sheffield Hallam University by Dr Rob Macmillan<sup>4</sup> into the benefits of voluntary and community sector **infrastructure**. The report has evidence of the following benefits:

- TSOs valued being provided with 'space for reflection'
- Increasing confidence
- Enhancing skills
- Supporting networking and partnership working

Research by the Scottish Government found that some TSOs didn't know about the work of intermediaries however many felt that the SCVO (and indeed the local infrastructure bodies) provided a useful forum for representing the interests of the third sector and for supporting its work. Membership forums, often representing particular interests, were valued most in terms of offering a platform to influence policy. Direct links with the Scottish Government, where accessible, were also highly valued<sup>5</sup>.

Most published work we found on intermediary impact comes from evaluations of programmes about **capacity building functions** of intermediaries.

The Big Lottery Fund in England engaged the Centre for Regional Economic and Social research at Sheffield Hallam University and Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) to explore the evidence about what works in capacity building in the voluntary sector. The study concluded that the evidence is mixed. Conditions thought to be needed for successful capacity building were adopting a comprehensive and systematic approach, tailored to organisation, good diagnostic process, delivered by capable providers<sup>6</sup>.

The evaluation of Big Lottery Fund's Dynamic Inclusive Communities in Scotland programme found that funding had helped build capacity in organisations through the broad areas of:

- Strategy and structural development. This included action and business planning, management group development, and staff and volunteer development for organisations across Scotland.
- Funded organisations' visibility, reputation and perceived effectiveness improved.

However, the impact was varied between organisations partly dependent on the starting point<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Macmillan, R. (August 2006) A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the Benefits of Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure

<sup>5</sup> The Opportunities of the changing Public Services Landscape for the third Sector in Scotland: A Longitudinal Study Year Two Report on [Scottish Government website](#)

<sup>6</sup> Macmillan et al (2014) Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: A summary of what the evidence tells us, TSRC

<sup>7</sup> Big Lottery Fund (2009) Big Lottery Fund Research Issue 51, Capacity building through the Developing Communities Scotland programme – evaluation summary

The evaluation of CEMVO Scotland's capacity building programme 2004-06 revealed the programme had enhanced capacity through the development of improved policies, systems and processes for ensuring more effective management of BME organisations and ensuring greater accountability to service users and funding bodies. In some cases, external links with other organisations and partnerships have also been strengthened through the identification of relevant bodies and partnerships<sup>8</sup>.

Network of International Development Organisations Scotland (NIDOS) was evaluated externally and the findings published in 2011<sup>9</sup>. This included a stakeholder's survey and one to one interviews. The findings were that NIDOS was valued by its members who thought the organisation was working effectively: building up trust across the membership, giving them a louder voice, enabling organisations to network and informing them through newsletters, website and training events. NIDOS members had improved their own understanding of the Scottish international development sector.

There are examples of evaluations managed by intermediaries of funded projects however these have little or no evaluation of the intermediary as the funder.

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<sup>8</sup> AN EVALUATION OF CEMVO Scotland's Capacity Building Programme Report conducted by Dr Gina Netto, Rabia Asghar, Sheetal Venugopal and Nicolina Kamenou

<sup>9</sup> [Network of International Development Organisations Scotland, NIDOS Evaluation summary of findings, March 2011](#)

## **Annex Three: Conversations with Scottish Government officials**

We had short conversations with 5 Scottish Government officials (from health, inequalities, children and young people and third sector unit). Our aim was to understand if evaluating national third sector intermediary impact was an issue that concerned them (and if so how) and views about next steps.

Conversations with officials are ongoing and we don't claim that we have fully captured the range of issues or perspectives from the Scottish Government. However the following points emerged:

### **Themes**

#### **Part of a bigger picture**

- Third sector intermediary funding is part of a bigger picture for some departments and whilst important, interests are more generally around how to best manage funding within a policy area, where there are a range of organisations playing different roles.
- Departments may fund other organisations playing an intermediary role, for example third sector organisations with national reach who have a link to communities, or knowledge intermediaries. Some challenges are the same and there may be learning that can be applied to this area of work.
- What unites all Government funders is a desire to understand how that organisation contributes to achieve strategic outcomes.
- There are some challenges more generally in moving to outcome focused grant funding. Such as taking the emphasis away from 'employing people' to achieving outcomes and the need to move beyond activity reporting.  
"How do we manage performance as we shift to an outcome based approach? Staff are not sure how to write a report, they are still reporting on activities/ events, and we do want that, but also want outcomes and satisfaction levels too."

#### **Role of the national third sector intermediary**

- There is a recognition that national third sector intermediaries play an important role for Scottish Government in terms of
  - Government accessing the views of staff, people affected by the issue and communities
  - Providing a voice for groups and organisations
  - Building a stronger third sector infrastructure and stronger services
  - Being a key arms-length partner and having intelligence and views of how to do things better or differently

"They provide a single place to go to get a plethora of voices"

"You chuck a problem at them and they know where the expertise lies"

"Draw a crowd and create ownership"

"Intermediaries do have huge influence over organisations".

" We don't want to be too bossy about what we want, [yes] it gives us an umbrella organisation to save us having to go to everyone else, but the rest

comes from the intermediary and what they want to give as a sector and share with us how we can help them.”

“It’s really important to develop in partnership a two way process, it’s give and take. Partners help us to work toward those national strategies.”

- Nevertheless it might be helpful to have greater clarity over the role of the intermediary, generally and in relation to particular situations.

“We would like a better sense of where intermediaries add value. We know they are doing some good stuff and are very committed, but is the investment worthwhile?”

“The third sector are vast in terms of opinions, [you need to be clear what you want] is it a mediated view, [is it] the voice of lived experience, [is it] the view of people who are going to challenge, sometimes you don’t want the harsher corners knocked off. [you need] to be careful what you are asking.”

### **Challenges for funding national third sector intermediaries**

- Officials understand the difficulties of measuring the impact on end beneficiaries but need a narrative to show the thread of their work to better services and better outcomes

“Government also play a mediating role, policy makers struggle with this too, you [need to] go back to your business case, what are you trying to improve for people. Practitioners are not your end game, you are training practitioners for a reason, [need to ask] is it fit for purpose, does it help to improve services. Are you doing the right things?”

“Reports need to be more contextualised, so why run events and why a particular number and what difference might they make.”

- How to shift the relationship to allow national third sector intermediaries to become key arms-lengths partners.

“[we need to] shift in relationship to make it more adult, accepting criticism levelled against us, not top down, but asking ‘what do you think?’ some people get a bit uneasy about that.”

“Where do we draw the line and say exactly what numbers and when, especially as it can shift and change as the environment changes. Where should the control lie, think it’s different for everyone.”

“Communication is key, [how to] ensure everyone’s understanding is on the same page, being able to diagnose when everyone’s nodding, but agreeing to different things”

- Making the links across Scottish Government: where different departments are using different templates and systems and referencing different outcomes and strategies. Officials shared their learning about:
  - using fund managers (such as Voluntary Action Fund and Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland) to manage grants and policy leads to make connections across Government

- 4 departments funding one organisation, coming together to agree 'their ask' and to ensure the plan relates to separate policy area
- Officials feeding information up the chain within Scottish Government, so others can see the fit with their work. "The role of the account manager a good one, it's their job to link in."
- A couple of officials talked about the importance of diversity of funding.  
"If we withdraw funding, that can have a huge impact, but are they really independent if they are nearly wholly funded by govt."

## **Annex Four: the third sector intermediaries we spoke to**

SCVO (separate interviews with Lucy McTernan, Ilse Mackinnon and Allan Young)  
ACOSVO (Pat Armstrong)  
Age Scotland (Brian Sloan)  
Befriending Networks (Liz Watson)  
Built Environment Forum Scotland (Euan Leitch)  
Children in Scotland (Jackie Brock)  
Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland (Annie Gunner Logan)  
Learning Link Scotland (Jackie Howie)  
Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland (Jane Salmonson)  
Scottish Environment Link (Jen Anderson)  
Social Firms Scotland (Pauline Graham)  
Voluntary Health Scotland (Claire Stevens)  
Youth Scotland (Ian McLaughlin)

Note: The only organisation we invited to participate and did not was Inclusion Scotland because Sally Witcher was ill.

Health warning: the sample of intermediaries we spoke to gives a range of different subject areas and sizes of organisation. But of course we did not speak to everyone we could have so our study is indicative rather than exhaustive.

We worked with the Scottish Sports Association during the period of the scoping study. They did not participate directly, but some learning fed in indirectly. We liaised informally with the Big Lottery Fund and with the Lloyd TSB Foundation for Scotland that runs the Early Intervention Fund for Scottish Government which includes funding for intermediaries in that field. But neither funder was formally part of the scoping study.

Evaluation Support Scotland works with the third sector and funders so that they can measure and report on their impact and use learning to improve practice and inform policy.

Registered Company SC284842    Scottish Charity SC036529    VAT No: 923 2102 72  
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July 2017

Funded by Scottish Government Third Sector Unit