



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Three: Indigenous Perspectives on Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education

Summary of Outcomes and Good Practice Principles

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

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Setting the Scene for the Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

About the Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series

The Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop Series is a strategic initiative by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) to explore in depth four topics chosen from the 'Ten Conversations' conducted during the [NCSEHE Forum](#) in November 2016.

This new strategy aims to further extend the NCSEHE's capacity in synthesising, codifying and disseminating learnings from equity research and practice and use them to inform future initiatives, studies and policy.

The objectives of the workshops are to:

- define a collective knowledge base informed by research and practice
- engage in strategic and action planning to guide institutional practice and future research
- develop evidence-informed policy advice.

Each workshop consists of a small group of participants, including researchers, practitioners, policymakers and community partners, who contribute their insights as subject matter experts. Taking recent research findings and case studies of good practice as the starting point, the workshops are structured around high-level questions which frame the group discussion.

Workshop participants are encouraged to draw on the insights from pre-reading materials to advance a national conversation at the intersection of equity research, practice and policy. The outcomes of the discussions are shared widely across the sector, including via webinars, written materials and professional illustrations. All resources are made available on the NCSEHE website: ncsehe.edu.au.

Workshop Three:

Indigenous Perspectives on Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education

The third workshop in the series put a spotlight on data sovereignty and the importance of listening to Indigenous perspectives on evaluation in Indigenous higher education.

Within Australia, the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) provided a clear mandate for investing in policies and programs that support Indigenous pathways, participation and achievement in higher education. While there have been notable investments and significant national reforms in Indigenous higher education over the past few years, the recommendation within the Behrendt Review to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework is yet to be actioned. Similarly, in 2015 prior to its abolishment, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council recommended the development of a "performance framework", which is also yet to be actioned. This means there are no frameworks or practice guidelines to inform future success in evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. The workshop aimed to partially address this gap.

The workshop began with James Smith and Kim Robertson providing a brief summary of what is currently known about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia (as per workshop pre-reading Smith et al., 2018). They then presented findings from an [Equity Fellowship project led by James Smith](#), hosted at Charles Darwin University

and sponsored by the NCSEHE. Key enablers and drivers of evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts identified through this research, which involved Indigenous scholars from all states and territories across Australia, were discussed. It is envisaged these findings will help to frame subsequent workshop dialogue about potential success factors and good practice principles that could shape improvements in evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. This will mark the commencement of what is hoped to be an ongoing national conversation about this important topic.

For practitioners, researchers and policymakers working in Indigenous and equity higher education contexts there remain critical questions about the nature of the problem and the best ways to facilitate timely action:

1. How can concepts of data sovereignty be incorporated into evaluation in Indigenous higher education, including issues such as Indigenous governance and leadership, Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous methods?
2. How can universities and government pay attention to the key principles, enablers and drivers associated with good practice in evaluation in Indigenous higher education?
3. How can we make better use of emerging evaluation evidence in Indigenous higher education to drive culturally responsive policy and program reforms?
4. How can Indigenous scholars and other key stakeholders work together to ensure the development of a national Indigenous higher education performance and evaluation strategy is prioritised?

In trying to resolve these questions and work towards evidence-based advice to policymakers and practitioners, this workshop brought together a group of Indigenous subject matter experts to consider the topic from different perspectives.

Priority was given to inviting Indigenous higher education stakeholders to participate in the workshop. However, non-Indigenous stakeholders with an interest in Indigenous higher education, from both research and policy backgrounds, were invited. The intent was to provide a culturally safe space to engage in a strategic discussion and debate about evaluation in Indigenous higher education.

The workshop was structured around high-level questions which framed the group discussion:

1. What do we know about the nature of the problem?
2. What does success look like?
3. What do we know from current practice and research: What works? What doesn't work? Why and why not?
4. What principles underpin good practice, and why?
5. How could the Australian Government, state governments and universities better support effective approaches?
6. What are the gaps in knowledge to promote positive change?

The insights generated during the workshop have informed this set of priority actions that can be implemented by researchers, practitioners and policymakers across the sector.

Workshop Attendees

- Peter Anderson, Queensland University of Technology and WIRA
- Jason Brailey, RMIT University
- Nathan Cassidy, Universities Australia
- Paul Corcoran, Australian Government Department of Education and Training
- Kathryn Gilbey, University of Southern Queensland
- Cheryl Godwell, Charles Darwin University and NATSIHEC

- Kim Grey, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Leanne Holt, Macquarie University and NATSIHEC
- Steven Larkin, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
- Sebastian Lowery, The University of Adelaide
- Maria Raciti, University of the Sunshine Coast
- Kim Robertson, Charles Darwin University
- James Smith, NCSEHE and Menzies School of Health Research
- Karen Treloar, TEQSA
- Sue Trinidad, NCSEHE
- Nadine Zacharias, NCSEHE

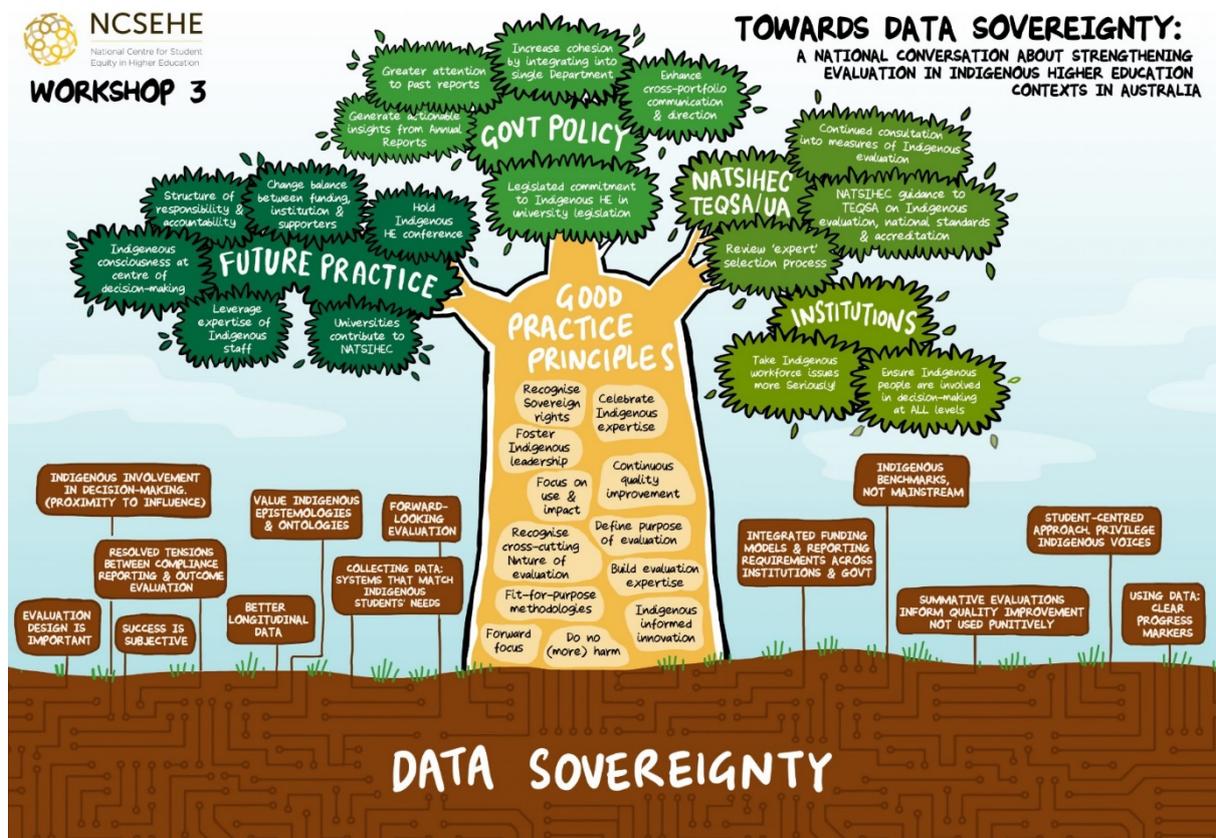
Note: For the purposes of the brief/workshop, Indigenous refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and/or Australian First Nations people, unless specified otherwise. This term is used for brevity only. NCSEHE and the co-facilitators acknowledge the diversity of views with regard to preferences for using these terms.

Summary of Workshop Three Outcomes

The outcomes from the workshop have informed this good practice guide for the sector, as well as a set of recommendations for policymakers; they have been captured in this visual illustration.

Note: This visual is accessible in high resolution on the NCSEHE website:

https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/workshop3-illustration_FINAL-e1530076788168.jpg



Defining Success: Meaningful Evaluations of Indigenous Higher Education

The workshop sought to articulate a definition of success with regard to evaluation in Indigenous higher education. “Success” is subjective — trying to define success often generates more questions than answers, and the complexity of the issues explored during the session required multi-faceted concepts of success.

- Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies need to be valued. These should be reflected through Indigenous methodologies, methods, and in the “evaluation terminology”.
- Proximity to influence is important. Indigenous people need to be involved in deciding what gets evaluated, how, and why. Indigenous leadership should underpin institutional evaluation.
- Evaluation design is important. This should start early with the end goal in mind. Expected impacts and outcomes can be mapped out over time.
- Evaluation should be forward-looking and inform changes in practice.
- Better longitudinal data would be useful to frame future strategy development.
- Collecting data: we need to collect data, and build data systems, that correspond to the identified needs and aspirations of Indigenous students.
- Using data: we need clear progress markers that serve a clear purpose at institutional and national levels.
- Indigenous student voices are privileged in program design and evaluation (i.e. student-centred approach).
- Summative evaluations should not be used punitively by institutions (i.e. to cut programs). Rather, they should inform quality improvement.
- Tensions between compliance reporting and impact/outcome evaluation are resolved by, for example, placing a greater focus on program efficacy and effectiveness.
- Benchmarking against mainstream indicators is not always useful because it can perpetuate a deficit discourse. Indigenous-specific benchmarks would be a better alternative.
- There should be integrated funding models and reporting requirements across institutions and government.

Good Practice Principles

These good practice principles for effective evaluation in Indigenous higher education emerged from panel discussion and research findings:

1. Recognise sovereign rights (who speaks for whom?).
2. Demonstrate and celebrate Indigenous expertise, diversity, excellence and difference.
3. Commit to systems and continuous quality improvement.
4. Foster Indigenous leadership within, and outside of, the sector.
5. Clearly define the purpose of evaluation (Indigenous self-actualisation).
6. Recognise cross-cutting nature of Indigenous evaluation.
7. Focus on use and impact.
8. Build and design evaluation expertise among Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education staff.
9. Adopt a forward focus.
10. Ensure evaluation methodologies are “fit-for-purpose” (adaptive and acknowledging diverse goals of Indigenous higher education).
11. “Do no [more] harm” (evaluation is not always a safe space; be careful what you ask; resistance against power sharing with Indigenous higher education stakeholders is real).
12. Strive for innovation that builds on Indigenous knowledges/practices.

Recommendations for Future Practice and Policy

To achieve effective evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia, a set of recommendations was developed to inform future practice and policy.

Policy recommendations have been broken down to specifically address implications for the Government; institutions; and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC), the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), and Universities Australia (UA).

Recommendations for Practice

1. Create a structure of responsibility and accountability that supports a whole-of-university approach.
2. Leverage the current policy shift from access/recruitment to retention/completion to change the balance between funding, the institution, and students (and their supporters).
3. Put Indigenous consciousness and praxis at the centre of decision-making to facilitate agency within the institution.
4. Leverage expertise of Indigenous staff across the sector, rather than tie them to an institution.
5. Hold a strategically-focused Indigenous higher education conference.
6. Universities could consider making a “contribution” to NATSIHEC to build capacity, disseminate findings, advance major projects, and provide regular communication.

Recommendations for Policy: Government

1. Pay greater attention to recommendations from past reports (i.e. development of a performance, monitoring and evaluation framework/strategy).
2. Bring together Indigenous higher education policymaking, programming and funding into the same Australian Government Department to increase cohesion.
3. Enhance cross-portfolio communication and direction, including across the silos of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).
4. Generate actionable insights from Annual Reports to government: review, synthesise, feed back to the sector and all key stakeholders, including TEQSA.
5. Consider a legislated commitment to Indigenous higher education in university legislation as is the practice in Victoria. The founding Acts of Victorian universities include the following statement:

The objects of the university include:

(f) to use its expertise and resources to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia in its teaching, learning, research and advancement of knowledge activities and thereby contribute to:

- (i) realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations; and
- (ii) the safeguarding of the ancient and rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage.

Recommendations for Policy: Institutions

1. Higher education institutions to take Indigenous workforce issues much more seriously. Urgent action required!
2. Ensure Indigenous people are involved in decision-making at all levels of Institutions.

Recommendations for Policy: NATSIHEC/TEQSA/UA

1. NATSIHEC to work with Indigenous stakeholders to identify the most relevant and applicable data collection and reporting mechanisms associated with Indigenous higher education.
2. Continued consultation and partnership development between UA and NATSIHEC to input into measures of Indigenous evaluation.
3. NATSIHEC to provide guidance to TEQSA on what the expectations are to support Indigenous evaluation (particularly in relation to national standards and accreditation): conversation to commence under the current MOU.
4. Review the ways in which TEQSA chooses “experts”: how does it recognise Indigeneity and Indigenous expertise?

Read the final report [here](#).

View the accompanying webinar [here](#).