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A brief exploration of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service's (IGEES) outputs and its role in Department of Children and Youth Affairs policymaking

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Introduction

This paper presents a high-level exploration of Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) policy-related evaluation and analytical reports, published by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES). The reports represent a mix of internally developed DCYA and externally developed Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) outputs.

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The paper explores what the reports may tell us about the role of IGEES, to date, in informing DCYA budgeting and policymaking. The exploration is grounded in Boyle's 2014 assessment of Irish government evaluation, which suggests that internal department-produced evaluations are more likely to recommend minor changes to programme implementation, while DPER evaluations are more likely to recommend major programme changes, or termination.

The paper begins with a brief summary of Ireland's government evaluation system, presented in an international context. A brief assessment of two key IGEES-supported DCYA policy-related reports follows: one produced internally (DCYA) and one externally (DPER). The assessment is informed by interviews with key senior DCYA officials.

A key consideration is whether there were differences in impacts arising from the internal versus external reports. It is suggested that DCYA-related IGEES reports may challenge assumptions regarding internal versus external evaluations described in Boyle's assessment, and in the wider literature. The paper concludes with a suggestion that IGEES central and line department staff collaborate more often on evaluation projects, to help strengthen the impact of their work.

Ireland's evaluation system

According to Furubo & Sandahl's (2002) *International Atlas of Evaluation*, Ireland's evaluation system has been driven primarily by external bodies, such as the EU and, to a lesser extent, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (McNamara et al., 2009). Formal requirements to evaluate EU Structural Funds during the 1980s and 1990s led the Irish government to train evaluators with significant *ex ante*, intermediate and *ex post* evaluation expertise. While in the late 1990s and early 2000s there was increasing emphasis on reviews and evaluations of domestic policies and programmes, dramatic economic improvements also resulted in diminished priority for evaluations. This led to a dissipation of the pool of evaluators trained during the preceding years (Boyle, 2014).

A number of key government reforms were introduced as a result of the fiscal crisis that followed the global economic and social crisis of 2008. The Irish government, with external impetus from the EU and International Monetary Fund (IMF), renewed their focus on ensuring value for money in public spending (Boyle, 2014). The wider public sector reform initiative, which included the establishment of DPER in

2011, heralded a 'renewal of government evaluation capacity' (Boyle, 2014). In its *Comprehensive Expenditure Report 2012–14*, the government committed to the use of evaluations in a range of departmental and thematic-based Comprehensive Reviews of Expenditure, the inclusion of more targeted reviews such as Focused Policy Assessments (FPAs), and the introduction of IGEES.

For Boyle (2014), a positive feature of the new regime was that evaluations were conducted from within a number of locations, including corporate and central government, line departments, agencies and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Boyle, 2014). IGEES played a key role in this regard, by developing a network of evaluators and policy analysts across government.

The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES)

DPER established IGEES in 2012 as a cross-government service to enhance economic and analytical capacity in government budgeting and policymaking. IGEES has a recruitment and training function, hiring economic and policy analysts who are placed in evaluation units across a broad range of departments. These analysts conducted appraisals and evaluations as outlined in the Public Spending Code (DPER, 2013). Since 2017, they have also delivered a range of Spending Review papers (DPER, 2018).

According to Boyle (2014), IGEES represents an important initiative that has helped embed a more permanent evaluation culture. Although the economic crisis that precipitated the establishment of IGEES may have subsided in recent years, the number of IGEES recruits working in the system continues to grow. In addition, economic recovery has given way to uncertainty in the global economy (Donohoe, 2019), likely to be greatly increased by the Covid-19 pandemic.² Prior to the emergence of the pandemic, the government had sought to avoid the high expenditure levels experienced in pre-crisis years (Department of the Taoiseach, 2019). Therefore, while DPER was established to reform public expenditure at a time of significant government cost-cutting, the importance of evaluation and policy analysis has remained.

² At time of writing the economic impact of Covid-19 is only beginning to emerge. It will be of interest to researchers and policymakers to explore how government economic and evaluation capacity responds to the crisis over time.

Ireland's evaluation culture: Broader political contexts

According to Mutch (2012), evaluation systems across the world have been subjected to ongoing shifts in 'ideological, political and economic forces'. Vedung (2010) outlined a series of evaluation 'waves', from the rationalists of the 1960s to the more recent proponents of evidence-based policy. Each of these waves has been 'coupled to diverse, more general public sector governance doctrines', with 'strong currents' coming from both the political left and right (Vedung, 2010: see also Martinaitis et al., 2018).

A dominant trend in Western countries since the 1980s has been neoliberalism, whose doctrine of governance is New Public Management (or 'NPM'; see Breidahl et al., 2017; Hood & Dixon, 2016; Mutch, 2012). NPM has been characterised by a 'desire to replace the presumed inefficiency of hierarchical bureaucracy with the presumed efficiency of markets' (Vedung, 2010; see also Kalimullah et al., 2019). This replaced an earlier belief in the capacity of the public sector to solve social problems (Vedung, 2010). Proponents have demanded that the public sector deliver better services, at lower cost. Evaluation's key role in the new era would be to ensure government accountability and value for money (Vedung, 2010).

Critics have suggested that NPM approaches neglect public service quality (Hood & Dixon, 2016). Hood & Dixon (2016) have asserted that these approaches have led to the displacement of values of 'justice and equity'. Debates around NPM have uncovered a fundamental tension between those who understand government evaluation as serving an accountability function, and those who understand its role as facilitating learning and service improvements (see Benjamin, 2015, cited in Dahler-Larsen & Boodhoo, 2019).

A number of evaluation commentators have acknowledged that neoliberal political ideologies have been supported by 'transnational agencies' such as the OECD, the World Bank and the EU (see Boyle, 1997; McNamara et al., 2009; Mutch, 2012; Ruane, 2004). Given that Ireland operates as a small, open market economy, and given that its post-2008 crisis reform programme was heavily informed by the EU and IMF, questions remain regarding the extent to which this neoliberal wave penetrated the government evaluation system.

Boyle (1997, 2014) and McNamara et al. (2009) have suggested that Ireland's political culture of partnership and consensus has shaped Ireland's evaluation system more than neoliberalism or NPM. Boyle (2014) argued that while there were ample rhetorical displays of NPM

ideals, practice in the 1990s and early 2000s was dominated by the social partnership model. As a result, while the UK and US pursued evaluation as a form of accountability, Ireland pursued a more developmental and non-confrontational evaluation focus (Boyle, 2014; McNamara et al., 2009).

As far back as 1997, Boyle acknowledged that, while Anglo-Saxon countries favoured market-oriented approaches, drawn from 'public choice or agency theories', Ireland's approach was akin to other small European countries where a corporatist political tradition predominated, such as the Netherlands and Denmark (Boyle, 1997; McNamara et al., 2009), which 'limited the extent to which managerialist notions' could enter into the evaluation culture.

However, the post-2008 crisis led to a dismantling of the social partnership model (Boyle, 2014). Robinson (2014) has described how, internationally, 'difficult fiscal circumstances' created 'unparalleled pressures for expenditure cuts'. Rather than engage in 'less adversarial' developmental evaluations, the Irish government now needed to engage in critical evaluations, to inform budget cuts and resource reallocations (Boyle, 2014; McNamara et al., 2009). DPER was established during this period, with the objective of driving public service reform, supported by economists and policy analysts recruited through the fledgling IGEES, who delivered evaluations and analyses in service to this objective.

Internal versus external evaluations

In terms of definitions, Mathison (1991) has provided the following: 'internal evaluations are those conducted by individuals employed by the entity that they are evaluating, whereas external evaluators are not'. The structure of IGEES lends itself to a distinction between evaluation outputs produced internally by IGEES staff assigned to a government department, and those produced by staff based in DPER. The evaluation literature identifies key distinctions between 'internal' and 'external' evaluations, each of which presents its own challenges (Boyle, 2014; Mayne et al., 1999; Menestrel et al., 2014).

The typical strengths associated with internal evaluations are that they are more likely to be conducted by evaluators who are closer to programme delivery, and may therefore be more effective at 'addressing operational issues' (Boyle, 2014). Given their position within an organisation, internal evaluators may also be capable of addressing issues that 'external evaluators would not be able to

understand clearly in a short timeframe' (Minnett, 1999, cited in Bourgeois et al., 2011). This central position may also help internal evaluators to make recommendations that are 'politically acceptable' (Menestrel et al., 2014).

In terms of challenges, internal evaluators face issues of credibility, related to perceptions of subjectivity arising from dependence on the organisation they are evaluating for employment and career opportunities (Bourgeois et al., 2011; Menestrel et al., 2014). Evaluation researchers have found that internal evaluators may tend to evaluate the practice of their organisations more favourably (Menestrel et al., 2014).

External evaluators, meanwhile, may be valued more highly due to their relative lack of bias, and possibly bring a greater level of expertise (Boyle, 2014; Menestrel et al., 2014). Drawing on Mayne et al. (1999), Boyle (2014) has suggested that external evaluators' 'distance from the programme or policy' makes them more suited to examining the continued relevance and impacts of policies and programmes. They are therefore better placed to make critical assessments that can inform government budgeting (Robinson, 2014). Vanhoof & Petegem (2007), who presented a review of the literature in this regard, have suggested that in a context where evaluation's accountability objectives are in the ascendance, external evaluations are often perceived as superior.

However, external evaluators' objectivity may not be guaranteed. Picciotto (2016) has referred to recent advances in behavioural psychology that have 'punctured the myth of the purely rational agent' (Kahneman, 2011, cited in Picciotto, 2016). Rather than representing purely value-free rationalists, external evaluators may also be subject to professional interests. For Sonnichsen (2000, p. 132, cited in Bourgeois et al., 2011), 'neither internal nor external evaluators have a defensible, monopolistic claim on objectivity.' Drawing on a 'principal-agent' formulation, Picciotto (2016) suggests that contracted evaluators (agents) may be incentivised by the prospect of future contracts to focus on results that do not threaten the organisational 'status quo' (Picciotto, 2016).

Boyle's (2014) analysis of Irish government policy evaluation identified how internal evaluations conducted within Irish government departments were associated more with process and implementation-based recommendations, while external evaluations were associated more with impact and continued relevance. Boyle (2014) analysed 428 recommendations made in 19 value for money and policy review

(VFMPR) reports published between 2011 and 2014, as well as 5 evaluation papers produced by the DPER Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit (CEEU). He found that of the VFMPR recommendations, only 1 per cent recommended substantial re-design of the programme, while 94 per cent recommended programme adjustments. The 5 CEEU evaluation papers were more likely to suggest substantial redesign (55 per cent of the 29 recommendations) or programme/part-programme termination (10 per cent).

While not minimising the importance of recommendations aimed at improving how a programme or policy operates, Boyle's (2014) findings suggested that internally delivered VFMPRs were of limited use in terms of government evaluation's accountability and resource reallocation function. In this context, he suggested that the delivery of both internal (departmental) and external (central department and privately contracted) evaluations would ensure that the benefits of each would be achieved on an ongoing basis (Boyle, 2014). He concurs with Mayne et al. (1999), who asserted that 'evaluation systems should be anchored in several places', and concludes that the IGEES structure, as part of the wider evaluation system, would satisfy this approach.

Picciotto (2016) has suggested that evaluators 'funded and controlled by a supreme governance authority' could be better protected from potential interference from those whose programmes or policies they are evaluating (Picciotto, 2016). Although not representing a 'supreme governance authority', the location of central IGEES within DPER could help provide a level of objectivity and protection not available to IGEES staff in line departments. However, a key consideration when assessing Boyle's analysis is whether internal evaluators in government departments experience some degree of independence. According to Minnett (1999, cited in Bourgeois et al., 2011), internal evaluators can maintain some functional distance from policies and programmes. Picciotto (2016) suggests that evaluations carried out by independent units within a department that report to boards of directors are well placed to overcome issues such as 'information asymmetry', while also maintaining objectivity. In terms of IGEES staff located in line departments, a more centralised departmental evaluation structure, where evaluations are conducted within a dedicated unit that reports to the management board and secretary general, could provide independence (Minnett, 1999, cited in Bourgeois et al., 2011). This could help reduce bias, both real and perceived (Picciotto, 2016).

In addition, a number of evaluation researchers have pointed to the potential of combining internal and external evaluations (Menestrel et al., 2014; Picciotto, 2016; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007). For Martinaitis et al. (2018), ‘real-world’ evaluation systems are ‘characterised by multiple and competing stakeholders’ and so evaluators must adapt in a manner that is purpose-driven, so as to maximise evaluation impact. Evaluation researchers have referred to alternative models, such as ‘hybrid’ (Menestrel et al., 2014; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007), ‘collaborative’ (O’Sullivan, 2012) and ‘complementary’ approaches (Mutch, 2012). These approaches aim to bring together the strengths of internal and external evaluations, in order to mitigate the challenges associated with each. To achieve this, both internal and external parties must operate within a relationship of mutually beneficial learning and professional respect (Menestrel et al., 2014; O’Sullivan, 2004, cited in Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007). Internal evaluations can ensure the capturing of local issues and priorities (Nevo, 2001; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007), while external evaluators can help ‘legitimise’ the results (Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007). For Picciotto, the synergies produced by a combined approach can help shift evaluation impacts from ‘single-loop learning’, which encourages agents to follow agreed programme rules, to ‘triple-loop learning’, which ‘establishes internal mechanisms that ensure that the organization learns to learn’ (Picciotto, 2016). Such an approach can also build the cultural competence and methodological expertise of each party (Menestrel et al., 2014; O’Sullivan, 2012).

In terms of the potential impacts of evaluations on policies and programmes, Martinaitis et al. (2018) have suggested that evaluations fall into three categories: ‘symbolic’, which provide legitimacy, but that reflect externally imposed evaluation systems that separate evaluations from decision-making; ‘instrumental’, which provide information to improve the management and delivery of programmes; and ‘conceptual’, which create knowledge for policymakers about cause and effect. They point out that ‘symbolic’ evaluations are characteristic of younger evaluation systems, while ‘conceptual’ evaluations come close to the ‘ideal’ of engaging high-level policymakers in reform processes. Advanced methodological design is necessary to answer causal questions that link a policy or programme to population outcomes (Martinaitis et al., 2018).

There now follows a brief exploration of IGEES-supported DCYA evaluation and policy analysis published between 2014 and 2019, which will be assessed in the context of the evaluation literature outlined above.

IGEES-supported DCYA evaluation and policy analysis outputs: 2014–2019

The IGEES website provides access to nine IGEES-supported reports relating to DCYA policies and programmes. These reports were produced between 2014 and 2019, as follows:

- *Focused Policy Assessment of Early Childhood Education and the ECCE Scheme* (2014) – conducted by the CEEU within DPER.
- *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Programmes* (2014) – conducted internally by the DCYA, with internal IGEES supports provided in 2014.
- *Focused Policy Assessment of the Affordable Childcare Scheme* (2018) – conducted internally by the DCYA, with IGEES supports, this paper represented a refinement of the cost model for Affordable Childcare Scheme estimates and budgeting.
- *Social Impact Assessment: Targeted Childcare Schemes* (2016) – conducted by the Vote Section of DPER, as part of the Social Impact Assessment Series (DPER, 2016).
- *Social Impact Assessment: Targeted Childcare Programmes* (2018) – conducted by the IGEES Central Unit in DPER, as a follow-up to the 2016 assessment. Both assessments provided descriptive analysis only.
- *Prevention and Early Intervention Series Focused Policy Assessment: Early Learning and Childcare* (2018) – one of three DCYA-related descriptive reports developed by the DPER Prevention and Early Intervention Unit (PEIU).
- *Prevention and Early Intervention Series Focused Policy Assessment: Family Services Supporting Children and their Parents* (2019) – the second of three DCYA policy-related descriptive reports developed by the PEIU (DPER, 2019).
- *Prevention and Early Intervention Series Focused Policy Assessment: Programmatic Interventions for Children and Young People and their Parents* (2019) – the third in the PEIU series of DCYA policy-related FPAs, providing descriptive statistics and trend analyses.
- *Spending Review 2019. Tusla: Assessment of Performance Measurement* (2019) – conducted by the central DPER IGEES Unit as part of the three-year (2017–2019) DPER Spending Review cycle. This analysis presented descriptive statistics and trend analyses.

Boyle's (2014) assessment of evaluation reports examined recommendations made in IGEES-published reports covering a broad range of policies and programmes across government. The authors of the nine DCYA-related reports above made policy recommendations in two reports only, i.e. the internal *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Programmes* (2014) and external *Focused Policy Assessment of Early Childhood Education and the ECCE Scheme* (2014). It is therefore only possible to apply Boyle's method of assessing policy recommendations to these two reports. The remaining seven reports were predominantly descriptive in nature.

The policy impacts of the two reports, one of which was conducted internally and the other externally, will now be explored at a high level.

Internal (IGEES-supported) DCYA output

Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Programmes

This evaluation was conducted in the main by a DCYA evaluator between October 2012 and December 2014. An IGEES administrative officer economist supported the project from 2014. The DCYA evaluator conducted the VFMPR according to the Public Spending Code. The report presented twelve recommendations. These recommendations have informed the development of a major reform plan that has focused predominantly on the amalgamation of youth programmes into a single funding scheme. The review also recommended that a performance-related governance system would enable routine monitoring through enhanced data collection on costs, outputs and outcomes. All twelve recommendations presented in the VFMPR report either have been or are being implemented by the DCYA.

In terms of considering the strengths and challenges of an internal evaluation approach, the following may be considered: the VFMPR evaluator was a recent appointment to the DCYA who was responding to an established desire for programmatic reform within the department and wider youth sector. This evaluator had prior evaluation expertise and knowledge of the youth sector, which may have helped provide a sense of independence, credibility and buy-in for reform implementation. A DCYA official consulted for this paper also pointed out that, as oversight for the evaluation was provided by DPER, the boundary between internal and external evaluation blurred over time. According to this official, the depth of literature that supported links between youth programme interventions and youth outcomes also positively reflected the

evaluator's expertise. This expertise may have acted as a defence against criticisms. The official felt that 'buy-in' would be difficult if conducted by an external consultant, who would 'not be likely to adequately capture the nuances of the sector'. 'Buy-in' would also be difficult if the VFMPR had been delivered by 'generalists or economist specialists' within DPER.

External DPER IGEES Output

Focused Policy Assessment of Early Childhood Education and the ECCE Scheme

The authors of this FPA sought to align progress in ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) scheme delivery, with progress on actions outlined in the Department of Education and Skills' 'Literacy and Numeracy Strategy' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). However, the FPA authors' approach was disputed by DCYA, with a footnote included in the report as follows:

The Department of Children & Youth Affairs does not accept that the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is an appropriate context in which to set an FPA of the ECCE programme and strongly questions the appropriateness of this approach ... While the ECCE programme was unrelated to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, published by the Department of Education & Skills in June 2011, its existence enabled the Department of Children & Youth Affairs to subscribe to a number of commitments which could be delivered through participating early years services.

The report recommended that progress on the educational programme and the use of assessment, monitoring and reporting in terms of impact on the overall quality would require:

- gathering evidence with regard to adherence to the curriculum framework;
- setting out the relationship between the curriculum framework and the anticipated benefits;
- monitoring and recording the use by ECCE practitioners of the various tools, guides and other mechanisms that have been introduced to enhance the quality of the ECCE scheme.

There is no evidence, from discussions with DCYA policymakers, or from DCYA records, whether this FPA report resulted in programme reform or the reallocation of budgets or resources. While the recommended actions have been progressed by DCYA and Department of Education and Skills policymakers, there is no evidence that progress was influenced by the FPA report.

Findings and Conclusion

The findings of this limited analysis of DCYA policy-related IGEES-supported reports present a more complicated picture of internal versus external evaluations than has been provided in the literature reviewed for this paper. Only two out of nine reports included recommendations for policymakers: the internally delivered *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Programmes* and the externally delivered *Focused Policy Assessment of Early Childhood Education and the ECCE Scheme*. Of these, the VFMPR had the most direct policy impact. While limited to two evaluation reports only, these findings seem to differ from Boyle's (2014) analysis. Of the seven externally delivered DPER reports, only one included recommendations, with no evidence of this report having impacted on policy development. The six other externally delivered reports presented descriptive data and analysis.

Boyle's analysis (2014) supported an assertion that budget-related evaluations would be conducted more effectively by external evaluators. These evaluators could work independently and make challenging recommendations. However, the limited analysis conducted for this paper does not suggest that external IGEES-supported DCYA-related reports resulted in major programme reforms, the reallocation of budgets or resources, or indeed programme termination.

Under Martinaitis et al.'s (2018) categorisation of evaluations, two of the externally delivered reports, the social impact assessments, represent a 'symbolic' evaluation output. As the *Focused Policy Assessment of the Affordable Childcare Scheme* (Early Years Unit & Research and Evaluation Unit, 2018) represented a refinement of the Affordable Childcare Scheme cost model, it functioned as 'instrumental'; however it had 'symbolic' elements, with a decoupling of the evaluation from policy decision-making. While the FPA of the ECCE Scheme aimed to guide change, and therefore aimed for an 'instrumental' function, it may have been ignored by DCYA

policymakers as a result of a disagreement relating to the FPA focus. Only one of the nine DCYA-related IGEES reports achieved a 'conceptual' function: *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Programmes*. This report was produced internally within the DCYA.

The VFMPR was published in 2014, with limited policy impact arising from IGEES-supported papers in subsequent years. Therefore, findings from this limited sample may raise questions around the developmental trajectory of evaluation systems suggested in the literature, where systems mature from producing 'symbolic' towards more 'conceptual' evaluations over time. A follow-up study, involving consultations with the relevant DPER officials, could help ascertain whether the more descriptive DPER-led outputs listed in this paper have assisted with the budgeting process.

More recent outputs could reflect a shift in focus for IGEES. Since 2017, IGEES staff have engaged in shorter, more targeted annual Spending Reviews (DPER, 2018), which are closely aligned to, and published in tandem with, the annual budget. However, in turn, IGEES staff have published relatively fewer FPAs or VFMPRs. It remains to be seen whether this refocusing towards shorter Spending Review reports represents a strategic shift for IGEES that may be rooted in broader changes in government and economic priorities.

In terms of the social impact assessments, and the *Prevention and Early Intervention Series* of FPAs, this refocusing of IGEES resources could echo Delahais & Lacouette-Fougère's (2019) assessment of the 'Modernisation of Public Action' programme in France, delivered between 2012 and 2017. They described how the building of evaluation resources during these years led to gradual improvements in output quality, as new evaluators 'learned by doing'. In this way, IGEES recruits' baseline-setting studies and short descriptive papers may be helping to build expertise over time. It remains to be seen whether IGEES may be developing its longer-term capacity, shifting to the delivery of more outcome and impact evaluations as evaluation expertise grows (Delahais & Lacouette-Fougère, 2019).

The findings of this limited analysis may also raise questions regarding the classification of 'internal' and 'external' evaluators. It appears that the *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Programmes* evaluator's position as a new DCYA recruit with prior evaluation and youth sector expertise was key to buy-in, both within the department and the youth sector. There was also a pre-existing willingness within the department to engage in a reform of the youth

funding programmes. This was matched by external pressure from the sector, who were seeking change. For Martinaitis et al. (2018), these conditions provide fertile ground for the use of evaluative knowledge to improve design and/or implementation (see also Weiss, 1993). This may be contrasted with the DPER-led *Focused Policy Assessment of Early Childhood Education and the ECCE Scheme*, which was disputed by the DCYA prior to its publication, and for which there is no clear record of policy impact.

The distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ IGEES outputs may require more considered analysis. Mathison (2011) and others have debated whether a clear distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ evaluations is ‘false’. According to a DCYA official consulted for this paper, the boundaries between internal (DCYA) and external (DPER) were blurred during the VFMPR process. It may therefore be the case that concerns around legitimacy, bias and expertise between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ evaluations were not prevalent during the VFMPR process.

As discussed earlier in this paper, a number of evaluation researchers have suggested that ‘real-world’ evaluation systems are characterised more by ‘multiple and competing stakeholders’ than by clear ‘internal’ versus ‘external’ definitions. Evaluators must therefore adapt to this reality so as to maximise evaluation impact, with one potential approach being to combine internal and external evaluations (Menestrel et al., 2014; Picciotto, 2016; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2007). This could include ‘hybrid’, ‘collaborative’ and ‘complementary’ approaches. While there is evidence of IGEES staff adopting these more integrative approaches, there may be merit in formal consideration of these approaches in both DPER and line department evaluation work plans. In this way, line department IGEES staff could bring their knowledge of the historical and cultural contexts of policy or programme delivery, while leveraging the independence and expertise held by their DPER IGEES colleagues.

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