

# Enlightening Evaluation: from perception to proof in higher education social policy

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Government policies designed to redress social inequality are often evaluated by qualitative methods, which prevents the establishment of a causal relationship between policy objectives and outcomes. Social programmes to broaden participation in higher education have been a feature of government policy in Europe, the US and Australia during the past three decades. The principal instrument of policy optimisation has been university partnerships with disadvantaged school students. The Australian Labor Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) is the most recent iteration of policy to broaden access to university. Unlike many of its European counterparts, the Australian policy includes funding criteria for evidence-based partnerships and rigorous evaluation methods. In the new era of accountability for publicly funded programmes between universities and disadvantaged schools, the qualitative research methods and formative analysis that dominate evaluation research in this field will need to be augmented by quantitative research that enables summative evaluation against public policy objectives. Transforming the evaluation paradigm is required to determine the impact of university-school partnerships on higher education participation.

## Introduction

Public policy designed to increase the proportion of students from low income backgrounds participating in higher education has been introduced in Europe, Australia and the US (Woodrow *et al.* 1998; DEEWR 2010; Cunningham *et al.* 2003). Its primary instrument of policy optimisation has been university partnerships with schools (HEFCE 2009, p. 9; DEEWR 2010; Cunningham *et al.* 2003). The literature indicates that the principal objective of these partnership programmes is to increase the articulation of targeted cohorts to university. However, programme evaluations are often designed using qualitative rather than

quantitative methods, the latter of which is required to establish a causal relationship between the programmes and students' articulation rate (Cunningham *et al.* 2003; Gale *et al.* 2010; Passey *et al.* 2009). The qualitative approach has led to the development of partnership evaluation instruments that may inform incremental improvements in programme delivery, but do not enable impact assessment against the principal public policy objective.

In this paper, I propose that a quantitative approach to evaluating university partnerships with disadvantaged schools and student cohorts is necessary to determine whether these programmes improve the articulation of low income and low SES students to

higher education. The article addresses this proposal in four steps: an exploration of the development of social programme evaluation as a discipline; observation of the political challenges associated with evaluation of social programmes; a comparative analysis of evaluation methods for university-school partnerships in the UK, Australia and the US; and a proposed model for evaluating university partnerships with disadvantaged schools in alignment with the Australian Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program.

In their 2009 budget paper 'Transforming Australia's Higher Education System', the Labor Government set a national target that by 2020, 20 per cent of students participating in higher education should be from low SES backgrounds. The 2010 Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (which regulates the 20 per cent target), lists principles and objectives for university-school partnerships, including evaluation criteria set against clear policy objectives. An assessment of the HEPPP objectives and how they might be used in the design of research evaluation is discussed later in the article.

### The politics of evaluation

The standard evaluation model for university partnerships with disadvantaged schools is 'social programme evaluation', which arose as a substantial field during the New Deal era in North America as a result of vast government expenditure on public services (Browne & Wildavsky 1987, p. 146). Shadish and colleagues define social programmes as those which 'aim to improve the welfare of individuals, organisations, and society' (Shadish *et al.* 1991, p. 19). Patton observes that more rigorous methods of evaluating social programmes were developed in the wake of the Vietnam War when, 'Great Society programmes collided head on with ... rising inflation, and the fall from glory of Keynesian economics' (Patton 1997, p. 11). Evaluation was born of the need for governments to decide, among a multitude of choices, 'which things are worth doing' (Patton 1997, p. 11).

It was not any form of evaluation, but that derived from quantitative methodology which governments began to demand to measure progress against their expenditure on social programmes. Posavac and Carey identify the policy function particular to quantitative methodology as the establishment of causation in programmes with mass subjects (Posavac & Carey 2007,

p. 31). For this reason, one might assume that it could be used in social programmes also given that they seek to establish a relationship between public policy and its effect on large groups of people. However, in these programmes, including government funded partnerships between universities and disadvantaged schools, quantitative methods that prove or disprove a causal relationship are relatively uncommon.

Despite the difficulty in evaluating social programmes, there is an increasing demand for policy-makers to provide statistical analysis to support their continuation or cessation. A 2008 article in *Policy* demonstrates the rationale for establishing evaluation based on causal research methods. Farrelly explains that randomised trials should be used to test the efficacy of social programmes in order to:

1. Prove a causal relationship between the programmatic aims of policymakers and their outcomes.
2. Develop evidence-based policy.
3. Use the least random and most scientific method available for analysis of social programmes.
4. Reduce differences in the targeted cohort.
5. Justify the 'high ideals and enormous budgets' of social experiments (Farrelly 2008, p. 7-10).

The research methods described above are used to prove or disprove a causal relationship between the stated aim/hypothesis of a policy or programme and its outcomes (Mark *et al.* 1999, p. 182). While randomised trials provide the most scientifically reliable results in research, there is ongoing concern that the motive for this form of evaluation is primarily ideological and that results can be used by conservatives to discontinue public programmes.

Fisher's study of the rise of expert policymakers in Western post-industrial societies illustrates that evaluation research was used to benefit conservative political purposes during the Nixon administration in the USA (Fisher 1990, pp. 161-163). Nixon institutionalised the practice of measuring social programmes by output measures. Fisher contends that rather than being a simple exercise in developing policy expertise in social programming, under the conservative approach, 'low-cost social experiments combined with rigid evaluation requirements were often used to subvert or eliminate expensive social programs beneficial to Democratic constituencies' (Fisher 1990, p. 163). While the characteristics of these programmes, such as low government expenditure, undermined their chances of success, Fisher asserts that it was the methodology used in their evaluation that made an

unbiased assessment of efficacy improbable. He contends that this causal research favours conservative political approaches to social programmes (Fisher 1990, p. 163). Weiss further explains that the political orientation of evaluation researchers can influence how social programmes have been – and are – evaluated. She writes that:

Because evaluation researchers tend to be liberal, reformist, humanitarian, and advocates of the underdog, it is exceedingly uncomfortable to have evaluation findings used to justify an end of spending on domestic social programs. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for evaluators to advocate continuation of programs that they have found had no apparent results. The political dilemma is real and painful (Weiss 1987, pp. 62-63).

Weiss describes the process of evaluation as a rational enterprise, but social programmes as 'political creatures'. It is the tension between rationality and politics which she views as the most intransigent obstruction to effective programme evaluation.

Despite its development as a distinctive field, from the mid 20th century, programme evaluation continues to receive less of a focus in public policy, including educational policy, than implementation, or 'front end' processes. Gerston observes that:

If there is an underside, or stealth-like component to the public policy process, it lies with the process of policy evaluation. So much political capital is directed towards agenda building, formulation, and (to a lesser extent) implementation of a public policy, that we often overlook the most obvious review questions of all [such as]: did the new policy attain its stated objectives along the lines of its intentions? (Gerston 2004, p. 119).

There is, of course, political risk involved in adopting quantitative evaluation research methodology as it can be used to discredit government funded programmes. Social programmes, in particular, which involve large groups of people, inevitably involve many variables beyond the control of government, policymakers and programme managers. For this reason alone, research methods that establish a linear path between cause and effect may be considered too difficult or too resource intensive compared with the kind of public

policy evaluation described by Gerston, which focuses on the design and implementation. However, a review of government funded partnerships between universities and disadvantaged schools illustrates the deficit created by evaluation approaches that focus on inputs in at the expense of impact assessment.

### The evaluation of university partnerships with disadvantaged schools

An international comparative review of the design of university partnerships with disadvantaged schools indicates that the connection between universities' programmes and the demands of public policy may be poorly understood. While the HEPPP offers clear policy objectives, universities have not yet indicated

what the best evaluation method to achieve them may be.

In assessing the evaluation methods of university-schools partnerships across the UK in 2009, Universities UK, the peak representative body, established that the 'evidence of

success' was defined broadly as follows, 'Partnerships need to deliver results and be measurable in impact, particularly through feedback (from students, parents, teachers, lecturers, trainers), measurement of progression and retention of participants' (Universities UK 2009, p. 18). However, evaluation based on the measures of progression and retention of participants in the partnership activities and participant feedback is not closely aligned with the aim of these partnerships, as stated in the foreword of the report, which is to widen participation in higher education of participants. There is no quantitative evaluation measure suggested for such efforts. In their recommendations for progressing partnerships programmes, the authors suggested that universities might consider 'benefits from developing a consistent approach to assessing impact' (Universities UK 2009, p. 20).

The lack of impact evaluation is common among university partnerships with disadvantaged schools, specifically when impact is aligned with a quantitative policy target such as rate of student participation in higher education. Aimhigher, funded by the UK government's Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), adopted longitudinal research

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to assess impact of its university-schools partnerships programme. In the 2009 report 'The longer term impact of Aimhigher: Tracking individuals', researchers with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) assessed the impact of the programme against its objectives, defined in this report as 'increasing the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who had the qualifications and aspirations necessary to enter higher education' (Morris *et al.* 2009, p. 1).

NFER noted that while the surveys commissioned to evaluate the educational outcomes of Aimhigher participants recorded aspirations and post-secondary destinations, the survey instrument was incomplete and 'left many questions unanswered'. In part, this was because in later years, the participant response rate was much lower than at the point of first contact and there had been no use of centralised data beyond survey results. Questions left unanswered by the survey instrument included:

What were the outcomes for non-respondents? What proportion of the various Aimhigher cohorts actually went on to higher education? Were there any differences in the proportion of young people from Aimhigher schools that entered university compared to young people from comparison schools, where there was no such exposure? Were there any differences in the type of universities the young people went to – what proportion went to those universities that traditionally have higher entry requirements, for example? (Morris *et al.* 2009, pp. 1-2).

Many of these questions require datasets that are neither readily available to higher education institutions, nor aggregated by government in a way that could be used in quantitative studies. In order to answer them, NFER accessed individual student records maintained in the National Pupil Database, the Individual Learner Record and the Higher Education Statistics Agency. While there was an analysis undertaken in 2005 that illustrated that Aimhigher had little impact on educational attainment, it was conducted almost a decade after the programme began. As a result, the findings could not be used in the context of formative evaluation, to contribute to programme improvement over that period.

The peril of not incorporating summative evaluation into programme design was also made evident by the Aimhigher case. The 2009 research demonstrated that there was a statistically significant, but only marginal increase of articulation to higher education among Aimhigher participants compared with those who

did not undertake the programme in selected schools. There was no impact on the proportion of Aimhigher participants attending the most selective universities, indicating that other factors, such as overall growth in higher education places, may have been important determinants in their higher education destinations. The finding was reported as evidence of programme failure in the Australian media, but perhaps it is more specifically an evidence of evaluation failure (Moodie, 11 November 2009). Indeed, in 2008, the National Audit Office had concluded that in relation to Aimhigher, government should adopt 'more robust approaches to evaluation when setting up activities which aim to widen participation' (National Audit Office 2008, p. 9).

The problems associated with poor evaluation of university outreach, marketing and recruitment activities with schools was emphasised by HEFCE in 2008. HEFCE criticised the 'weaknesses in data collection and analysis' in relation to activities included in university compacts with government (HEFCE 2008, p. 11). Specifically, they criticised the lack of student cohort tracking and poor evaluation of the impact of engagement on access to higher education. They suggested that:

Better data and analysis would encourage better management and enable institutions to make more assured judgements about the value of schemes and their value for money. It would also begin to answer more interesting evaluative questions, not just 'how well have compact participants done after entering HE compared with others?' but 'how well have they done compared with others who share similar characteristics and attainment but did not participate in a scheme?' (HEFCE 2008, p. 11).

The form of evaluation suggested by HEFCE is causal research with treatment and non-treatment groups, which requires quantitative methodology. As discussed later in the article, despite the potential for negative political repercussions, policymakers are increasingly calling for this form of research to be used in the evaluation of social programmes.

As with the British case, an Australian analysis of universities' outreach to disadvantaged schools in 2009 found that the evaluation methods used by universities to assess their outreach to disadvantaged students were formative, involving little or no summative evaluation research. Gale and colleagues reported that:

The most frequently reported program outcome was a change in aspirations towards higher education. Also commonly reported was an increase in students' understanding of university enrolment and procedures. Most respondents reported that their

programs are evaluated, predominantly on the basis of participant feedback (Gale *et al.* 2010, p. 8).

The lack of rigorous evaluation of partnerships in Australia may be due to the fact that prior to 2009, government policy on higher education equity included neither a national target for the proportion of low SES students participating in higher education, nor a dedicated fund to drive university partnerships with disadvantaged schools. However, rigorous evaluation methods should be introduced to determine which elements of partnerships contribute most to improving the academic preparedness of low SES students for higher education and to enable policymakers to conduct meta-analyses of programmes towards the development of an Australian best practice model.

Gerston's observation that programme evaluation is commonly focussed on the front end of policy development rather than programme outcomes is applicable to government-funded partnerships between universities and disadvantaged schools. In their assessment of early intervention partnerships between universities and schools across the US, Cunningham and colleagues concluded that while most programmes did include some element of evaluation, it tended to be qualitative, and lacked quantitative data that would enable summative assessment against policy objectives (Cunningham *et al.* 2003, p. 29). They proposed that:

Ideally, indicators of outcomes and effectiveness in early intervention programs might include such as measures as rates of application to/enrolment in college, the percentage of participating students taking the "pipeline steps" toward enrolment in a four year college or university and the percentage of participating students taking core college preparatory courses (Cunningham *et al.* 2003, p. 27).

Cunningham *et al.* concluded that the paucity of quantitative data on university partnerships programmes with disadvantaged schools meant not only that programme effectiveness could not be compared in a meta-analysis, but that the individual components of these programmes could not be assessed against objectives (Cunningham *et al.* 2003, pp. 36-37).

Unlike the UK and Australia, Florida's government has established an evaluation model for university partnerships with disadvantaged schools based on longitudinal research that includes qualitative and quantitative data. Its College Reach Out Program (CROP) is one of the most established schemes designed with a summative evaluation component and was recognised by Cunningham *et al.* as a leader in the field (Cunning-

ham *et al.* 2003, pp. 36-37). CROP was established by the Florida Legislature in 1983 with the objective to 'motivate and prepare educationally disadvantaged, low-income students in grades 6 through 12 to pursue and successfully complete a postsecondary education' (Winn & Armstrong 2005, p. 7).

It differs from other university outreach programmes with schools in two important ways. Firstly, since its inception it has had a clear objective which was established in legislation. Secondly, its evaluation method includes randomised trials and longitudinal research towards both continuous quality improvement and assessment against the stated policy objective. The State also collects aggregated data also to analyse broader cohort characteristics and other inputs such as participation rates (Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission 1994, pp. 8-13). As a result of this method of programme evaluation, several changes have been made to CROP during the past three decades and it has a relatively high rate of success against policy objectives.

While the CROP and HEPPP share some common policy objectives, they differ in several important ways. Effective evaluation of CROP relies upon accurate cohort tracking from point of contact to postsecondary education pass rates. Tracking is enabled by provision of student social security numbers and Florida identification numbers (Postsecondary Education Planning Commission 1994, p. 15). Such data is not yet gathered in Australia. The CROP students are recruited and selected based on low income status and cultural diversity is also a prominent factor in selection. The targeted selection process enables evaluation against random samples of non-participants. In 1994, statutory authority for annual evaluation of CROP was given to the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, while in Australia, each university is to be responsible for evaluation of partnerships. Finally, CROP emphasises improving the academic achievement of low income students in schools and in postsecondary education, rather than focusing on the aspiration-raising which has become a more prominent feature of university-school partnerships in the UK and Australia (Winn 2006, p. 1; Gale *et al.* 2010).

By 2004, the annual evaluation of CROP demonstrated significantly higher educational performance outcomes of CROP students against a random sample of public school students, with the exception of grade point average of community college students. Variables measured include the progression of school students

from one year to the next, the percentage of 12th graders receiving standard diplomas, the percentage enrolled in higher education, and the percentage of community college and state university students with a grade point average above 2.0. The evaluation comprised 8,286 programme participants and a random sample of 10,160 public school students stratified by race and income (Winn 2006, p. 2).

While the Floridian evaluation model is more advanced methodologically than that of other countries, there is an opportunity for Australia to develop a rigorous form of social programme evaluation through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program. Under paragraph 1.80.5(f) of the HEPPP guidelines, the Government clarifies universities;

... will be required, as part of their Partnership programs, to provide an 'evidence base' for proposed programs. This will need to include intended program outcomes, methods for achieving these outcomes, and associated measures for tracking outcomes. For experimental and pilot projects, providers will need to demonstrate how the program will achieve the objectives outlined at section 1.70.1 and the principles outlined at section 1.80.5' (DEEWR 2010, p. 18).

As illustrated, the guidelines require evidence based evaluation of programme outcomes against established policy objectives. The new criteria for partnerships funding evince a significant change in government regulation of student access and equity activities in universities. Under the previous legislation – the Equity Support Program – there was no demand for evidence-based evaluation of university-school partnerships.

### Fit For Purpose: A Mixed Method Approach to Evaluation Research

The proposed approach to assessing the effect of university-schools partnerships is a mixed method research design that produces quantitative and qualitative data to enable summative and formative evaluation of programmes. The reason for selecting this approach is that it addresses most readily the logic underlying government funding of university partnerships with disadvantaged schools, as articulated in the objectives and principles of the HEPPP.

Several scholars have observed that 'pragmatism' has been a core motivation for the evolution of mixed method evaluation research, which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; McConney, Rudd & Ayres 2002, p. 122).

Greene traces the history of mixed methods back to the 1980s and explains that social scientists in the 'highly practical fields' such as 'education, nursing, and especially evaluation' have been using a variety of evaluation methods because 'the contexts in which they worked called for both generality and particularity' (Greene 2008, p. 7). However, she argues that theoretical and epistemological concerns have also driven the evolution of mixed methods research in more theoretical fields such as development economics (Greene 2008, pp. 7-8). In their 2009 book *Mixed Method Design: Principles and Procedures*, Morse and Niehaus offer a comprehensive treatment of mixed method design. They explain:

Our definition of mixed methods is that the study consists of a qualitative or quantitative core component and a supplementary component (which consists of qualitative or quantitative research strategies but is not a complete study in itself). The research question dictates the theoretical drive, as either inductive or deductive, so that the onus is on the researcher to be versatile and competently switch inductive and deductive positions according to the need of the study ... We have presented our view - it appears to work, appears to pass validity tests, and gets one to where one is trying to go (Morse & Niehaus 2009, p. 20).

This definition offers a partial solution to the main argument against mixed methods; the perceived incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative paradigms and the resultant confusion about how to combine them in a single research project (Morse & Niehaus 2009, p. 19). However, Morse and Niehaus identify a major problem with mixed method research design: 'there is no consensus about how to evaluate mixed methods' (Morse & Niehaus 2009, p. 20). It is observable in their definition of mixed methods that the methodology may produce a repeated emphasis on the front end and implementation process components of policy to the subordination of testable outcomes against policy objectives. It is exactly this problem that, as discussed throughout this article, has undermined the political and scientific legitimacy of social programmes for the past half century.

The rise of mixed methods research has produced an attendant need to clarify not only its theoretical purpose in relation to evaluation, but its formal methodological structure. A useful distinction is the delineation between different purposes of evaluation made by Nevo. He explains that, 'evaluation can serve two functions, the 'formative' and the 'summative.' In its forma-

tive function evaluation is used for the improvement and development of an ongoing activity (or program, person, product, etc.) In its summative function, evaluation is used for accountability, certification, or selection' (Nevo 1983, p. 119).

Since that early definition, evaluation epistemology has become more complex as scholars attempt to find a model that allows for different research requirements. In their analysis on the integration of qualitative and quantitative research, Tashakkori and Teddlie conclude that while integration may occur at any time during the research project, 'true mixed method designs have clearly articulated mixed research questions, necessitating the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches in all stages of the study' (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 284). However, like Morse and Niehaus, they allow that elements of a study may have research questions that are predominantly qualitative or quantitative (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, pp. 284-285).

To distinguish fully integrated from partially integrated methods, Tashakkori and Teddlie categorise different types of mixed designs create a separate subcategory called quasi-mixed designs (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, pp. 288-289). Within mixed designs, they identify five types of methods: parallel, sequential, conversion, multilevel and fully integrated (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 289). Parallel mixed designs are those in which there are at least two interconnected strands, each requiring either qualitative or quantitative questions, data collection and analysis. The strands remain either purely qualitative or quantitative, that is, parallel (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 289). Sequential designs are those in which there are at least two strands occurring chronologically with mixed qualitative and quantitative questions and analysis resulting from the findings of the previous element (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, pp. 289-290). Conversion designs involve mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches at all stages.

**Table A: Mixed Method Evaluation Model for the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program**

<i>HEPPP Objective 1.70.1</i>	<i>Research Method</i>	<i>Activity Type/s</i>	<i>Evaluation Instrument</i>	<i>Performance Indicator</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
a. Assist in improving the understanding and awareness of higher education as a viable post-school option	Qualitative	Master classes that introduce students to and familiarise them with university curriculum.	Survey	Aspirations and awareness raised	Proportion of targeted cohort with increased awareness above an established knowledge threshold. Increase in proportion of targeted cohort aspiring to higher education before and after intervention.
b. Assist in pre-tertiary achievement, either at school or via an alternative pathway, to enable consideration for access to higher education	Quantitative	Early intervention literacy and numeracy mentoring programme.	Pre and post activity testing	Test results	Improved literacy and/or numeracy based on pre and post testing.
c. Encourage an increase in the proportion of [people from low SES backgrounds] who apply for attendance at a provider	Quantitative	Admissions & scholarships workshops to assist students to navigate pathways to higher education.	Application cohort tracking	Application rate of low SES cohort targeted compared with non-low SES cohort in a given year.	Increased application rate of targeted cohort against random sample.
d. Support [people from low SES backgrounds] in linking with higher education providers.	Quantitative	On campus activities.	Tracking of number of 'linking' activities held with targeted cohort against random sample.	Proportion of targeted cohort participating in activities and proportion making contact with HE provider.	Proportion of targeted cohort participating in activities and making contact with higher education providers is equal to - or above - the rate of the random sample.

*\*Activity type lists only one activity for the purpose of simplification. There are many examples that could be listed against each objective.*

The rule guiding this approach is that when one type of data (either qualitative or quantitative) is collected, it is analysed using the other type of approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 290). The multilevel and fully integrated designs are progressively more integrative.

### **A mixed method evaluation model for university-school partnerships**

For the purpose of evaluating university partnerships with disadvantaged schools, it is proposed that the parallel mixed design would be the most useful. The conversion, multilevel and fully integrated approaches are more experimental than logical at this stage and would thus not be easily testable against policy objectives. The sequential design has been rejected because of its requirement for chronological sequencing, which would make coherent longitudinal research of any large and diverse social programmes, including existing university-school partnerships, difficult. The parallel mixed design produces contains three elements that are useful to analysis of university partnerships with disadvantaged schools against the requirements of the HEPPP and social programmes more broadly:

1. A combination of causal and descriptive research design and thus the possibility of testing results against a core hypothesis (the main policy objective underpinning the programme) and sub-hypotheses (the programme components).
2. Qualitative and quantitative data generation.
3. Summative and formative assessments that can be used to assess individual programmes against institutional performance indicators, improve programme design and implementation incrementally; and compare programmes in a meta-evaluation for national policy development.

A simplified example of the parallel mixed design applied to the HEPPP is presented in Table A. To close the gap between government policy objectives and social programme implementation, I have selected the principles and objectives of the partnership component of the HEPPP as the basis for the evaluation programme. Under the Partnership component B, Section 1.70, activities are to be directed towards domestic undergraduate students from a low SES background (DEEWR 2010, p. 16).

While Table A provides an example of how a mixed method research and evaluation design might be employed to measure progress against the partnership objectives of the HEPPP, the question remains as to

how the results of the mixed model could be used to assess whether the HEPPP, or any equivalent social programme, were successful at the level of national policy. This is because there is yet to be devised a method for synthesising data derived from mixed methods research that provides for meta-analysis. The only way in which a meta-analysis of HEPPP partnerships could be undertaken would be to select a specific subset of partnership activities that evidence demonstrates are likely to have the strongest impact on the principal policy objective of increasing low SES students' articulation to higher education and test them in a randomised trial across schools. I suggest that for the purpose of evaluating the HEPPP at the policy rather than programme level, one of two approaches to meta-analysis might be considered:

1. Only the results arising from the quantitative methods are measured in meta-analysis for the purpose of determining efficacy against the principal objective of the HEPPP, which is to increase the rate of low SES students' participation in higher education.
2. Quantitative methods are used to develop national policy, while the results from mixed methods are used to inform institutional level improvement in partnerships programme design.

### **Conclusion**

The evolution of evaluation as a research field raises new challenges for policymakers and managers of government funded programmes. The question of how to measure mass programmes against single, or multiple policy objectives demands awareness not only of evaluation research methodologies, but how the politics of evaluation may affect the ability to implement desirable models.

In the field of social programmes, the politics of evaluation has been an impediment to the introduction of a linear model of evaluation research that establishes a causal relationship between the original policy objective and its programmatic outcomes. Mixed method research offers a model to bridge the philosophical and instrumental divide between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Perhaps more importantly, mixed methods allow for an understanding human variability which, rather than necessarily being a signal of programme failure, may, in some cases, be an opportunity for progression. The proposed model for measuring partnerships established under the Australian government's Higher Education Participation and



Partnerships Program demonstrates a mixed method approach to evaluation. This method will inform programme efficacy against the principal policy objective of the HEPPP and enable formative assessment to improve programme design over time. The creation of a meta-analytical evaluation model for public policy such as the HEPPP is critical to furthering evaluation research in the field of social programmes.

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