



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

Make tomorrow better.

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1. Setting the Scene

1.1. 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
- 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.

1.2. 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.

1.3. 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
- Bronwyn Fredericks University of Queensland
- 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
- Rodney Stoter Community member
- Karen Treloar TEQSA
- Sue Trinidad NCSEHE
- Nadine Zacharias NCSEHE

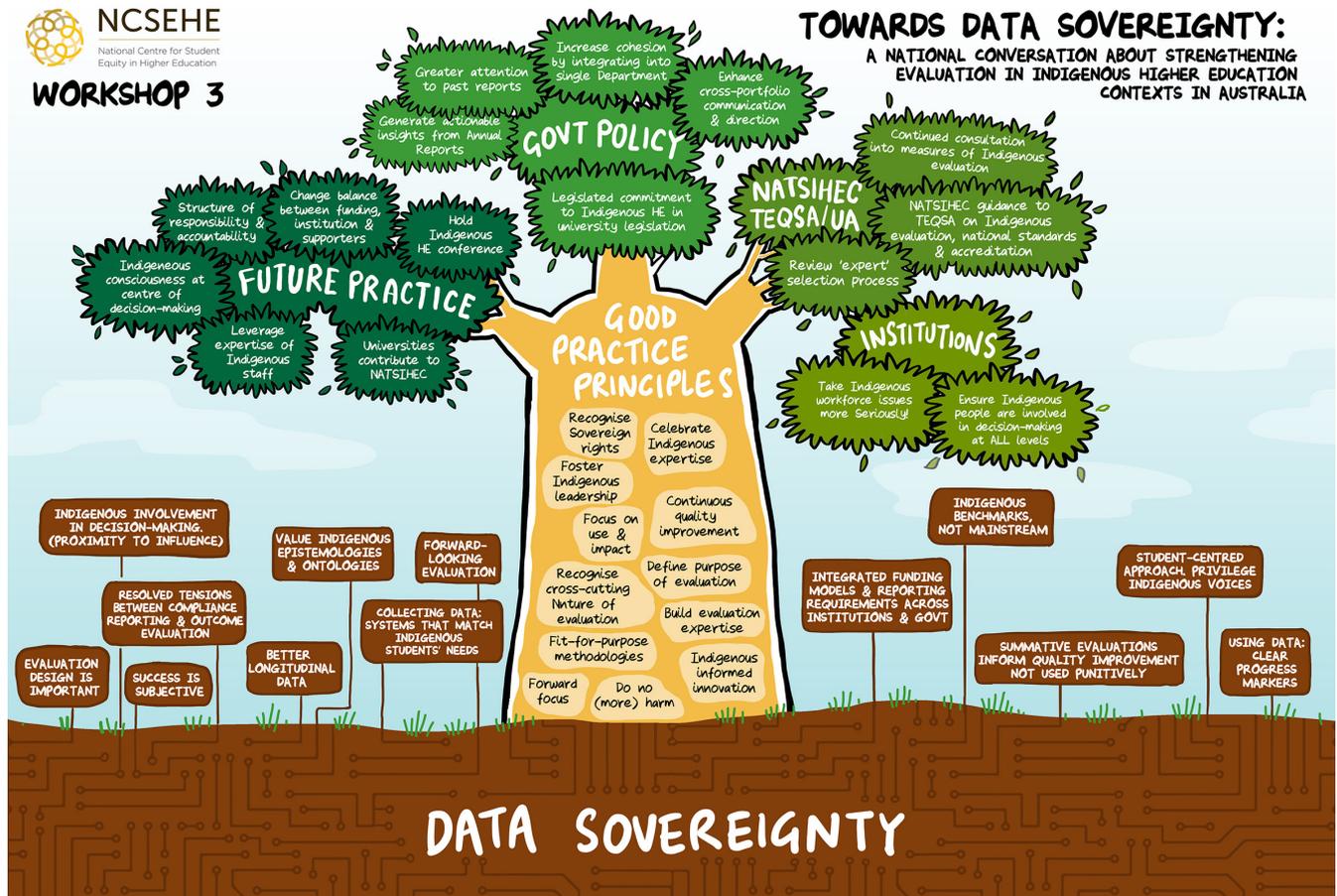
Note:

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.

2. Summary of Workshop 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



2.1. 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.

2.2. 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.

2.3. 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. Continued consultation and partnership development between UA and NATSIHEC to input into measures of Indigenous evaluation.
2. 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.
3. Review the ways in which TEQSA chooses “experts”: how does it recognise Indigeneity and Indigenous expertise?

View the accompanying webinar [here](#).

3. Pre-Reading Materials

3.1. Workshop agenda

Date: Friday 6 April 2018

Location: The University of Sydney

Facilitators: James Smith and Kim Robertson

TIME	ACTIVITY	
08:30	Arrival, registration, tea and coffee	All
08:55	Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country	Sue Trinidad
09:00	Session One: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A snapshot of what we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.</i> <i>Defining success: Key enablers and drivers for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education (key findings from 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship).</i> <i>Yarning about evaluation — sharing successes and challenges from current evaluation work: What has worked? What didn't work? And why?</i> <i>Reporting against the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020.</i> 	James Smith/ Kim Robertson James Smith/ Kim Robertson All Nathan Cassidy
10:30	Morning tea	All
11:00	Session Two: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Yarning about good evaluation from an Indigenous standpoint — what does this all mean in practice? What role do you play?</i> <i>Stocktake of the discussion so far: What do we know now about Indigenous perspectives on evaluation in Indigenous higher education?</i> 	All All
12:30	Lunch	All
13:15	Session Three: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Identifying principles for good practice to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia.</i> <i>How could the Australian Government, state governments and universities, better support evaluation in Indigenous higher education?</i> 	All All
14:45	Conclusion and closing	James Smith/ Kim Robertson



VIEWPOINT

What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?

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Indigenous participation and achievement in education is an issue of international significance. 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 this report 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 also appears to have been ignored. In parallel, the Productivity Commission, Australian National Audit Office and subsequently the Australian Government have emphasised the importance of strengthening evaluation in Indigenous program and policy contexts across Australia. The release of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework in 2017 is one recent example. Bringing these two national conversations together, and drawing on current scholarship in this space, this paper describes what we currently know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. We point towards key areas for action to move this agenda forward as a means to better support Indigenous participation and achievement in higher education.

Keywords: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; Indigenous; evaluation; education; higher education; policy

Introduction

Increasing Indigenous¹ participation and achievement in higher education is an issue of global significance. Scholars from Canada, New Zealand, United States and Australia have been particularly vocal about this issue for multiple decades (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Jefferies,

¹ For the purposes of this paper, 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. The authors acknowledge the diversity of views with regard to preferences for using these terms.

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1998; Smith, 2000; Deloria, 2001; Battiste, 2002; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012). This has paralleled international Indigenous education advocacy efforts and subsequent investments, such as the establishment of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) in 2002; and the establishment of the World Indigenous Nations University (WINU) in 2014. WINHEC has been particularly influential in driving discussions about the need for ensuring quality cultural standards in higher education through the development of an international accreditation program (Malina-Wright, Robertson, & Moeke, 2010). These global advances have been built on the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2008); and the *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education* (Task Force of the National Organizing Committee of the 1993 World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1999). These landmark declarations specifically recognise the sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples, calling for Indigenous people to lead and make decisions about their education destinies. This has ultimately seen targeted investments aimed at widening participation in Indigenous higher education in multiple countries. Yet, globally there has been minimal attention to building a robust evaluation evidence-base to drive further improvements (Frawley, Smith, & Larkin, 2015). In this paper, we use the Australian Indigenous higher education context as an example to illustrate the challenges associated with undertaking evaluation in this space. We explain why novel approaches, which align to contemporary global discussions about data sovereignty and Indigenous rights, are urgently required.

In Australia, widening participation in the context of Indigenous higher education has been discussed as a policy priority for more than four decades (Behrendt et al., 2012; Anderson, 2016). Indigenous students have long been identified as one of six priority equity groups within the Australian higher education system (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012; Liddle, 2016). Some of these students also fall into other under-represented categories, including students from low socio-economic status backgrounds; students from regional and remote areas; and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Bennett et al., 2015). This means Indigenous student exposure to inequities in higher education can be cumulative. Whilst there has been a steady growth in widening participation and completion among Indigenous higher education students in Australia, this has not yet reached parity with non-Indigenous student cohorts (Wilks & Wilson, 2015; Anderson, 2016; Liddle, 2016). Not surprisingly, there has been an incremental increase in strategies aimed at improving higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people (Behrendt et al., 2012; Anderson, 2016; Frawley, Larkin, & Smith, 2017a; 2017b). Yet, the evidence-base to inform strategy development has been weak and in some instances non-existent.

Different approaches and activities have emerged that respond to evolving Indigenous higher education and equity policy and program landscapes (Anderson, 2016; Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2017). These include the provision of enabling programs, scholarships, tutorial assistance and academic support, community engagement, partnership development, mentoring and workforce capacity building, including the establishment of senior executive level Indigenous positions within universities (Wilks & Wilson, 2014; Fredericks, Lamey, Mikecz, & Santamaria, 2015; Fricker, 2015; Hall & Wilkes, 2015; Priestly, Lynch, Wallace, & Harwood, 2015; Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2015; Smith, Larkin, Yibarbuk, & Guenther, 2017; Wilks, Radnidge, & Wilson, 2017). Such activities have highlighted the importance of intelligent investment in planning, implementing and *evaluating* Indigenous higher education programs in Australia (Frawley et al., 2015). The latter concept – evaluation – has been identified as an important lever for system improvement. However, it has largely remained at the margins of government and university action. In this paper, we aim to examine what we currently know

about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. We also discuss the respective implications for strengthening evaluation in this space. But first, it is important to understand evaluation in the broader Indigenous affairs context.

Discussion

Evaluation in Indigenous affairs contexts in Australia

In early 2017, the Australian Government Minister for Indigenous Affairs announced a significant investment of \$10 Million per year into the monitoring and evaluation of Indigenous programs funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).² This commitment responded to numerous calls to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous affairs contexts in Australia (Productivity Commission, 2013; Department of Families, Housing, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2014; and Hudson, 2016). At the same time, there has been a rapidly growing discourse in Australia that the quantum and quality of evaluation evidence being generated in response to Indigenous policy and program investments is poor (Hudson, 2016; 2017; Muir & Dean, 2017). Hudson (2017) claims “in general, Indigenous evaluations are characterised by a lack of data and the absence of a control group, as well as an over-reliance on anecdotal evidence” (p. 13). Indeed, the need to produce more high quality evaluations that generate evidence to drive future policy and program improvements is pivotal (Productivity Commission, 2013; Hudson, 2016; 2017). A lack of robust and comprehensive evaluation evidence, whether quantitative or qualitative in nature, appears to be stifling Indigenous focused policy and program development, implementation and reform. Yet, as Muir and Dean (2017) note, “developing an Indigenous-focused evaluation culture will not guarantee an evaluation’s success; however, the absence of such culture is likely to make the evaluation task more difficult and less likely to meet local community needs” (p. 2). We now take a brief look at the role the Australian Government is currently playing in attempting to address these concerns.

Government reporting and evaluation in Indigenous contexts

In response to previous issues identified by the Productivity Commission about the evaluation of Indigenous programs, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) released a draft Evaluation Framework for the Indigenous Advancement Strategy in October 2017. This new framework articulates that robustness, relevance, credibility and appropriateness are best practice principles for underpinning Indigenous evaluation work (DPMC, 2017). A key element of the framework is the separation of performance (i.e., monitoring grants and activity reviews) from evaluation (process, impact, outcome and cross-cutting evaluations) (DPMC, 2017). Previously there have been minimal attempts to divide concepts of performance and evaluation in this way within Indigenous affairs contexts – perhaps with the notable exception of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*, which has been used as a reporting framework in the health sector for over a decade (AHMAC, 2017).

Whilst the IAS Evaluation Framework outlines that activities must be respectful to Indigenous Australians, there is minimal detail about what this may constitute and how this could be achieved, other than a cursory note that participatory methods are encouraged. Perhaps the most important element of the IAS Evaluation Framework is the concept of cross-cutting evaluations. This approach insinuates that there is potential to link evaluation work in Indigenous contexts within sectors, such as between schools and universities; and between sectors, such as health and education. There is also potential to expand the concept of cross-cutting evaluation work between Indigenous and equity contexts, but an understanding of the complex legislative

² The IAS commenced in July 2014, and is the way in which the Australian Government funds and delivers a range of programs targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

arrangements and philosophical underpinnings which govern Indigenous higher education is important to understand the challenges in this regard.

At present, there are numerous programs that support Indigenous higher education in Australia. The Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) and the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) both fall under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*. ISSP is administered through the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, whereas HEPPP is administered through Department of Education and Training (DET). This means both programs fall under different Ministers – the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and the Minister for Education and Training. To avoid any confusion, it is important to note that HEPPP is an equity-focused program targeting low SES students. It is not considered to be an Indigenous higher education program. However, the recent HEPPP evaluation indicated that 19% of HEPPP projects were targeted towards Indigenous students from low socio-economic backgrounds (see ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). This equated to 15% of the total program funding – an estimated \$150.45M from 2010-2016 (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). This is a conservative estimate given that some HEPPP programs have involved Indigenous students, without them necessarily being a targeted beneficiary. It can be argued that HEPPP is an incredibly important part of the broader Indigenous higher education policy landscape, although perhaps more implicit than explicit.

There are also other programs aimed at providing financial assistance to Indigenous students either directly or indirectly. Funding for ABSTUDY falls under the *Student Assistance Act 1973*, with different components administered through the Department of Social Services and Department of Human Services. In addition, funding for the Away from Base (AFB) program falls under the *Appropriation Act* and operates under dual guidelines associated with the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*. AFB funding is quarantined as part of the IAS and is administered by DPMC.

Confused? Rightly so. This quagmire of different Acts, departments and programs makes Indigenous higher education in Australia difficult to navigate and helps to explain why it has become the complex jigsaw it is. It has also made cross-jurisdictional and international comparisons difficult, and muddied calls for tighter reporting and accountability. We argue that a cross-government evaluation of the combined effectiveness of different Indigenous higher education policies and programs is urgently required. We recognise the current system is complex and multi-faceted, but we need to know whether the current situation is meeting the diverse needs of Indigenous students across Australia and the aspirations of the nation's Indigenous peoples. The recent call for cross-cutting evaluations within the IAS Framework reiterates the need for such an approach.

Until recently, there had been little evaluation of financial incentives that support Indigenous students to participate in higher education. We know that payments through ABSTUDY have not significantly increased since the 1980s, despite financial strain remaining a significant barrier to participation in higher education for Indigenous students. A recent report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs (2016) recommended an independent review of ABSTUDY. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO, 2017) has since completed an audit of ABSTUDY in relation to compliance and performance measures associated with the administration of ABSTUDY by the Department of Social Services and the Department of Human Services. However, the parameters of the audit did not extend to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of ABSTUDY programs in relation to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It was merely an audit of departmental performance. The need

for an evaluation of the impact and outcome of ABSTUDY remains.

A critical element of the above discussion involves understanding that Australian Universities are required to report against the funding they receive. This is an accountability measure, routine for governments, and includes reporting against targeted funding related to Indigenous and equity focused higher education programs. For example, ISSP has an annual reporting requirement, consistent with its past equivalents. The purpose of ISSP is to provide scholarships, tutorial assistance and support services to Indigenous higher education students. The reporting parameters outlined in the reporting template were co-developed with key stakeholders within the Indigenous higher education sector, including those involved in a time-limited Indigenous Advisory Group. ISSP performance funding allocations are currently based on Indigenous student enrolments, success and completions data. This data is routinely collected through the Higher Education Information and Management System (HEIMS) managed by the DET. To remain eligible for ISSP funding, universities are also required to maintain and report on an Indigenous Education Strategy, Indigenous Governance Mechanisms and Indigenous Workforce Strategy. This reporting has been established as a descriptive process - primarily activity-based reporting. At present, reporting on the effectiveness and efficacy of investments from an impact and outcome perspective is not required. It does, however, reflect a movement towards monitoring systemic and structural factors within higher education institutions. This is a welcome transition. The intent to undertake a review of ISSP guidelines and reporting processes has already been flagged for 2018 and is likely to assist in making further quality improvements within the ISSP itself.

It is clear, from the information presented above, that a national Indigenous monitoring and evaluation framework would need to be robust enough to traverse multiple Ministers, departments and programs; *and* be flexible enough to suit very different university contexts and student aspirations. At present, the extent to which government reporting is driving university evaluation processes in Indigenous higher education contexts is unclear. Further qualitative research about the ways in which evaluation data is being collected and used in this space, and the respective drivers for undertaking such work, is urgently required. But what do we currently know?

Evaluation in equity focused higher education contexts: Can this help?

Prior to embarking on a discussion about the need for a national Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation framework, it is useful to note that there has been a parallel discussion in relation to the equity and higher education national agenda. As Downing (2017) notes:

Despite significant funding flowing into higher education for programs aimed at improving participation, access and success, there still exists a limited amount of systematic evaluation taking place within the sector. In some institutions (including universities, research centres and centres of excellence), a greater level of onus has been felt in recent years for the need to ascertain whether funding sources such as the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) have led or are likely to lead to positive equity-related outcomes. (p. 19)

Substantial progress has already been made in developing measures of equity performance in higher education in Australia. For example, Naylor, Baik, & James (2011) developed the *Critical Interventions Framework* for advancing equity in Australian higher education. This was subsequently revisited by Bennett et al. in 2015 through the development of an *Equity Initiatives Framework*. An important aspect of the second framework is an explicit acknowledgement that

the framework should be modified according to both context and stakeholder needs (Bennett et al., 2015). That is, there is a clear recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach is not necessarily going to work in an equity and higher education space. In parallel, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) developed *A Framework for Measuring Equity Performance in Australian Higher Education* (Pitman & Koshy, 2015). This work was guided by that which had already progressed in the health sector a decade prior, with specific reference to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*. In its final recommendations to the Australian Government before being abolished, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIHEAC, 2015) acknowledged the work of the NCSEHE and provided a solid basis from which to further monitoring and performance framework discussions in the Indigenous higher education landscape.

More recently, the national review of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program has spurred increased interest in improving evaluation. Indeed, there was a recommendation and subsequent policy commitment to develop an evaluation framework as part of the review (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). The policy commitment was fast - an expression of interest (EOI) for the development of an evaluation framework was released within days of the release of the report, with an expectation that the framework would be ready within less than six months. This tight timeframe drew criticism from the equity and higher education sector. The EOI was subsequently abandoned and a decision was made by DET to pursue the development of the evaluation framework internally. This work remains in process at the time of writing.

A well-articulated submission to the Reform of the Australian Government Administration in 2010 indicated the risks inherent in such an approach by stating that “most evaluation activities within the Australian Public Service [APS] are shaped by people who have no professional technical expertise in evaluation” (Diamond & O’Brien-Malone, 2010, p. 2). The submission also identified that evaluation functions within each APS agency should be centralised to maximise the use of limited evaluation expertise (Diamond & O’Brien-Malone, 2010). DPMC currently has a model of this nature, hence its capacity to develop the IAS Evaluation Framework, as previously discussed. However, DET – where the evaluation framework for HEPPP is to be developed - does not currently have a centralised evaluation unit. As O’Brien-Malone and Diamond (2010) articulate in a separate submission about the development of the Australian Government’s research workforce strategy:

...the knowledge base which underpins evaluation is highly technical, and good intentions and being a skilled bureaucrat do not equate to having knowledge and skill in evaluation. This failure on the part of departments to recognise that evaluation is a profession with a detailed, technical, knowledge base has to stop if government is to get good value from its evaluator dollar. (p. 10)

We are not suggesting that DET does not have the evaluation capacity and capability in-house to undertake this task. Rather we are suggesting that there are risks associated with pursuing an evaluation framework in this way. Whilst there is significant potential to acknowledge emerging frameworks that relate to equity and higher education in Australia, there are also unique considerations specific to the Indigenous higher education landscape that need to be included. At this juncture it is important to note that there are both synergies and differences in equity and Indigenous policy agendas in Australia that need to be recognised and addressed as part of this conversation (Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012; Nakata, 2013; Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2017). We start to unpack these further below.

Evaluation in Indigenous higher education: Is there a problem?

In 2012, the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al., 2012) stated that:

While considerable data was available through departmental program-based reporting to monitor progress, there was not always sufficient evidence to assess the overall success or otherwise of specific programs. In some cases, there were no independent evaluations of programs for the Panel to draw on. (p. 154)

The review subsequently recommended that the Australian Government and universities work together to develop a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education monitoring and evaluation framework (Behrendt et al., 2012). However, this recommendation is yet to be formally actioned. More recently, in its final advice to government ATSIHEAC (2015) provided a number of recommendations to accelerate the pace of change in Indigenous higher education. Working towards an agreed national minimum data set and framework for Indigenous higher education was a strategy recommended to provide critical support for assessment of progress at a system level (ATSIHEAC, 2015). In this sense, concepts of ‘evaluation’ and ‘performance monitoring’ were broadly conflated. This contrasts the separation of these concepts as advocated through the release of the draft IAS Evaluation Framework. Irrespective of the way in which these concepts overlap, the need for a national monitoring and evaluation framework has also been heightened by the recent release of the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020* (Universities Australia, 2017), which outlines a broad range of targets for Australian universities. There appears to be some broad alignment with reporting parameters associated with ISSP. Of course, the variables that have impacted on widening participation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia, are not limited to Indigenous student enrolments, success and completions, as currently captured through the ISSP. There are also a range of historical and contemporary social policy and systemic barriers to education, that also need to be considered in the context of evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia, and arguably elsewhere across the globe. These are discussed further below.

Contextualising evaluation in Indigenous higher education

It has previously been noted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education contexts, that outcomes frameworks need to be developed flexibly so that educational responses are tailored to local needs at systemic and institutional (school) levels (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2014). As Frawley, Smith and Larkin (2015) explain:

One key challenge we face in Australia is to move beyond basic process and impact evaluation approaches about Indigenous higher education pathways and transitions. We need to develop more sophisticated evaluation models that reflect more rigorous, comprehensive and nuanced understandings of what Indigenous higher education trajectories look like, the inherent complexities they bring, how they can best be navigated, and the tangible outcomes Indigenous-specific programs can achieve. This includes the capacity to examine and monitor new and innovative institutional and organisational culture change to reform Indigenous education within higher education settings...emerging evaluation approaches that build on Indigenous knowledge systems could be useful in this regard. These will need to privilege Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies. (p. 10)

The notion of incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems into evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts aligns well with recent commentary about the concepts of decolonising

methods and data sovereignty within Indigenous research contexts. Indeed, we argue that repositioning Indigenous knowledges as being a central element and core philosophy underpinning evaluation in this space is critical. The seminal work of international Indigenous scholars, Smith (2012) and Kovach (2010) is particularly influential in relation to the use of decolonising research methods. For example, the privileging of narrative forms of qualitative evidence, such as Indigenous student success stories, can provide important contextual information about achievements in the Indigenous higher education landscape (Frawley, Ober, Olcay, & Smith, 2017). Similarly, the work of Indigenous academic Maggie Walter (2010; 2016) is equally important in relation to concepts of data sovereignty and the culturally appropriate use of statistical data. In an attempt to increase the cultural appropriateness of statistical data reporting and usage, recent scholars have developed a draft quality framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education data and statistics (Drew, Wilks, & Wilson, 2015). This aligns with claims made by Bunda et al. (2012) that:

The administrative gaze of policy...swallows Indigenous peoples' identities in the fetish of statistics, objectifying through numbers. In doing so, it continues long-standing colonial processes for categorising the 'Other' so as to avoid recognising social-cultural differences that challenge the legitimacy of whitestream-centred power. (p. 943)

Whilst these concepts have seldom surfaced (at least not explicitly) in discussions about *evaluation* in Indigenous higher education contexts, they are poignant for future discussions. They are particularly relevant at a time when Indigenous governance is increasingly being (re)emphasised as an important factor in Indigenous higher education policy and program contexts (Universities Australia, 2017). They also correspond with the national instability experienced in relation to government supported co-ordination of Indigenous higher education; expressed goals to grow the Indigenous higher education professional and academic workforce; and increasing expectations to improve cultural competency in Australian universities (Universities Australia, 2011; 2017). We argue that further commentary and the privileging of Indigenous standpoints through evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts will enhance evaluation effectiveness, and produce better quality and more comprehensive data to inform policy, program and system improvements. The work of Foley (2002; 2003a; 2003b) and Rigney (1999; 2011) is particularly useful in suggesting how Australian Indigenous standpoint theory could be used as a means to reframe the way evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts is approached. An approach that privileges an Indigenous stance aligns with parallel literature emanating from an Indigenous *research* realm (Foley, 2003a; Ardill, 2013; Nakata, 2013).

In addition to the epistemological and ontological positioning and privileging of Indigenous standpoints, a Whole-of-University (WOU) approach to Indigenous education has been repeatedly recommended by peak bodies and advisory groups over the past few years (Behrendt et al., 2012; ATSIHEAC, 2016; NATSIHEC, 2017; Universities Australia, 2017). It is probable if this transition occurs, that there will be new expectations about what to evaluate, and how to evaluate, and key investments supporting improved outcomes for Indigenous students participating in higher education in Australia. Some scholars argue for alternative evaluation frameworks that respond to emerging calls for WOU approaches to 'Indigenise' universities (Frawley et al., 2015; Rigney, 2017). Rigney (2017) has already presented a conceptual Design and Evaluation for Indigenisation (DEFI) that can guide institutional change. This sentiment is reiterated in a recent report about accelerating Indigenous higher education prepared by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC, 2017). The report talks about the need for the DET, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards

Authority (TEQSA) and NATSIHEC to work together to determine WOU quality standards and accountabilities in relation to measuring the quality of Indigenous student and staff participation in universities (NATSIHEC, 2017). It also outlines that strategies used to incorporate Indigenous knowledges within universities should be included as a measure of quality in the provision of higher education (NATSIHEC, 2017). NATSIHEC recommends a process whereby NATSIHEC and TEQSA work collaboratively to evaluate performance of universities against Indigenous imperatives on an annual basis (NATSIHEC, 2017). This seems sensible. The World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) has already developed a global Indigenous-led higher education accreditation process (Malina-Wright, Robertson, & Moeke, 2010) that could be used to inform reforms of this nature in Australian universities. This accreditation is explicitly about cultural standards and protocols. At present, the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory, are the only two organisations in Australia that have received WINHEC accreditation status. Behrendt et al. (2012) and Universities Australia (2017) have also pointed out the utility of WINHEC accreditation as a means to monitor university performance in relation to enhancing Australian Indigenous higher education outcomes.

Akin to discussions about the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges into higher education institutions, there have also been parallel calls to more explicitly embed Indigenous pedagogies into university curricula. Larkin (2015) has convincingly argued that the objective of Critical Race pedagogy is to create inclusive approaches that recognise and support spaces where Indigenous students can learn from culturally relevant pedagogies. The concept of embedding Indigenous knowledges into university curricula has also been reinforced in the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020* (Universities Australia, 2017), but there is little guidance about how universities can monitor and evaluate investments of this nature. There is an increasing urgency for Indigenous higher education stakeholders to identify ways to capture and implement innovative conceptual designs that are explicit. Perhaps drawing on the aforementioned Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous standpoints would be a useful starting point?

Conclusion

There are multiple recommendations emergent in key national reports and from peak bodies that demand the development of an Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation framework. To date, there has been minimal government and/or university response to such calls. Limiting factors have been a poor articulation of exactly what such a framework might look like; how it might be developed; who is best positioned to develop it; and the timeframe in which it should be developed. That is, the Indigenous higher education sector has not been collectively engaged in high-level strategic discussions of this nature, and further qualitative research with policy-makers (particularly those in DPMC and DET) and Indigenous scholars/thinkers working in higher education institutions across Australia would help to guide this conversation, but the imperative is to enact an effective innovative evaluation framework now. Understanding the enablers of, and barriers to, change in this space needs a nuanced perspective in further research. In parallel, contemporary scholarship about the application of Indigenous research methods and Indigenous knowledges as they relate to evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts is required to aid such perspectives. A useful starting point could be the articulation of the principles and philosophical assumptions that underpin such work, with particular reference to key global documents that consistently emphasise Indigenous rights within education contexts (Task Force of the National Organizing Committee of the 1993 World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1999; United Nations, 2008). Doing so would mean that concepts such as self-determination and data sovereignty could underpin

further conversations. Indeed, Indigenous methods, concepts and standpoints could potentially re-conceptualise the purpose of monitoring and evaluation in Indigenous higher education. This could include further discussion about what should be monitored and evaluated, when, why, how and by whom. Indigenous standpoints are epistemologically and ontologically different from parallel frameworks current in the broader equity and higher education space, but we argue that they are not necessarily incompatible. Rather, it is important to understand the synergies and differences to examine these intersections more critically. An Australian Indigenous informed evaluative framework would benefit from progress in New Zealand, Canada, United States and Norway, where strategies designed to empower Indigenous design and input have resulted in improved, targeted investments for Indigenous students in higher education. The Australian Government, NATSIHEC, Universities Australia, TEQSA, and the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, along with all Australian universities should commit to engaging in a joint national strategic conversation about evaluation to move this agenda forward. This effort would make a significant contribution to the international Indigenous higher education landscape and enhance action aimed at widening the participation of Indigenous students both in Australia and globally.

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