

Learning and Insights from the CCPS & Scotland Excel Joint Short Life Working Group

CCPS & Scotland Excel Short Life
Working Group 2024/25



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The CCPS & Scotland Excel Joint Short Life Working Group met from October 2024 to March 2025 with the aim of developing joint solutions to key challenges in the operation of national procurement frameworks. Representatives from Scotland Excel, CCPS member organisations and CCPS staff met on six occasions, with an additional four meetings held by a subgroup established to consider data challenges. Although the work was expected to be challenging and members anticipated competing perspectives and priorities, the group ultimately achieved much of what it set out to do.

The group produced several documents which detail this work and the changes to be embedded as a result:

- [Main Report of the CCPS & Scotland Excel SLWG](#)
- [Social Care Contract Management Information and Data Subgroup Review](#)
- [Scotland Excel Commitments](#)
- [Scotland Excel Participation Strategy](#)
- [Position statement on Considering Social Value in Commissioned Social Care Services](#)

Following on from this group, CCPS and Scotland Excel will hold a bi-annual forum with CCPS member organisations to review the actions and commitments set out in these documents.

Drawing on participants' experience, this report distils key lessons from the group's approach to collaborative working. It offers practical insights and recommendations for other groups aiming to work together effectively, and highlights how constructive cross-organisational collaboration can be when a trusting, cooperative ethos is fostered – a theme emphasised throughout participants' reflections.

CCPS would like to thank everyone involved for their contributions. The success of this group rests on CCPS provider and Scotland Excel representatives' openness and willingness to find solutions. With special thanks to Peter Bailey, for chairing and for establishing the ethos of the group.

Reflections from CCPS CEO Rachel Cackett:

"Setting the right culture for respectful and productive relationships matters more than ever when money for service procurement is so tight. I'm really proud to have worked alongside the CEO of Scotland Excel in this project, committing to leading improvement jointly and modelling honest brokering of what can be done – even where systems and histories conspire against doing things better. The outcomes which CCPS members and Scotland Excel staff have realised already have far surpassed my initial expectations. This is the change that can happen when people meet with integrity, openness and a willingness to reform."

What worked well

Shared Purpose and Plan

The work began in 2023-24 with CCPS leading a project to assess how national frameworks could be improved. This project gave providers and Scotland Excel the opportunity to meet and discuss issues. All parties acknowledged that this was a tough environment and there was a need to acknowledge difficulties before solutions could be explored. This first phase led to a report of issues and proposals, 'National Frameworks and the role of Scotland Excel: CCPS Provider Feedback and Proposals'. The Short Life Working Group can be seen as a second phase of this project, tackling the issues identified in the report. The factors which were helpful in the success of the SLWG included:

- **Preparatory Work:** The Chair of the group met with both parties separately (CCPS members and Scotland Excel) prior to the Short Life Working Group beginning, to agree an approach to finding constructive solutions. The Chair reflected that this initial 'storming session' was an important part of the journey in giving group members a chance to air their frustrations. This was also an opportunity to determine areas where additional or supporting information would enhance the joint discussions.
- **Clear remit and plan:** A clear, jointly agreed purpose and discussion plan was shared at the outset, with the topics of each meeting agreed in advance. This helped anchor discussions; although there was flexibility and new work identified through discussions, the original meeting structure was adhered to and further work taken into subgroups which did not derail the original plan.
- **Action tracking:** As the group discussed themes and issues, 'quick win' solutions were identified, along with longer term improvement objectives and issues for which no consensus could be agreed; an action tracker was

iteratively developed until actions came under four categories (A-D) based on completion time and who had responsibility for actioning. Action categorisation was laid out in a report for the group to consider, and the rationalisation can be seen in the final report of the group.

- **Forward pathway:** The group arrived at clarity on how unresolved recommendations would be taken forward once the group ends.
- **A time-bound mandate** (with a clear start and end date) ensured momentum and focus.
- **Leadership commitment:** Commitment from Scotland Excel and CCPS Chief Executives to finding shared solutions was important in setting a collaborative tone, releasing organisational resource and anchoring the group.

Reflections

"We never avoided any opinions or discussion topics. This could have gone down a rabbit hole with issues that could have gone above our scope. We didn't dwell too much in the meetings as it could have gone nowhere. We focused on what we could influence and change."

"With broader challenges we put a pin in it, and worked where we could to make a change. That's been constructive and positive."

Membership

CCPS member representatives were invited by letter to apply to be on the group, with the time commitment explained. Things which worked well include:

- **Compact membership:** The group totalled 11 members. Recruitment was initially capped at 12 representatives of CCPS organisations and six applied. The six provider representatives were joined by two CCPS staff and three representatives from Scotland Excel. The group was therefore small enough to enable rich, in-depth discussion. The chair questioned whether there would be a need to balance the numbers within the group to ensure all stakeholders' voices were fairly included. We found that this was not an issue. Given the diversity of services, perspectives, and experiences with Scotland Excel among providers, it was more important to facilitate wider provider

representation.

- **Proximity to the issues, right mix of skills/knowledge and ability to effect changes:** The invitation letter invited provider representatives with a mix of experience and responsibility to join the group. It was anticipated that this mix would allow solutions to be assessed from all angles and would benefit from the perspective of people who were working with these challenges day to day. This included roles such as: Director with responsibility for contracting and business development; Director of Finance; Business Services Manager; Business Support Advisor; Operations Manager; and Contracts Manager. The six provider representatives had a mix of experience across several of these roles. Scotland Excel was represented by senior leadership who had both a remit to make changes to Scotland Excel's ways of working and proximity to the operation of the social care frameworks. This was helpful in allowing actions to be developed and assigned.
- **Chair role:** The group was chaired by Peter Bailey, who was commissioned by CCPS as a consultant. Peter has previous experience as a CEO of a social care organisation but is now removed from operational pressures; this allowed Peter to understand the challenges whilst building relationships with Scotland Excel and understanding their perspective. Peter was pivotal in establishing the shared ethos of the group and reiterating expectations around communication, respect and mutuality at the beginning of meetings.

Reflections

"More people would mean you could become a passenger on the group."

"Having a chair who sits apart was a good idea. [The Chair] was semi-impartial, and was helping both organisations get where they need to get to."

Meeting Structure

Some of the factors which supported the work of the group include:

- **Efficient meetings:** Agendas were circulated in advance, the chair ensured good timekeeping, and actions were tracked and updated following the meeting.
- **Flexibility:** Although there was a clear plan, the group harnessed the momentum and connections made through the SLWG and established a subgroup to address data issues which required a level of scrutiny that didn't fit within the main meetings.

- **Regular progress updates:** Scotland Excel were able to update on actions that had already been taken to address provider concerns, which helped the group to maintain momentum.
- **Consensus:** The chair sought consensus on actions from the group and ensured that everyone was involved in decisions.

Reflections

"All meetings were in the diary nice and early, there was good organisation which was helpful"

Trust building

A collaborative ethos was set out at the beginning. The Chair of the group communicated clearly that the purpose of the group was to be constructive and stressed the need to respect both parties' (Scotland Excel and CCPS members) perspective. The chair clarified that frustrations which the group had no power to change could be explored, captured and escalated through the final report, but the intention was not to get stalled by this.

CCPS Member representatives expressed that they felt comfortable to share concerns openly and without judgment. This is thanks to the receptiveness of Scotland Excel staff. Good working relationships were established between CCPS staff and Scotland Excel representatives, who met outwith the main meetings to fine tune the workplan and debrief after challenging conversations. This helped to establish trust between the organisations.

Openness, honesty, and a genuine desire to improve characterised the group's work. This enabled participants to understand differing positions and recognise that some issues initially flagged were not operational problems but misunderstandings. Scotland Excel reflected that this approach allowed them to acknowledge areas for improvement and respond to justified provider critiques.

The ultimate benefit of this collaborative ethos was that it enabled the group to focus on the issues that truly mattered and co-develop practical solutions.

Reflections

"I think it's quite difficult to articulate how important the tone/ethos of the group was, which the Chair established, but it meant it wasn't another meeting where everyone complains without saying anything constructive and people start getting defensive."

"For providers, we had frustrations. It felt like we had been heard, and it was helpful to see tangible actions coming out of that, to make changes that will help both organisations. So it has been a positive experience in that way."

"Whilst everyone was able to share frustrations, it was received in the right spirit, so it felt constructive."

"I think it was a useful exercise and helped by the willingness of parties to hear each others' point of view, that helped drive it forward."

"There was definitely robustness of opinion and disagreement"

"There was conflict, things to agree and disagree on, the key was understanding and accepting that we would not reach agreement on everything."

Lessons and things we'd do differently

- **Clear accountability and ability to make commitments:** It would have been valuable to carry out an early exercise to clarify the scope of each organisation to take actions, make decisions, and identify who must be consulted at each stage. Towards the end of the SLWG, some drift occurred when actions were framed as joint initiatives between Scotland Excel and providers. At this point it was important to review the work with the understanding that, while CCPS could facilitate and support joint working, it could not commit to actions on behalf of individual members.
- **Expectations around attendance:** The group took the opportunity to extend its work by establishing a data subgroup. While this enabled deeper joint working, it also created additional demands on members' time. For those sitting on both groups, the workload became challenging, and one of the four subgroup meetings was poorly attended. This reflects both the productivity of the SLWG and the level of commitment required, suggesting that future groups may benefit from allocating more time or managing subgroup

workloads more carefully.

- **Managing Frustrations:** Overall, the group maintained constructive communication. During a discussion around previous Scotland Excel engagements, one provider disagreed with Scotland Excel's assessment of an event, and there was a lot of frustration expressed during this discussion. It may have been helpful to agree at the outset how CCPS and Scotland Excel would approach conflict management within meetings. Having a shared protocol may have allowed some difficult discussions to be resolved more quickly.

Summary of Recommendations for cross-sector working:

1. Define clear scope and mandate from the outset.
2. Engage a chair who is acceptable to both parties and removed from the immediate issues being discussed.
3. Keep membership compact with relevant experience; be clear what range of experience and skills you need.
4. Track actions.
5. Work on building trust through the tone and ethos of the group, and acting quickly on things that can be changed to demonstrate intent.
6. Set realistic expectations around attendance and time commitment.
7. Agree a plan for managing frustrations and conflicting priorities.

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