

We are submitting on the proposed public sector system shift : *Enable system learning and improvement through monitoring and evaluation* (Chapter 6).

We support the report's conclusion that public sector leadership and stewardship for system learning and improvement is 'missing', and this has worsened in recent years:
...there is currently a lack of system leadership for monitoring, evaluation and learning, limiting uptake of applicable lessons by the centre.

This submission proposes a vehicle to 'find' this again: a heads of profession grouping through the Public Service Commission.

In our view there is a need to enhance stewardship of the public sector social research and evaluation system in New Zealand to support an evidence-based learning system across government and ultimately promote the Public Service's responsibilities towards long term investment in reducing persistent disadvantage.

This submission asserts that to achieve this and reposition public sector social research and evaluation to meaningfully support the other system shifts required to remove persistent disadvantage, centralized public service leadership of the social research and evaluation profession is essential.

Some critical development areas for public service research and evaluation with the goals of the report also in mind include:

- Highly trained workforce. There is currently a very shallow level of tertiary training options for social research methodologies and methods and particularly evaluation, and in-service professional learning opportunities have declined in recent years. There is little government coordination of professional learning opportunities.
- Backbone tools and resources. This includes all-agency access to online journal subscriptions, specialist ethics support, survey tools, analysis software, data security, engagement with new analytical approaches including the digital revolution in data. This backbone is very patchy across government and smaller departments are particularly disadvantaged.
- Enhanced expectations of interagency research collaboration, opportunities and resourcing. This is particularly important for the cross-cutting issues the report speaks to, and the development of research and evaluation that reveals and informs system shifts. Visibility of research pipelines across the public service, university and wānanga sectors to maximize research application and collaboration and minimize duplication.
- More consistent quality standards, expectations and guidance, particularly around participant-centered research that directly addresses marginalization by ensuring social research includes feedback loops as a minimum. Standards should reflect the risk survey fatigue places on people is not specific to any one agency.
- Model standards present the opportunity to demonstrate fully the value of research and evaluation groups by developing standard evaluation of research impact approaches, citation policies to ensure research work is recognized in organizational decision-making and open-publication systems to maximize scrutiny of research and decision-making to encourage constructive contributions to both what public service agencies do at strategic and operational levels.
- Support for approaches that articulate the narrative from the public on their own terms, so that both bottom-up and public service demand driven programmes are supported.

- More effective ways of public sector research and evaluation supporting Kaupapa Māori research and evaluation development and community and place-based approaches.
- Some research resourcing that is untethered to short term policy issues of the day and can be applied to researching and evaluating system transformation efforts in cross-government contexts. If social policy research and evaluation is to support system change through stronger insights over the longer term, there needs to be some opportunity to look beyond a short term 'presentist bias' to design and delivery. It needs some flexibility and freedom to invest in sustained systems approaches over time.

We think coordination of these developments should be championed and enabled through a centralized public service function. In the early 2000s there was an officials coordinating group for social policy research and evaluation - SPEaR:

The committee's role is to develop the research and evaluation agendas to meet the identified knowledge gaps. They are to ensure that the research and evaluation purchased by government is of appropriate quality and relevance. Downstream, the committee is also responsible for evaluating the success of initiatives.

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/connecting-policy-research-and-practice>

SPEaR coordinated successful professional conferences and released good practice guidelines to enhance the standard of research and evaluation practice across the social sector:

*These Guidelines are primarily designed for **government agency officials** who design, commission and/or manage social research or evaluation contracts or undertake such projects as part of their employment. They will also have relevance for the many stakeholders in social policy research and evaluation.*

https://thehub.swa.govt.nz/assets/documents/43067_good-practice-guidelines-june-2008-final-version_0.pdf

There have been other attempts to coordinate and advance public sector research and evaluation including SuPERU (see: <https://thehub.swa.govt.nz/resources/for-whom-the-bells-tolls/>). Crown Research and Evaluation managers have a semi-formal network called CREM but this has no formal mandate and limited structure and process. It does not have the legitimacy or collective capacity and leadership in its current form to make a significant contribution to the challenges described in your report. ANZEA is the national professional body for evaluation in New Zealand and supports the development of the evaluation profession in Aotearoa. ANZEA has developed evaluation standards and competencies (with SuPERU).

There has not been a sustained central resource in government to push through with development efforts since the early 2000s. The Public Service Commission's Heads of Profession model offers the best opportunity for the resurrection of public service led leadership and development of the profession:

[Heads of Profession] provide leadership of professional groups across the Public Service. This includes convening professional networks, building capability through professional development, and providing best-practice guidance for members of the profession. Heads of profession are designated by the Public Service Commissioner.

Public Service Commission, <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/system/leaders/public-service-system-leaders/heads-of-profession/>

Currently there are heads of professions for Policy, Legal, Finance, Internal Audit and risk assurance, Communications, but not Research and Evaluation. This should change.

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