CHAPTER 25

THE ‘SCOTTISH APPROACH’ TO POLICYMAKING

PAUL CAIRNEY

INTRODUCTION: SCOTTISH POLICYMAKING IN HISTORICAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The early years of Scottish devolution coincided with major international developments in public administration, in which many governments began to change fundamentally the way that they described their approach to policymaking. Osborne (2006: 383) describes three broad historical phases: public administration, emphasizing ‘hierarchy’ and a ‘public sector ethos’, new public management (NPM) emphasizing private sector and market efficiency, and new public governance (NPG), emphasizing networks and trust-based relationships. From the late 1970s, many governments had moved towards public sector reforms inspired by private sector practices associated with NPM (Hood 1995). UK governments were particularly committed to a major programme of privatizing their nationalized industries, introducing quasi-markets within sectors such as healthcare and education, and reforming government departments to separate strategic and delivery functions (Gray 2000). More recently, many governments—including the UK—began to experiment with NPG-style policymaking, combining traditional hierarchies, networks of relationships between governments and service delivery bodies, and the ‘co-production’ of policy between service users and providers (Richards and Smith 2004; Durose and Richardson 2015).

The overall result of these developments is a complex mix of policymaking styles, in which many governments make often inconsistent references to a public sector ethos, markets, and co-production. Further, in the UK and Scotland there is a strong sense of
Westminster-style accountability in which governments try to balance a desire to delegate policymaking and the need to intervene to demonstrate governing competence (Gains and Stoker 2009; Matthews 2016). As Connolly and Pyper (Chapter 22 in this Handbook) and Parry (Chapter 21 in this Handbook) describe, we should situate Scottish policymaking from 1999 within this wider historical and international context, rather than simply accept the rhetoric that Scottish politics is new compared to ‘old Westminster’ practices.

This wider lens helps us to interpret the claims by two former Scottish Government Permanent Secretaries that a Scottish ‘model’ or ‘approach’ to policymaking is a distinctive alternative to the UK model (Elvidge 2011; Housden 2013). There are differences in UK and Scottish government styles, and a tendency for senior Scottish policymakers to criticize hierarchical and command-and-control policymaking (Greer and Jarman 2012; Housden 2014: 69–70), but both governments are responding to similar dilemmas and international and historical trends which limit the scope of their differences.

In this chapter, I relate this argument specifically to the use of evidence in policymaking. One aspect of the Scottish model is the allegedly new way in which it makes choices on evidence use and governance (Paun et al. 2016; Cairney 2017). Yet, I identify three different models of evidence-informed governance supported by different parts of the Scottish Government. Each model supports a very different combination of evidence and governance principles, including: a focus on policy transfer built on a hierarchy of scientific evidence and uniform national policy delivery; a storytelling approach which rejects evidential hierarchies and gives far higher autonomy to local actors; and, the improvement method in which there is a pluralistic approach to evidence combined with the ability of trained practitioners to experiment on the ground. These models are ideal-types and, although there are key projects which live up to their aims, they are generally aspirational. Further, it is difficult to depart from centralism because the Scottish Government must also follow principles associated with Westminster-style democratic accountability rather than simply delegate responsibility for policymaking and delivery to local actors. The overall result is a complicated mixture of often-contradictory approaches to policymaking, and uncertainty about the extent to which the Scottish Government can produce an internationally distinctive approach or truly depart from an allegedly top-down, centralist British style.

To demonstrate these arguments, I first describe the origins and key elements of the ‘Scottish Approach’ to policymaking (SATP). Second, I describe the three different models of evidence-based policymaking that it supports (see also Cairney 2016). Third, I situate these developments within the context of Westminster-style democratic accountability which limits the roll-out of two of these models. Fourth, I examine in each case the implications for two key Scottish Government agendas: to produce new forms of leadership in public service delivery; and, to foster public service reform, encouraging a ‘decisive shift to prevention’ to reduce socio-economic inequalities and the costs of reactive public services (Scottish Government 2011). I conclude by considering the extent to which the SATP represents a major departure from international or British norms.
The SATP as a New Model of Government and Public Service Delivery

Academics, practitioners, and civil servants in the Scottish Government have long described—in very general terms—a Scottish ‘approach’ or ‘policy style’, to compare it with British policymaking. Over the years, our interviewees (see Keating et al. 2009; Cairney 2015) have identified two stark contrasts in their experiences of Scottish and UK governments:

1. **Consultation.** The Scottish Government’s reputation for pursuing a relatively consultative and co-operative style with ‘pressure participants’ (Jordan et al. 2004) such as interest groups, public bodies, local government organizations, voluntary sector and professional bodies, and unions (Keating 2005/2010; Cairney 2009a, 2011b, 2013; Cairney and McGarvey 2013).

2. **Implementation.** Its pursuit of a distinctive ‘governance’ style: a relative ability or willingness to devolve the delivery of policy to public bodies, including local authorities, in a meaningful way (Greer and Jarman 2008; Cairney 2009b, 2011a: 130; 2013; Cairney and McGarvey 2013: 142).

However, the Scottish Government has only recently described a specific model of policymaking with key elements to be operationalized and evaluated (Scottish Government and ESRC 2013).

The Development of the ‘Scottish Model of Government’

The early signs of a ‘Scottish model of government’ were apparent towards the end of the first era of Scottish Government, overseen by a Labour–Liberal Democrat coalition from 1999 to 2007. The then Permanent Secretary Sir John Elvidge (2011: 31–5) related it to the Scottish Government’s potential to exploit its relatively small size, and central position in a dense network of public sector and third sector bodies; to pursue joined-up government and regular meetings with leaders of public sector bodies (which became the ‘Scottish Public Sector Leadership Forum’); to reject top-down or centrist policymaking; and to seek better ways to solve ‘wicked’ (Rittell and Webber 1973) problems.

Elvidge (2011: 31) describes the ‘the concept of a government as a single organisation’ and ‘the idea of “joined up government” taken to its logical conclusions’. He links this agenda to his belief that ‘traditional policy and operational solutions’ based on ‘the
target driven approach which characterised the conduct of the UK Government would not produce the major changes in policy and policymaking required to address, ‘problems with major social and economic impacts: educational outcomes for the least successful 20 per cent of young people; health inequalities related to socio-economic background; geographical concentrations of economically unsuccessful households; and Scotland’s rate of GDP growth relative to the UK average and to that of comparable countries’. Such problems require ‘more integrated approaches, such as the approach to the early years of children’s lives . . . which looked across the full range of government functions [and] offered the scope for some significant and unexpected fresh policy perspectives’ (Elvidge 2011: 32).

These general ideas about holistic forms of government, including joined-up central government and local forms of community planning, have circulated internationally for decades (Keating 2005/2010). However, Elvidge (2011: 32) suggests that a specific model took off under the SNP-led Scottish Government, elected in May 2007, partly because his emphasis on joined-up government complemented the SNP’s focus on streamlined government and ‘an outcome based approach to the framing of the objectives of government and to enabling the electorate to hold the Government to account for performance’. By 2007, the model combined Elvidge’s ideas with the SNP’s ‘single statement of purpose, elaborated into a supporting structure of a small number of broad objectives and a larger, but still limited, number of measurable national outcomes’ (2011: 34). The Scottish Government introduced the National Performance Framework (NPF), based on a single ‘ten year vision’ and a shift towards measuring success with long-term outcomes (Scottish Government 2007/2014a). The NPF has a stated ‘core purpose—to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth’. It seeks to turn this broad purpose into specific policies and measures of success. It articulates in more depth its national approach via a ‘purpose framework’—linked to targets gauging its economic growth, productivity, labour market participation, population, income inequality, regional inequality and (emissions-based) sustainability—and five ‘strategic objectives’ (under the headings Wealthier and Fairer, Healthier, Safer and Stronger, Smarter, Greener) mapped onto sixteen ‘National Outcomes’ and fifty ‘National Indicators’.

It then signalled the need for partnership with the public sector to align organizational objectives with the NPF, in two main ways. First, it obliged Scottish Government-sponsored public bodies to align their objectives with the NPF (Elvidge 2011: 35). Second, it required local authorities to produce ‘Single Outcomes Agreements’ (SOAs), in line with the NPF’s overall vision and strategic objectives, but with local government discretion to determine the balance between many priorities, to reflect some autonomy agreed in the concordat with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Keating 2005/2010: 123–4; Scottish Government and COSLA 2007; Cairney 2011a; Cairney and McGarvey 2013: 138; Matthews 2014; McAteer 2014; O’Neill 2014).

Further, the Scottish Government encourages local authorities to co-operate with a range of other bodies in the public sector, including health, enterprise, police, fire, and transport, via ‘community planning partnerships’ (CPPs). They exist in part to pursue
meaningful long-term outcomes via ‘community engagement’ and engagement with the third and private sectors, to produce a ‘shared strategic vision for an area and a statement of common purpose’ (Cairney and McGarvey 2013: 139–40; Housden 2014: 68). These CPPs had been established for some time, via the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, but their purpose was unclear before (a) this new emphasis on locally negotiated SOAs was reinforced by the joint ‘Statement of Ambition’ between the Scottish Government and COSLA in 2012 (Audit Scotland 2014: 4), and (b) the CPPs were given greater statutory direction in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

The ‘Scottish Approach’ Since 2013: Improvement, Assets, Co-Production, and a ‘Decisive Shift to Prevention’

Since 2013, the Scottish Government has sought to reinforce and articulate the meaning of the ‘Scottish approach’, in part to further encourage its use and gauge its impact. It now gives ‘additional priority to:

- Service performance and improvement underpinned by data, evidence and the application of improvement methodologies;
- Building on the strengths and assets of individuals and communities, rather than only focusing on perceived deficits;
- Services which are shaped and co-produced by both service providers and the citizens and communities who receive and engage with those services’ (Scottish Government and ESRC 2013: 4).

Elvidge’s successor as Scottish Government Permanent Secretary from 2010 to 2015, Sir Peter Housden (2014: 67–8), provides a broad description of these elements, suggesting that: co-production ‘requires professionals to sustain a deep and on-going dialogue with service users and to commission with and through those users the range of services and providers best suited to their needs’; an ‘assets based approach’ requires governments ‘to build on and strengthen the assets and resilience of individuals, families and communities’; and, a focus on ‘service performance and improvement’ goes beyond the bland assertion that the Scottish Government supports well integrated public services which are of demonstrable high quality.

A key Scottish Government aim is to use the SATP and public service reform to deliver initiatives such as a ‘decisive shift to prevention’ (Scottish Government 2011). Prevention policy refers in part to, ‘actions which prevent problems and ease future demand on services by intervening early, thereby delivering better outcomes and value
for money’ (Audit Scotland 2014: 30). The Scottish Government commissioned the ‘Christie Commission’ (Commission of the Future Delivery of Public Services 2011) to examine how to reduce socio-economic inequalities, improve ‘social and economic wellbeing’, and spend less money on public services. To do so requires the Scottish Government to address its unintended contribution to a ‘cycle of deprivation and low aspiration’ by: redirecting spending towards preventative policies in a major way; changing its relationship with delivery bodies; addressing a lack of joint working in the public sector, caused partly by separate budgets and modes of accountability; and, engaging ‘communities’ in the design and delivery of public services, rather than treating them as ‘passive recipients of services’ (2011: 27). In other words, its recommendations are consistent with the SATP.

The Scottish Government’s (2011: 6) response was positive, showing a broad commitment to a broad prevention-style philosophy, ‘mainstreamed’ throughout government, and accompanied by a short list of projects receiving new dedicated funding, including early years, older people’s services, and ‘reducing reoffending’ projects based on partnership with third sector organizations. It also required local authorities to incorporate Christie’s recommendations into SOAs. Indeed, the first relevant SOAs in 2013 (Scottish Government 2014b) are similar to each other, sticking closely to the guidance issued by the Scottish Government and COSLA (COSLA and the Scottish Government 2012).

Overall, the Scottish Government is seeking ways to encourage national improvements in public service delivery without ‘micromanaging’ local services or relying on short-term targets and top-down performance management. Instead, public service innovation, ‘is driven organically by organisations and networks with the requisite ambition, curiosity and skills. It thrives on variety and experimentation. It cannot generally be delivered in penny packets from the centre’ (Housden 2014: 71). Yet, these aims are difficult to define and operationalize, and so the SATP is something for the Scottish Government to explore with further research and perhaps refine following feedback from practice. In many ways, it is likely to be in continuous development as one new aspect of its approach produces new issues to address, such as the effect of ‘co-production’ on the idea of leadership, workforce development, and the rising value of skills to encourage joint working (Housden 2014: 73–4).

**The SATP as Three Models of Policy Delivery**

In practice, the Scottish Government is experimenting with three ways to encourage service improvement by gathering evidence of success and encouraging its spread across local areas (Cairney 2017). These three models—summarized in Table 25.1—have major, and very different, implications for the nature of public service delivery,
relating primarily to the extent to which they encourage certain forms of evidence and how this choice relates to local autonomy.

*Approach 1* is associated with the idea of policy transfer and implementation science. Initially, policies become highly regarded because there is empirical evidence that they have been successful elsewhere. In health departments, in particular, this evidence tends to be gathered using a small number of highly regarded research methods, based on the argument that there is a hierarchy of good evidence in which randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and their systematic review are at the 'top', whilst user feedback and professional experience are closer to the bottom. Evidence of success comes from RCTs conducted multiple times under similar conditions in multiple places.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 25.1 Three Approaches to Evidence-based Service Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How should you gather evidence of effectiveness and best practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From where should you seek evidence of success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How should you 'scale up' from evidence of best practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What aim should you prioritize?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Cairney (2017).*
If accepted as the basis for public service delivery, this approach has major implications for local autonomy. The RCT demonstrates the success of a very specific intervention with a set ‘dosage’ (of a service rather than a medicine). Further, the interventions require ‘fidelity’, to ensure that the ‘active ingredient’ is given in the correct dosage, and to measure the model’s effectiveness, using RCTs, in different places. In such cases, the projects are relatively likely to be funded and controlled by central governments, and linked to an ‘implementation science’ agenda in which we consider how best to roll out—often uniformly—the most successful evidence-based interventions in as many areas as possible (Nilsen et al. 2013).

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is a key example. It was imported from the US following its success in multiple RCTs (not exclusively in the US), and rolled out in England to 9000 mothers, with reference to its high cost effectiveness and ‘strong evidence base’, which would be enhanced by an RCT to evaluate its effect in a new country (Family Nurse Partnership National Unit 2014; Robling et al. 2016). The FNP requires fidelity to the US programme—you can only use it if you agree to the licensing conditions—based on evaluation results which showed that the programme was most effective when provided by nurses/midwives and using a licence ‘setting out core model elements’ (Department of Health, 2012: 6). In Scotland, it was initially funded centrally by the Scottish Government, which holds the licence (on the understanding that the ‘UK’ RCT will be conducted in England), then adopted in local areas with minimal scope to modify the original service design.

Approach 2 is based on a storytelling approach with no evidential hierarchy or need to ‘scale up’ projects uniformly. Instead, advocates make reference to principles of governance and good practice, including the value of practitioner and service-user testimony. With this approach, evidence sharing—of good and bad experiences—comes from service users and practitioners. People use stories, conversations and practice-based experience or user feedback to help decide if a project is worth adopting. Policymakers create a supportive environment in which practitioners and users can tell stories of their experience, and invite other people to learn from them. External evidence can also be used, but to begin a conversation; to initiate further experience-based evidence gathering. Advocates often refer to the importance of complex systems (see Cairney 2012; Geyer and Cairney 2015), an inability to ‘control’ delivery and policy outcomes (to challenge the idea of controlled experiments in RCTs), and the need to create new and bespoke evidence through practice or experiential learning.

My Home Life (Scotland) is a key example (Sharp et al. 2018). It began as a UK initiative ‘to promote quality of life for those living, dying, visiting and working in care homes for older people through relationship-centred and evidence based practice’. In Scotland, it is co-ordinated by the University of the West of Scotland, Age Scotland and Scottish Care. The pursuit of a ‘homely setting’ involves the inclusion of residents in care home decisions, and processes of reflection, regarding a manager’s relationship

¹ See http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/ for more information.
with staff and staff attitudes to residents—via ‘caring conversations’ over an extended period. Much derives from individual feedback, with a focus on the richness of experience. The result may be a set of principles to inform future practice, not a specific intervention with a correct dosage. The principles are deliberately broad, to allow practitioners and service users to make sense of them in specific settings (Dewar et al. 2014: 5). This approach contrasts markedly with the FNP’s requirement to follow a model closely and gather quantitative data to measure fidelity. With ‘my home life’, there is no model, and practitioners and service users use their experiences to guide future practice and develop favourable institutional cultures.

Approach 3 is the improvement method described frequently by the Scottish Government. Advocates make reference to a process in which they use evidence pragmatically to identify promising interventions, and encourage trained practitioners to adapt and experiment with the interventions in their area and gather data on their experience (Cairney 2017). A core team describes the best available evidence to practitioners, teaches them improvement methods, and asks them to experiment with their own projects in their local areas. The subsequent discussion about how to ‘scale up’ involves a mix of personal reflection on one’s own project and a co-ordinated process of data gathering: people are asked for ‘contextual’ evidence for the success of their own programmes, but in a way that can be compared with others. If theirs is successful they should consider expansion. If there is evidence of relative success in other areas, they should consider learning from other projects.

The Early Years Collaborative (EYC) is a key example, and it is often highlighted as one of the Scottish Government’s most promising areas of policy and policymaking, following the success of its patient safety programme, which used the same improvement method (Housden 2014: 68). It uses the ‘Breakthrough Series Collaborative Model’ from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in Boston. ‘Collaborative’ refers to a group of similar organizations engaging on a problem in a specified amount of time (such as 1 to 2 years), drawing on the ‘sound science’ on how to reduce costs or improve outcomes, which exists but ‘lies fallow and unused in daily work. There is a gap between what we know and what we do’ (Institute for Healthcare Improvement 2003: 1). Participants identify a specific aim, measures of success, and the changes to test, then gather quantitative data on their effects, using a form of continuous learning summed up by a ‘Plan-Do-Study-Act’ cycle (2003: 7).

The EYC is an attempt, from 2012, to use the IHI’s method to co-ordinate a multiagency project, working with local and health authorities through the 32 CPPs. The first ‘learning session’, in January 2013, involved an audience of 800 practitioners learning the method and discussing how to apply it to early years policy (Scottish Government 2014b: 53). The second event focused on specific projects, but on the assumption that, unlike in patient safety, there is no complete set of known, effective interventions, that the Scottish Government represents a policy innovator, and that participants are learning as they go. The new process is often described as messy—with local practitioners identifying problems in their own areas, choosing their own pace of change and learning as they deliver—and largely as a way to translate evidence into
cultural or organizational change (Cairney 2015). There is less focus on the efficacy of
an ‘active ingredient’ and more on the bespoke mode of delivery, underpinned by
governance principles about how the public sector engages with people, organizations,
and communities (Scottish Government 2014b: 38–40).

**Three Models Constrained by Democratic Accountability?**

The guiding assumption underpinning at least two of these models is that the Scottish
Government can pursue forms of accountability that relate only indirectly to tradi-
tional Westminster forms. Indeed, perhaps as much as five distinct stories of account-
ability operate simultaneously, to:

1. Maintain Westminster-style **democratic** accountability, through periodic elec-
tions and more regular reports by ministers to the Scottish Parliament. This
   requires a strong sense of central government and ministerial control—if you
   know who is in charge, you know who to hold to account or reward or punish in
   the next election.
2. Promote **institutional** accountability, through performance management meas-
   ures applied to the chief executives of public bodies, such as elected local
   authorities and unelected agencies and quangos. Ministers may be ultimately
   responsible, but democracy is not served well by the historic idea of ‘sacrificial’
   accountability, in which ministers resign if anything goes wrong in their depart-
   ment. Instead, ministers decide whether to redirect queries to other bodies, keep
   Parliament informed routinely, explain problems, or promise to intervene (Judge
3. Advance the idea of shared ‘ownership’ of policy choices, such as when policy-
makers work with certain stakeholders to produce a policy that both support.
4. Develop a sense of collective responsibility between ‘community planning part-
   nerships’, often led by local authorities, with new statutory obligations for public
   bodies to participate, and for stakeholders to be consulted.
5. Develop user-based notions of accountability, when a public body considers its
   added value to (and responds to the wishes of) service users, or public bodies and
   users ‘co-produce’ and share responsibility for the outcomes.

On the one hand, the SATP helps make sense of these many forms of accountability by
providing a grand theme and bringing together each element into a single narrative. An
open and accessible consultation style maximizes the gathering of information and
advice and fosters group ownership. A national framework, with cross-cutting aims,
reduces departmental silos and balances an image of democratic accountability with
the pursuit of administrative devolution, through partnership agreements with local authorities, the formation of community planning partnerships, and the encouragement of community and user-driven design of public services. The formation of relationships with public bodies and other organizations delivering services, based on trust, fosters the production of common aims across the public sector, and reduces the need for top-down policymaking. An ‘outcomes-focused approach presents serious challenges to traditional “command-and-control” approaches to government’ in favour of ‘an evidence-based, learning approach’ (Sanderson 2011: 65).

On the other hand, this is a difficult balancing act, to take pragmatic steps to recognize the realities of ‘complex government’ over which ministers have limited control whilst projecting a sense of control and governing competence (Cairney 2015). It produces the potential for practices that are well out of step with the Scottish grand theme. The pursuit of institutional accountability could produce a fragmented public landscape in which no one—including ministers or delivery bodies—seems to take responsibility. A move away from hierarchy and central targets, to focus more on the value of public services to users or the ‘co-production’ of services with users (Gains and Stoker 2009; Osborne and Strokosch 2013) could promote user-based accountability and/or diminish a sense of democratic accountability. Scaling back a top-down performance management system removes an important and regular source of information on public sector performance for the government (for example, when trying to reduce inequalities in education attainment) and the Scottish Parliament, which lacks the ability to gather information independently. Further, one consequence of devolving more power locally is that interest groups, previously organized to lobby a new and relatively open Scottish Government, must reorganize to lobby thirty-two local governments. It produces new winners and losers. The well-resourced professional groups can adapt their multi-level lobbying strategies, whilst the groups working on a small budget, with one or two members of paid staff, only able to lobby the Scottish Government, struggle.

Overall, the myth may not match the reality. Although the Scottish Government’s reputation suggests that it has a better relationship with local authorities than its UK counterpart, this may not be saying much. Analysis within Scotland over time suggests that local actors may see this relationship differently. For example, compare statements by different COSLA Presidents. In 2007, Pat Watters talked about local government now having greater responsibility and ‘the freedom and flexibility to respond effectively to local priorities’ (Cairney 2011a: 130). In 2014, David Ó’Neill (2014) argued that, ‘Over the decades, we’ve seen a culture in which more and more services and decisions have been taken away from local communities and put into the hands of distant bureaucracies’. The Scottish Government has secured political control and accountability by maintaining a local government system that is highly centralized by European standards, with a small number of local authorities (thirty-two, with an average of 165,000 people per authority) which depend on the Scottish Government for (effectively) over 80 per cent of their funding (McAtteer 2014). It therefore shares with the UK a reluctance to devolve powers completely to local authorities with a relatively weak
mandate (based on low electoral turnout) and a recognition that such a mandate may not arise unless local authorities have more powers. This problem has not been solved by the promotion of CPPs, since local authorities are expected to work in equal partnership with unelected bodies—not to direct them or hold them to account. Ultimate responsibility still rests with Scottish ministers even though it has delegated decision-making to community partners.

The Implications of Each Model for Leadership and Public Service Reform

These uncertainties and tensions are reflected in competing models of evidence-based best practice (Table 25.1). Further, a comparison of these three approaches highlights their very different implications for public service leadership and change, particularly if we add a fourth column to take into account the importance of Westminster-style accountability (Table 25.2). Approach 1 seems closest to traditional forms of leadership and management built on “the pursuit of relative certainty through a centrally funded and directed programme”, whilst Approaches 2 and 3 offer far greater scope for “the pursuit of flexibility and localism, with an emphasis on new forms of leadership and “letting go” or developing staff capacity and the confidence to challenge top-down leadership” (Cairney 2017: 509). The latter approaches often seem to be more consistent with the ‘vision’ of the Scottish Government (2016) for its public service reforms:

Our vision is of a public service delivery landscape which is affordable, rises to the challenge of tackling inequalities and supports economic growth across Scotland: where communities are empowered and supported to take responsibility for their own actions; and public services are confident and agile enough to allow that to happen. Public bodies will play a full part in delivering improved outcomes: leaders and their teams work collaboratively across organisational boundaries to ensure that services are shaped around the needs and demands of individuals and communities; and there will be a clear focus on prevention and early intervention, with the aim of breaking cycles of inequality and poverty.

In this self-description you can see a clear attempt by the Scottish Government to provide national direction but also delegate responsibility to public bodies and partnerships. This signal of intent is consistent with Approaches 2 and 3, in which public service reform is organic or through experimentation. It also requires new forms of leadership development, in which actors in formal positions of responsibility enter rooms with no agenda and/or encourage other people to take risks and experiment rather than follow a blueprint (Table 25.2).

With Approach 3, the Scottish Government initially measured its success in buy-in and commitment to governance principles, rather than with reference to meeting
performance targets related to specific policies. For example, at least half of the factors underpinning EYC theories of change relate to public service leadership, management, communication, joint working, and ‘family centred’ responses (Scottish Government 2014b: 38–40). The first evaluation also listed the high level of ‘stakeholder buy-in’ as one of its short-term achievements (2014: 10–11). Rather than attempting to direct local activities, a small Scottish Government team helps practitioners develop and use a ‘toolkit’ for improvement.

With Approach 2, the Skilled Workers, Skilled Citizens (Workforce Scotland 2016) initiative develops a public service workforce in collaboration with service users and the wider public. Leadership development focuses on the benefits of ‘letting go’, to allow people in positions of formal leadership to include staff and service users in the decision-making process (Cairney 2017: 512). The storytelling approach also provides an alternative to a focus on short-term or numerical performance management as indicators of improvement, in favour of ‘success stories’ or quality management systems based on service-user and staff feedback (Davies and Heath 2007: 32–4).

### Table 25.2 From Three to Four Approaches to Leadership and Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach 1</th>
<th>Approach 2</th>
<th>Approach 3</th>
<th>Approach 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy emulation</td>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>Improvement science</td>
<td>Democratic accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required leadership qualities</td>
<td>The ability to manage change initially from the top down, and to ensure that measures are in place to monitor delivery to ensure adherence to the model.</td>
<td>The ability to let go, and encourage reflective discussion without predetermined agendas.</td>
<td>To set an overall vision for government, encourage/ensure that key actors sign up to it, and ‘let go’ to encourage innovation in delivery/intervene to maintain improvements in performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for change in public services</td>
<td>Driven initially from the centre, until key public bodies agree to incorporate the same basic service into their standard operating procedures.</td>
<td>Organic and not driven by central government instructions or short-term performance measures.</td>
<td>Steered by central government, but with a clear role for experimentation and local variation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author’s own compilation.
Yet, Approaches 2 and 3 represent a small part of Scottish Government business. They are sandwiched (in Table 25.2) between Approach 1, in which leadership efforts are directed towards identifying the best evidence-based interventions and monitoring progress to ensure that they are carried out with ‘fidelity’ to those interventions, and Approach 4, in which leaders have to juggle contradictory aims, to centralize and localize.

Similarly, the Scottish Government’s commitment to ‘prevention’ and long-term measures of success seem to be aspirational and relate to small pockets of progress. Prevention policy represents a key example of the limits to the developments of new policymaking approaches. Policymakers make a commitment to long-term outcomes but work to a short-term timetable, and soon find that they cannot achieve their aims within a single electoral cycle. This would not be an obstacle in itself, if not for the fact that Scottish ministers are held responsible for policy performance in elections, however well they manage different forms of accountability in between elections. So, they have an electoral incentive to address more pressing issues on which they will be judged.

Consequently, prevention—as a broad, long-term, low-key aspiration—suffers in competition with highly salient short-term problems that politicians feel they have to solve first. Prevention projects are long-term investments with only the vague promise of spending reductions in the future. During periods of high and growing public expenditure, prevention can be sold as akin to long-term capital investment. During periods of austerity, it is difficult to use a vague promise of long-term savings to prompt immediate action. It is difficult for politicians to advocate reductions in funding for reactive, acute, ‘firefighting’, ‘frontline’ services to pay for new prevention initiatives that may only produce results after a generation.

Governments still maintain performance management systems geared towards short-term targets and outputs. Performance management systems for public sector managers encourage them to focus on short-term and measurable targets within their own service more than their shared aims with public service partners or the well-being of their local populations. Performance management is about setting priorities when governments have too many aims to fulfil. Central governments encourage local bodies to form long-term partnerships to address inequalities and meet short-term public service targets, and the latter come first (Cairney and St Denny 2015).

Similarly, the new prevention-inspired SOAs symbolize the classic dilemma when governments seek to balance a necessary sense of central control with the pursuit of meaningful local autonomy (Cairney and St Denny 2014; Cairney et al. 2016: 334). They are written by local authorities, but with strong adherence to central guidance. They provide a way to promote a CPP agenda but also betray a lack of CPP development as meaningful corporate bodies with binding decision-making powers (Audit Scotland 2014: 14). Overall, there remains uncertainty, ‘both nationally and locally about the extent to which the focus of community planning should be on local needs or about delivering national priorities’, particularly since the Scottish Government’s NPF operates alongside other performance management systems which emphasize the need to adhere to relatively short-term national input/output measures rather than
long-term measure of local outcomes (see also Chapter 22 in this Handbook). There is a broad Scottish Government commitment to prevention and localism, but it is not easy to operationalize and, as yet, no clear pattern has emerged on the operation of CPPs or the development of SOAs.

**Conclusion: The Scottish Approach as a Signal of Aspiration**

To a large extent the SATP is a statement of aspiration; an attempt to put distance between the Scottish Government and its image of UK government policymaking. It reflects the sense articulated by policy participants, over many years, that the size and scale of Scottish policymaking, coupled with a vague sense of a different ‘culture’, can be conducive to distinctive forms of policymaking. They are reflected in at least two approaches to evidence-based best practice, which involve the Scottish Government setting national outcomes and giving local actors the space to decide how to meet them over the long term.

At the same time, Scottish ministers operate in the short term. They are subject to election every five years, and election debates tend to emphasize traditional Westminster ideas about accountability. Scottish ministers know that, however successful they are in establishing pragmatic forms of institutional, community, local, stakeholder, and user-driven forms of accountability during their day-to-day business, they will be subject to democratic accountability every five years. Their accountability to the public via parliament is also driven by the sense that central government is in control and therefore responsible for outcomes. A new approach requires a subtle difference in tone, to differentiate between ministerial responsibility for a national framework containing key objectives and outcome-based measures of success, and ministerial responsibility for subsequent public sector behaviour and actual outcomes. Yet, an acknowledgement of this difference is difficult to detect in parliamentary or public debate. Instead, ministers will know that to try to share responsibility, for service delivery and outcomes, is to look like they are shuffling off responsibility.

The result is an unclear agenda on public service leadership and public sector reform. The Scottish Government has to encourage the development of skills geared towards contradictory aims. It must centralize to monitor performance towards national targets, and let go to encourage local autonomy and experimentation. It must encourage the inclusion of service users in public service design, and ensure that the leaders of public bodies take responsibility for meeting statutory and financial targets. It must encourage local authorities to engage fully in community planning partnerships, and maintain local accountability and an electoral mandate on the basis that they are responsible for their own actions. It seems like an ambitious task to train leaders to fulfil many contradictory aims simultaneously.
REFERENCES


Cairney, P. 2015. 'What is Complex Government and What Can We Do About It?' *Public Money and Management*, 35/1: 3–6.


Housden, P. 2013. 'This is US: A Perspective on Public Services in Scotland', Frank Stacey Memorial Lecture, Public Administration Committee Annual Conference, 9 September.

Housden, P. 2014. 'This is Us', *Civil Service Quarterly*, 16 April. Available at: https://quarterly.blog.gov.uk/2014/04/16/this-is-us/


