

Round Table Discussion

Title: Connections and Leverage: Using good design to improve baseline evaluation studies

Connections between people, ideas and time; whether lateral, hierarchical or opportunistic, offer evaluators points of reference, points of view and meeting points. Leverage is a more an active concept that implies purposeful analysis, with the expectation of improvement.

These two simple concepts are valuable themes for improving the design of an evaluation programme, particularly one that is large, complex and long-term.

The concepts of connection and leverage will form the basis of the roundtable discussion, which will look at four aspects of management and design of evaluation programmes. These aspects have been developed, and could be further developed, in an evaluation programme managed by the presenter.

The discussion will consider:

1. use of international literature, especially OECD material, for programme planning;
2. design of baseline studies and analysis of historical data for policy implementation work and as a counterfactual for subsequent output analysis;
3. development of evaluation and monitoring networks that contribute programme planning expertise, skills and tools for analysis, and quality assurance of projects; and
4. engagement in government and business networks to facilitate the uptake of, and action on, report findings and recommendations.

The discussion will be facilitated by Kathleen Palmer, who is a Senior Adviser: Performance and Evaluation at the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology in Wellington, New Zealand.

The context for the discussion is a five-year, cross-government evaluation of the effectiveness of the newly introduced New Zealand research and development (R&D) tax credit in meeting government aims. The evaluation programme is based on a logic model for the policy intervention, and so over time, the evaluation's focus will move from baseline to input, output and on to outcome additionality.

Because this evaluation programme is running alongside the implementation of the New Zealand R&D tax incentive, the evaluation provides an interesting window on how a nation's business community aligns itself to a new government policy. The first fine- and mid-grained baseline studies to capture pre-intervention data have been completed.

Although these studies were designed to simply provide reference points to measure the effectiveness of the R&D tax credit at a later date, they are already proving useful in other ways. The findings have confirmed or strengthened government action related to business R&D, and have identified possible impacts in other parts of the science

system. The findings also provide interesting material for socio-economic analysis of firms.

This roundtable will be the second international discussion involving the evaluation of the New Zealand R&D tax credit, and will contribute to our international network connections and leverage for this evaluation.

More information about the evaluation programme, and published reports, are available at www.morst.govt.nz.

Kathleen Palmer can be contacted at kathleen.palmer@morst.govt.nz.