

The ethics of external evaluation: The case of the Education Review Office

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EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
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Presentation outline

- ▶ **The Education Review Office (ERO)**
- ▶ **The development of ERO's Code of Conduct**
- ▶ **The current Code of Conduct**
- ▶ **Ethics in evaluation (literature review)**
- ▶ **Theoretical and conceptual framework**
- ▶ **Three ethical conundrums:**
 - **Accountability and improvement**
 - **External and internal**
 - **Insider and outsider**
- ▶ **The Code of Conduct as a touchstone**

The Education Review Office

- ▶ Established in 1989 following the education sector reforms of the 1980s (Education Act 1989)
- ▶ Responsibility for reviewing the quality of education in schools, kura, early childhood services, homeschooling and other pre-tertiary educational services and institutions
- ▶ Dual aims: evaluation for accountability and improvement
- ▶ 20 year history shows responsiveness to contextual changes (political, social, leadership, educational, evaluation theory and practice)

The development of the Code of Conduct

- ▶ AS ERO became established its practices were reviewed externally and internally to ensure consistency with government expectations and current evaluation theory and practice
- ▶ ‘Code of Ethical Conduct’ development began at time Judith Aitken was Chief Review Officer
- ▶ Working group set up including external consultant and internal ERO representatives
- ▶ *Code of Ethical Conduct for Review Officers* first published in 1993
- ▶ Key principles – *A review officer must:*
 - *Have integrity, be principled and incorruptible and act with probity in all situations*
 - *Be worthy of trust*
 - *Be honest and truthful*
 - *Recognise that evaluative judgements must be consistent with the evidence, impartial and just*

The current Code of Conduct

- ▶ Revised in 2007 to include the State Services Commission's *Standards and Integrity of Conduct*.
 - FAIR
 - IMPARTIAL
 - RESPONSIBLE
 - TRUSTWORTHY
- ▶ Covers all ERO employees
- ▶ Includes specific *Expectations of Review Officers*:
 - Rationale (explicit principles, ERO's reputation and authority, confidence in ERO's services, legal protection)
 - Importance of impartiality
 - Performance of duties
 - Conduct during reviews

Literature review

- ▶ **As evaluation became established as a profession, there were calls for practice standards and ethical guidelines for consistency, credibility and duty of care**
- ▶ **A set of principles was developed by AEA (1994):**
 - Systematic inquiry
 - Competence
 - Integrity/honesty
 - Respect for people
 - Responsibilities for general and public welfare
- ▶ **A “topographical map rather than a road atlas”**
- ▶ **Many evaluation associations and organisations have since developed their own**
- ▶ **More recent focus on cultural competence (ANZEA)**

Theoretical and conceptual framework

- ▶ Evaluation theories and practices range across the spectrum from outcomes-focused logic models to empowerment approaches
- ▶ Writers on the theory–practice nexus vary on whether theory or context drives practice
- ▶ ERO has changed over time from an audit/assurance model to one with a stronger focus on evaluation for improvement in response to theory, context and practice
- ▶ The current focus is on balancing external review with school self review in a more complementary manner

Three ethical conundrums

- ▶ Accountability and improvement
- ▶ External and internal
- ▶ Insider and outsider

Accountability and improvement

- ▶ **Accountability to government**
- ▶ **Reporting to parents through Boards of Trustees**
- ▶ **Public nature of reports makes them high stakes**
- ▶ **Purpose to get schools/services to focus on continuous improvement**
- ▶ **Importance of clear consistent procedures, transparency of process and ethical standards to protect all parties**

External and internal

- ▶ While self review has been expected of schools for 20 years the quality and depth of this has been variable
- ▶ ERO's use of school self audits/reviews has developed over time
- ▶ Recent focus of ERO to build self review capacity in schools through BCiE project
- ▶ Complementary evaluation requires all parties to have shared understandings, expectations, levels of competence and input – how do you balance this with accountability and improvement?

Insider and outsider

- ▶ Most reviewers are recruited from the ranks of experienced educators and need to make the move from educator to evaluator
- ▶ Most reviewers have personal in-depth experience in at least one sector but are expected to review across a broad range of settings
- ▶ Cultural competency means that reviewers need to know how to act in varying situations, to understand diverse perspectives and to appear credible in the eyes of those being reviewed

The Code of Conduct as a touchstone

- ▶ Provides a set of principles to guide ethical decision making especially when facing sensitive conundrums and ethical dilemmas
- ▶ Is building a history of interpretation with case studies and custom-and-practice examples
- ▶ Gives confidence to the sector that reviewers are acting legally and ethically
- ▶ Contributes to the advancement of evaluation as a profession
- ▶ Contributes to national integrity systems within the state sector