

## In this issue:

### Social sciences in the 21st century

Good practice progress .....	2
Datasaving and sharing update .....	2
Coming of Age feedback sought .....	3
Clearinghouse for information on family violence .....	4
Commission's project to provide families snapshot .....	5
Blue Skies research .....	5
Social science and the challenges of the 21st century .....	6
Chair's comment .....	7
Longitudinal study of Pasifika families' health and wellbeing .....	8
Labour market research trends .....	9
Improving evaluative activities .....	10

# Towards 2020 for the social sciences

*Building long-term research capability and ensuring there are career pathways for emerging researchers were key themes at a recent social sciences symposium.*

The Royal Society of New Zealand hosted the symposium *Towards 2020: Challenges for the Social Science Community* in May, in conjunction with the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, the BRCSS Network and SPEaR. Professor Caroline Saunders, chair of the Royal Society of New Zealand's Social Sciences Committee, said it was timely to look ahead for social sciences to build an increasingly dynamic and relevant future, engaging in appropriate areas with public policy issues and debates.



Caroline Saunders

Caroline said there was positive dialogue about the future, along with thoughtful consideration of current barriers. "On the plus side, it's good to see progress through initiatives such as SPEaR and BRCSS to build capacity and coordination. The workshop also demonstrated the value in drawing together the broader 'social science' community, including practitioners in private practice, research institutes and operating environments beyond core government and academic spaces," she said.

"There are challenges with the underlying things like having accessible databases, ongoing longitudinal studies, and the ability to readily scope potential future social issues. Secondly, there is a shortfall of emerging researchers. It's getting harder to recruit students, but we need to have those people now so they are there in a decade. A better-defined career structure would help." Caroline noted there was interest in opportunities for new and emerging academics to engage with the landscapes of government and to potentially contribute to knowledge building, which she saw as positive.

She said there were tertiary sector barriers affecting the environment to foster emerging researchers. "Performance-based research funding can reduce the incentive to do New Zealand-focused research. Plus, tertiary providers have autonomy on how to spend funding, and sometimes little goes direct to the social sciences."

The recently released *Coming of Age* report (see p. 3) was discussed, and Caroline said the Social Sciences Reference Group that produced the report would continue discussions with the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology over the issues. "One hopes the development of the sector continues. We must continue to build for the future."

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## Good practice progress

A SPEaR workshop to test draft good practice guidelines for social sector research and evaluation, held on 10–11 May, was attended by approximately 50 research and evaluation professionals from the public, private, academic and non-government sectors. The guidelines are designed to “lift the game” in practice and process terms, and create transparent expectations for all parties in the process.

Four facilitated work groups provided constructive feedback on the draft guidelines for contracting, ethics, research involving Māori and research involving Pacific peoples. “There was active debate, and broad agreement was reached about the principles-based approach used for framing the guidelines,” said Paul Honeybone from the SPEaR secretariat.

“How to produce useful guidance for a range of practitioners, while encompassing a range of world views and perspectives, is challenging. Despite this, with further development, engagement and consultation, we will get to a point where we have helpful resources that all parties in the R&E process will benefit from.”

Raewyn Good, lead presenter for SPEaR on the

programme, outlined the approach and draft materials to delegates. “We are unpacking advice for all content stages of activity in the lifecycle of R&E in the social policy context,” said Raewyn. “The product will be web-based with layers of information, which produces interesting conceptual challenges. The tiered approach looks hierarchical on paper, but will be multi-leveled online,” she said.



*Raewyn Good*

Sue Walker, convenor of the SPEaR Good Practice Working Party overseeing the developments, said the guidelines would be released progressively on the SPEaR website. “We are already aware of practitioners using the draft material in their contract negotiations, which bodes well,” said Sue.

For more information, watch for developments on [www.spear.govt.nz](http://www.spear.govt.nz) or contact [raewyn.good002@msd.govt.nz](mailto:raewyn.good002@msd.govt.nz)

## Datasaving and sharing update

*A workshop to advance leadership and cross-sector impetus on datasaving and sharing in social and environmental science provided the more than 40 people who attended with an update on latest international and national developments.*

The 15 June workshop, organised by the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MoRST), considered the array of current initiatives and provided an opportunity for discussion about the way forward in the respective sectors.

Presentations on major initiatives across government brought participants up to speed with the technical infrastructure and content management “state of play”. This was in the context of a discussion paper produced by MoRST on international approaches to publicly funded research data policy.

“There was value in bringing together social and environmental people involved in this arena to encourage ‘joining the dots’ and new leadership,” said workshop convenor Eric Pyle from MoRST.

SPEaR’s Paul Honeybone, who facilitated the social discussion stream, said consolidating a strategic approach for enhanced social research datasaving and sharing was a priority across the social science sector. “There are some unique challenges for improving data availability and use as access due to new technologies creates new opportunities.”

Paul said SPEaR would be working with lead agencies to continue to advance the social stream and has a working party to provide impetus and oversight.

For more information on the workshop, contact [louise.munro@morst.govt.nz](mailto:louise.munro@morst.govt.nz) For more information on the SPEaR social datasaving and sharing working party, contact [paul.honeybone001@msd.govt.nz](mailto:paul.honeybone001@msd.govt.nz)

# Coming of Age feedback sought

*Recommendations made by the Social Sciences Reference Group in its Coming of Age report include new cross-disciplinary funding, increased investment in social sciences research, and a Social Sciences Research Academy.*

The report, made public in May 2005, says social science researchers need to be fully involved in interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research. It recommends a new cross-disciplinary research funding stream in which social science researchers would have a lead role.



*Sally Casswell*

“Many of the large challenges in research are ‘cross cutting’ and at the interfaces between the separate research disciplines. The social sciences can contribute significant knowledge to the physical and natural sciences and technology communities,” the report says.

It recommends strategic long-term planning and funding of social research within the government sector, and increased investment in research initiated by social scientists rather than by government or funding agencies.

It also recommends the establishment of an independent Academy of Social Sciences Research, which would complement the work of SPEaR, the BRCSS Network and the Social Sciences Committee of the Royal Society.

The report acknowledges SPEaR’s roles in fostering cross-departmental connections between policy and research, and in promoting the importance of research

knowledge in underpinning policy and practice and in providing an evidential base for decisions.

SPEaR chair Professor Richard Bedford said there was scope for further investments in social sciences to build both the breadth and depth of the knowledge base, particularly considering the field receives less than three per cent of research, science and technology investment.

“Given the central importance of having a rich pool of social knowledge, if we are to have informed and democratic social development, this is a timely call from the research community. Despite positive governmental expenditure within the social Ministries, social research expenditure is still relatively underfunded,” Richard said.

Reference Group chair, Professor Sally Casswell, said she was looking forward to feedback on the report and its recommendations. “I hope people will jot a few points down on the website. I think there is a potential role for a Social Sciences Research Academy, which is intended to be complementary to the roles fulfilled by SPEaR, BRCSS and the Royal Society’s Social Sciences Committee. I’m really keen to hear from people if they think it would be useful and whether or not they are enthusiastic about this idea.”

The report and a feedback questionnaire are available at [www.morst.govt.nz](http://www.morst.govt.nz)

## Linkages research methodology workshop

Dr Ronald Fischer (left), Fellow at the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research (CACR), Victoria University of Wellington, and Professor Johnny Fontaine, of the University of Gent, the Netherlands, presented at a Linkages-funded research methodology workshop hosted by CACR. Dr Fischer and Professor Fontaine presented at the February workshop on the use of multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) analysis in cross-cultural research. Survey research involving more than one cultural group routinely faces two problems. The first is whether the items are understood and interpreted by all groups in the same way, and the second concerns the question of how data can be interpreted if some items are applicable for some groups but not others. MDS tools are powerful instruments for evaluating equivalence in these circumstances. For more information, contact [info@spear.govt.nz](mailto:info@spear.govt.nz)



# Clearinghouse for information on family violence

*The Family Violence Clearinghouse, the national centre for collating and disseminating information relating to family violence in New Zealand, is now up and running.*

The clearinghouse, established with funding from the Ministry of Social Development in March this year, is based at Te Awatea Violence Research Centre in Canterbury University's Department of Social Work. It is the outcome of a \$1 million contract won by Te Awatea



*(From left) Dr Kate van Heugten, Nick Fahey, Rachel Halvaksz and Kylie Douglass*

and the university's Information Technology Services (ITS) team, in consortium with Child Abuse Prevention Services (NZ), the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges and Te Kupenga Whakaoti Mahi Patunga/The National Network Stopping Violence Services.

The consortium of organisations developing the clearinghouse combines academic interests and tertiary

training with the knowledge and experience of government and non-government organisations.

The clearinghouse resources and the research component of the project are being developed by a team led by the Director of Te Awatea, Dr Kate van Heugten. Other members are Project Manager and Chief Researcher, Nick Fahey; Database Development Officer, Kylie Douglass; and Communications Officer, Rachel Halvaksz, all based at Te Awatea; and Outreach Coordinator and Researcher, Sheryl Hann, based at Women's Refuge National Office in Wellington.

Nick said the initiative emerged from the Government's Te Rito New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy, which highlights the need for a centralised means of collating and disseminating family violence prevention and intervention research and evaluation.

"Access to quality information is critical in ensuring that family violence prevention strategies and initiatives are effective and achieve the greatest success," he said.

A website is being developed to provide electronic resources on family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand. A searchable database will provide access to family violence research and other resources from a variety of sources, including research and studies undertaken by government and non-governmental organisations and academic institutions. A best practice intervention and prevention database will provide resources for people working to eliminate violence within families, as well as highlighting training and research funding opportunities.

The clearinghouse will also produce a series of fact sheets designed to raise public awareness and understanding of the dynamics of all areas of family violence in New Zealand and how it can be prevented. There will also be a regular newsletter and occasional issues papers. All publications will be available online and in hard copy.

"One of our key aims is assessing the breadth and depth of New Zealand family violence research and identifying key research gaps that need to be addressed. This will be a major research component of our activity over the next year and it will involve a research mapping exercise and a gap analysis exercise," Nick said.

The website infrastructure is being developed by the university's ITS team. "Over the next few months the content of the website will grow rapidly so that by the end of the year it is expected to abound with resources."



*Sheryl Hann*

For more information, contact  
[administrator@nzfvc.org.nz](mailto:administrator@nzfvc.org.nz)

# Commission's project to provide families snapshot

*The Families Commission is undertaking a three-part research project to support and inform its policy and advocacy work.*

The project comprises a literature review, qualitative research involving focus groups with families, and a consultation exercise.

The qualitative research involves 43 focus groups with families with dependent children up to the age of 25.

The literature review will identify the available research on families, and identify where there are gaps.

The consultation is designed to elicit information from families on issues of importance to them, what works well for families, what they feel they need to make family life better, the challenges they are facing, and how they manage these challenges.

Senior policy and research analyst Katie Stevens said the information gained from the project would inform the work of the Commission. "Our role is to promote the interests of all families to government and the wider community. To do this, we need to understand the issues affecting them. This will guide our advocacy and policy work. The project provides a snapshot of where New Zealand families are at now. It will help us identify where more work is needed," Katie said.



*Katie Stevens*

An interim report is due soon, and a final report will be published before the end of the year.

For more information go to [www.families.org.nz](http://www.families.org.nz)

## SPEaR Linkages

SPEaR's Linkages Programme offers awards including scholarships, fellowships and exchanges, workshops and seminars. Funding is currently available in five categories:

- Social Policy Postgraduate Awards
- Social Policy Research Awards
- Research Methods Workshops
- Visiting Research Fellowships
- Visiting Speaker Awards

Applications for the next funding round close on 5 August.

For more information, an application forms, go to [www.spear.govt.nz](http://www.spear.govt.nz)

## Blue Skies research

There has been strong interest in the Families Commission's first *Blue Skies* research funding round, with more than 40 applications received. Successful applicants, to be announced soon, will receive funding of up to \$10,000 each for family issues-related research in areas that are under-researched or of emerging interest to the Commission. A second funding round will be held in September. For further details, please refer to the call for proposals available on the Commission's website [www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz). In total, the Commission will allocate up to \$100,000 a year for a series of family issues research papers, with an additional \$50,000 a year to support publication and seminar costs. The first seminar is expected to be held early in 2006. For more information, contact [mamy.dickson@familiescommission.govt.nz](mailto:mamy.dickson@familiescommission.govt.nz)

# Social science and the challenges of the 21st century

*A new concern with knowledge, a desire for evidence-based action, and a greater recognition of the relevance of social science are all part of the challenges facing social researchers in the 21st century, says Kay Saville-Smith.*

A director of the Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment (CRESA), Kay Saville-Smith was a presenter at last month's Royal Society of New Zealand's workshop *Towards 2020: Challenges for the Social Sciences Community*.

Speaking to the *Bulletin* after the workshop, Kay said social scientists were being asked to be involved in research and evaluation much more in the past five or six years. "Social scientists and social science as a series of pursuits are not very well placed, particularly in New Zealand, to face up to that challenge," she said.

"The demand for social science work is outstripping supply. The demand from central government, local government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector is greater than the current set of social scientists can deliver on."

Kay said agencies commissioning research talked of problems getting good-quality research and evaluation, but she warned it was important to be careful of such statements. "Sometimes good-quality products are not accepted by commissioning agencies as it gives them bad news. And sometimes commissioning agencies generate the problems they are complaining about – for example, sometimes the way they purchase and invest in research and evaluation has been poor."

She said social science in universities had, for a long time, been dominated by teaching. "Theoretically a portion of university funding goes to research, but in most cases that was not happening in the social sciences. I suspect if you did an audit of social science research in the seventies, eighties and nineties, it wouldn't come to anywhere near the amount of money that, theoretically, they were getting to do the research.

"Universities must start to value their researchers as more than simply revenue streams and must seriously invest in their research capacity. They must start facilitating cross-organisation research teams – especially with applied social research organisations."

Kay said a lot of academics had become "research de-skilled". "Research is a trade. It's complex and often difficult, but it's a trade – if you're not doing it, it's hard to get back into it. Teaching about social science is not the same as applying research skills in the real world and producing results that can stand up. The

outcome is that we often have a split between academic and applied researchers, with academics seeing applied researchers as atheoretical. That can end up being true if the commissioning agencies can't get researchers who are well-grounded in the theoretical paradigms of disciplines. You can end up with social research and evaluation done by people who reduce complex dynamics to simple ideas."

Kay said the relationship between commissioning agencies and researchers could become one of capture or estrangement. "The result can be that we promise a lot more than we can deliver, or that agencies often demand more than they are prepared to pay for, or that anyone could deliver, regardless of money."

For example, some agencies were preoccupied by randomised control studies, but the nature of the work meant that was impossible to deliver. It would be impossible to do a random controlled study on providing child support, for example, as it would be possible to withhold child support from some people for the study.

"There are ethical problems. And there is also the issue of the recruitment and maintenance of control groups. So there are raised expectations and beliefs about what is appropriate that are not sustainable."



*Kay Saville-Smith*

*Continued on page 7*

# Chair's comment



*SPEaR's Chair, Professor Richard Bedford, reflects on communicating and improving research and evaluation for continuing to advance a robust social policy decision-making culture.*

At the core of an evidence-informed policy culture is a commitment to the value of knowledge gained both locally and from the international literature about past and current policy and practice. To engage in the procurement and production of research and evaluation (R&E) requires effective communication. The latter is also essential for ensuring relevant uptake of R&E into policy and decision making.

Social information and knowledge must flow as freely as possible for informed action. The challenge we face is to "liberate" and utilise our data for multiple uses. All information and knowledge has intended and unintended consequences.

We need to expand the scope for positive unintended consequences by advancing the datasaving and sharing agenda. Organising our knowledge in an online operating environment poses big challenges at a variety of levels. SPEaR is engaging with these issues directly with the evolution of the SPEaR website and the work of the datasaving and sharing working party.

These projects are both playing a role in providing pathways that will open up new opportunities for social policy R&E practice. To take advantage of this new data-rich environment, it is essential we have a generation of social policy researchers and evaluators who are skilled in a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data

manipulation practices. We must also set high quality standards for R&E practice so we achieve excellent outcomes. The interconnected social policy and R&E communities must exemplify "good practice" to ensure high-quality knowledge creation and synthesis. SPEaR is leading a good practice process to set standards for the management and production of high-quality R&E.

If we do quality work that makes a difference, the social policy R&E sector will be an attractive career proposition for intelligent and caring people. With accessible information and creative potential for application, new and emerging researchers will have interesting and profitable spaces to explore.

In summary, successful R&E uptake requires the conditions of integrated organisation practice, excellent knowledge access, quality data, the communication of clear learnings and the opportunity for investment to extend into new areas.

The potential of an engaged, robust and dynamic policy, R&E and practice nexus is exciting. I believe we are starting to track well towards achieving this, and must continue to support and build on the initiatives under way. This requires an ongoing commitment to capability and capacity building plus new investments in the social sciences to expand "value-add" opportunities.

## *Social sciences and the challenges of the 21st century*

*Continued from page 6*

Kay said she was also concerned that universities needed more support and funding for their role as training grounds for social scientists in the future. "If you reduce all research to short hit pieces and projects, you don't build up a set of research knowledge or skills to sustain social science in the future."

It was important to have both short- and long-term research programmes. "Some long-term programmes that look at broad social dynamics get traction in the policy arena long after they were initiated – yet people didn't want to know about them when they started. So we need a mix of opportunities to sustain short- and long-term

work, and to sustain capacity and capability in New Zealand," she said.

"If researchers develop the right sort of relationship with policy people and service deliverers, then researchers have something to offer. When service deliverers come up with a problem, they will go to the research. We've got to have a knowledge platform for responding to particular instances. If not, and we go just for the short term, then we are always rediscovering the world, and there is no build-up of knowledge."

For more information, go to [www.cresa.co.nz](http://www.cresa.co.nz)

# Longitudinal study of Pasifika families' health and wellbeing

*A major longitudinal study of Pasifika children, now into its fifth year, is providing data on the wellbeing of Pasifika families, and valuable experience for new researchers.*

The Pacific Islands Families (PIF) study, funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology and the Health Research Council of New Zealand, is a longitudinal study following a cohort of approximately 1,400 Pasifika children born in 2000 at Auckland's Middlemore Hospital, and their families.

The study is being conducted by the Auckland University of Technology's Centre for Pacific Health and Development Research under the auspices of the National Institute for Public Health and Mental Health Research. It aims to provide information on Pasifika peoples' health – including the cultural, economic, environmental and psychosocial factors considered to be important influences on child health and development and family functioning.



*Esther Tumama  
Cowley-Malcolm*

It also aims to provide information on factors which, individually and interactively, influence positive and negative child, parent and family outcomes over time. A third aim is to provide information that will set quantifiable targets for Pasifika people's health.

Esther Tumama Cowley-Malcolm, a Pasifika member of the research team, said this study was very significant for Pasifika people as it was the first study of its kind in the world which focused on Pasifika children's health and development and socio-cultural context.

"Another important aspect of this study is that it acts as a springboard for budding Pacific researchers. With effective mentoring and research opportunities to participate at all levels of the research process, current postgraduate students working within the PIF study are gaining valuable experience as researchers."

The information was obtained by interviewing mothers at six weeks after the birth of the infant, and again when the children were 12 and 24 months. Additional data were gathered from paternal interviews at 12 and 24 months and from hospital and Plunket records.

The next phase, entitled *Pacific Islands Families: Transition*

*to School*, is under way, with children's development and wellbeing at ages four and six years being assessed. "We are in the process of completing the last interviews of the four-year phase," Esther said. The main aim is to provide information about pathways to a successful transition to school for Pasifika children.



*Janis Paterson*

Study co-director and Associate Professor Janis Paterson expressed hope for the future of the PIF study. "The research team is committed to keeping the study strong over the transitions to school phases so that it continues over middle childhood and into the adolescent years."

For more information go to [www.aut.ac.nz/research\\_showcase/research\\_activity\\_areas/pacific\\_islands\\_families/publications\\_resource/index.shtml](http://www.aut.ac.nz/research_showcase/research_activity_areas/pacific_islands_families/publications_resource/index.shtml) or contact [janis.paterson@aut.ac.nz](mailto:janis.paterson@aut.ac.nz) or [esther.cowley-malcolm@aut.ac.nz](mailto:esther.cowley-malcolm@aut.ac.nz)

## People in R&E

Dr **Tania Pocock** is the Health Research Council of New Zealand's (HRC) representative on SPEaR. Tania is a Senior Advisor – Policy and Business Development, with the Research Policy, Evaluation and Business Development Group at HRC. She took up her position at HRC in March 2003 after completing a PhD in Psychology at the University of Auckland, in the area of domestic violence and child abuse. Working alongside Dr Patricia Anderson (Group Manager, Research Policy, Evaluation and Business Development), Tania is responsible for providing research policy advice, implementing HRC's research portfolio system and prioritisation framework, reporting on the research investment, contributing to the evaluation of HRC policy and processes, and developing business opportunities to increase investment in high-priority health research areas.

# Labour market research trends



*Labour market transitions were the focus of the international conference Transitions & Risk: New Directions in Social Policy, reports Davina Jones, analyst on the Living Standards project at the Ministry of Social Development's Centre for Social Research and Evaluation.*

A small group of researchers and policy analysts from the Ministry of Social Development, the Department of Labour and the Treasury attended the conference, held in February 2005 at the Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne.

The conference centred on discussion of the model of Transitional Labour Markets (TLM), developed by keynote speaker, Professor Günther Schmid from the Wissenschaftszentrum für Sozialforschung (Social Science Research Centre), Berlin.

The TLM model is a response to the structural changes Professor Schmid has perceived as occurring across the developed Western economies, and the resulting exclusion of more and more people from full participation in economic and social life. In outlining this environment, Professor Schmid recognises that some Western countries have been able to significantly reduce unemployment, but suggests that in doing so they have paid a price with either increased income differentials or increased levels of "precarious" employment.

The model does not seek to work back towards an environment characterised by full employment. Rather, it suggests that the "bridges" associated with moving between different levels of engagement with the labour market need to be strengthened to provide for both flexibility of the labour market and security for those within the market (flexicurity).

The promotion of such bridges has been suggested as a way to help reduce the levels of "risk" faced by different individuals in seeking to engage in the labour market. The various "bridges" that individuals may need to traverse during the life course are summarised below. These, and the demographic groups to whom these may apply, formed the conference sessions' themes:

- transitions between various working time regimes
- transitions between unemployment and employment
- transitions between education, training and employment
- transitions between private work activities and gainful employment
- transitions from employment and retirement.

Interesting papers for follow-up include:

- Ann Harding (National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra) – *Redistribution, the Welfare State and Lifetime Transitions*. This paper comprised a macroeconomic analysis of redistribution across the Australian system. The model provided for assessment of total tax payments (including indirect taxes) against total social benefits accrued by individuals. It would be interesting to see a comparable analysis for New Zealand and other countries.
- Peter Saunders (University of New South Wales) – *Analysing the factors that contribute to successful Welfare-to-Work transitions*. This paper made the key point that mutual obligations work, where they are applied appropriately.
- Per Konshoj Madsen (University of Aalborg, Denmark) – *Labour Market Flexibility and Social Protection in European Welfare States – Contrasts and Similarities*. This paper examined the Danish version of "flexicurity", combining a high degree of worker mobility between firms with a well-developed system of income support for the unemployed. In this regard, the Danish model may be seen as a hybrid between a Nordic welfare state and a liberal regime.
- Dan Finn (University of Portsmouth) – *Getting Jobs and Moving On: The limits to "work first" and the challenge to education and training*. Presenting the only "English" perspective at the conference, Finn argued that New Labour's social democratic agenda could be achieved through policies which contrasted interestingly with those of the north European states.
- Jeff Borland (University of Melbourne) – *Ten Things to Know about Labour Market Programs*. This paper gave an informative review of the international literature regarding the evidence as to what works for job search programmes, training and education programmes, and work experience programmes.

Most papers are available at [www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference2005/Index.html](http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference2005/Index.html)

# Improving evaluative activities

*Improving the quality and utilisation of evaluative results is recognised internationally as a way to improve state sector performance.*

Evaluative activity is broadly defined, and includes many research, evidence gathering, and performance monitoring approaches.

Two main gains are sought from evaluative activity: enhanced effectiveness of services for the public, including improved focus, policy design, organisational efficiency; and robust decision making.

To that end, central agencies such as the State Services Commission and the Treasury, along with the SPEaR Committee in the government research and evaluation community, have been working across Government to increase evaluative knowledge, awareness and results.

“The challenge in the Government sector is that evaluative thinking and activity covers a wide spectrum. This ranges from internal organisational performance issues, monitoring particular programmes to see if they achieved their objectives, through to aggregating system performance for informed investment decision making,” said SPEaR project manager Paul Honeybone.

“The goal is to get a more comprehensive and connected approach to evaluation,” Paul said.

A small-scale survey has been conducted by SPEaR and the Managing for Outcomes (MfO) Programme Office to help inform the provision of advice to continue to improve current practice in the use of evaluation in central government agencies.

The survey was completed by SPEaR members, and also by respondents from other government departments outside SPEaR. The 22 responses from a total of 19 agencies encompassed both the “provider” perspective and the perspective of those who “use” evaluative information in decision making.

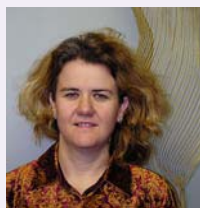
“While the sample was small, there were some consistent patterns coming through that will help shape future work in this area,” said Roger Waite, Principal Advisor for the Treasury’s Business Analysis Team, who co-convened the survey.

*Continued on page 11*

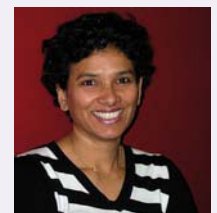
## People in R&E

SPEaR Committee member

**Cherie Englebrecht** is a senior policy analyst with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Prior to joining MWA, she worked at Child, Youth and Family, including a period as Private Secretary (Child, Youth and Family) in Parliament. Her current work includes a focus on women in business, “trying to understand why women don’t tend to ‘grow’ their businesses”. She is also working on housing, particularly access to affordable quality housing for women, and social assistance. “I am also involved in ensuring that New Zealand manages its international obligations on the status of women and was privileged to attend the recent Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York earlier this year.” Cherie says the SPEaR Committee work is important because “good policy is based on sound evidence, and research and evaluation provides that evidence.”



**Meenakshi Sankar** is a Senior Evaluator in the Strategy Group, Department of Labour. Her role involves contributing to the development of the Department’s Research and Evaluation Strategy, providing support and guidance within the team, and designing and implementing high quality evaluation projects. Meenakshi has a Master’s degree in social work from India. She has more than 15 years’ experience in working in the market and social research sector in India, and has worked extensively in South Asian and South East Asian countries. In New Zealand, she has applied her knowledge and experience in evaluation theory and practice to a public policy setting. She has a keen interest in exploring the use of participatory and collaborative processes to explore key issues. Meenakshi represents the Department of Labour on the SPEaR Committee.



## Diary notes

**Call for papers:** Organisers of the Tenth Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, to be held in Wellington from 14 to 16 February 2006, are inviting abstracts for papers to be presented in concurrent streams at the conference. The deadline for the receipt of abstracts is **12 July 2005**. To submit an abstract, go to [www.nzfvc.org.nz/accan](http://www.nzfvc.org.nz/accan)

The conference organiser, the Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect (ACCAN), aims to provide a forum for the exchange and discussion of ideas and strategies concerning the prevention, and interventions for the treatment, of child abuse and neglect.

The conference will bring together practitioners, policy makers, researchers and community groups to exchange information and share knowledge. This exchange has the potential to influence current practice and policy making, thereby improving outcomes for children and young people (aged 0–18 years) who suffer from, or are at risk of suffering from, abuse and neglect.

The conference Registration Brochure and Programme will be available in early September.

For more information, contact Avenues Event Management by email [accan@avenues.co.nz](mailto:accan@avenues.co.nz) or phone 04 473 8044.

**Summer School:** The Third Annual Discourse Theory Summer School will be held at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, between 21 November and 9 December 2005. This summer school will provide an advanced learning forum for researchers in the public and private sectors, and practitioners, as well as academic staff and postgraduates interested in the theory and practice of discourse. The school will draw upon phenomenology, post-analytic philosophy, post-structuralism, and psychoanalysis.

The three one-week courses are independent of each other, so you are invited to enrol in any combination: Week 1 Introduction to Discourse Theory (21–25 Nov), Dr Alejandro Groppo, Universidad Nacional de Villa Maria & Universidad Católica, de Cordoba, Argentina. Week 2 Psychoanalysis & Discourse Theory (28 Nov–2 Dec), Dr Yannis Stavrakakis, Essex University, England. Week 3 Critical Theory & Discourse Theory (5–9 Dec), Dr Mark Devenney, Brighton University, England.

For more details, including course outlines, cost and online enrolment, go to: [www.vuw.ac.nz/conted/discoursetheory](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/conted/discoursetheory) or contact: Peter Kitchenman, Convenor, 00 64 4 463 9488 or [peter.kitchenman@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:peter.kitchenman@vuw.ac.nz)

## Improving evaluative activities

*Continued from page 10*

The results from the practitioner and user groups were similar.

Results included the need for managers and policy staff to know how evaluation fits into their business, to identify and prioritise evaluative activities that will fill major information gaps, and to ensure that useful evaluative information is used to change business practice and improve results.

The survey found that over the past two years, managers have been making greater use of the results of evaluations, but there is room to improve the way evaluative activity is used in decision making.

This includes making training in using evaluation results a part of the core activity of managers and policy and operational staff rather than treating it as a separate

issue. Practitioners reflected on how they could improve uptake of their results.

In taking the work forwards, SPEaR will continue to focus on developing research and evaluative capability. SPEaR will also be working closely with the State Services Commission and the Treasury to improve the prioritisation and commissioning of social policy research. Joint work will also look at how business processes are designed to help ensure good results get used.

The next step will involve SPEaR and the MfO Programme Office identifying the training needed to address the issues raised in the survey.

For more information, contact [info@spear.govt.nz](mailto:info@spear.govt.nz)